

Fir Bank Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105662
Local Authority	Oldham
Inspection number	308910
Inspection dates	5–6 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Marie Cordey

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	152
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter Barlow
Headteacher	Mrs H MacKay
Date of previous school inspection	19 January 2004
School address	Grasmere Road Royton Oldham Lancashire OL2 6SJ
Telephone number	0161 624 9577
Fax number	-

Age group	4-11
Inspection dates	5–6 June 2008
Inspection number	308910

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a small school close to the town of Royton. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is below average and the number of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. There has been significant staffing turnover in recent years and a new headteacher has recently been appointed. The school has gained the Healthy Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory and improving school. The new headteacher has a clear vision for improvement, which has united staff in a systematic programme to raise standards. The clear planning and drive of the headteacher and governors has already resulted in improvements to standards and this demonstrates a good capacity to improve further. Pupils are happy and well behaved because their welfare is at the heart of the school's provision. The vast majority of parents back this up. A small number of parents expressed the view that they wanted to be more informed about their child's learning and activities. The headteacher has produced more detailed and thorough reports on pupils' progress for parents and is determined to act on improving communication. Following a period of staffing changes and challenge, the headteacher has introduced effective systems to provide continuity in pupils' learning.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Their attendance is above average and they enjoy coming to school. The school's emphasis on the adoption of healthy lifestyles means that pupils choose to eat a nutritious diet. They also take advantage of the many sporting opportunities available to them. Pupils enjoy learning especially when they are actively involved and there is plenty of variety and challenge. This is not as apparent in lessons where the more able pupils, in particular, are not challenged sufficiently. The satisfactory curriculum is currently being adapted to provide more challenge for the more able pupils and to give greater emphasis to the acquisition of skills in reading, writing, number and information and communication technology (ICT). The full impact of this work on raising standards has yet to be seen. Furthermore, as yet, opportunities have been missed to develop the use of these key skills in other subjects.

Achievement is satisfactory. Children enter Reception with skills that are broadly as expected for their age and reach average standards by the end of Year 6. Standards fell slightly in 2007 owing to staff turbulence. Learning is now sound and pupils are on course to reach some challenging targets. However, standards for the more able pupils, by the end of Year 6, fall short of the school's expectations. This weakness in achievement is being tackled by the introduction of rigorous systems to check how pupils are doing in their work. Teachers are becoming more knowledgeable and informed about individual pupils' progress. However, assessment information is not used consistently or well enough so that pupils know what to do to make their work better. Pupils do not always receive useful feedback on how well they are doing in their work.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher and governors have a clear strategy for improvement. They have accurately identified that more needs to be done in the evaluation of teaching and learning if standards, particularly for the more able, are to rise. To this end, the school is modelling examples of good teaching and involving all staff in monitoring and evaluating the impact of their teaching on pupils' progress. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are appropriate and links with outside services, such as hearing impaired specialists, attendance officers and local authority partners, make a satisfactory contribution to pupils' well-being and achievement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children enter Reception with a wide range of skills but overall they are broadly in line with national expectations. Social development is slightly below expected, particularly for some of the boys. Children settle in quickly and are well cared for. They make expected progress from their starting points by the end of the Reception year. There has been some disruption in staffing in the Foundation Stage and, consequently, the teacher and teaching assistants plan a range of activities to make up for any gaps in children's learning. They are especially skilful in planning activities to promote children's enjoyment and confidence. The very attractive and spacious school grounds are now being used to improve children's self-reliance through practical activities such as decorating trees for the Princesses' Ball. This has improved the personal and social development of boys in particular. There are appropriate systems in place to track children's progress and to support them when needed. Although there are accurate assessments to track children's standards and progress, these have not resulted in teachers providing greater challenge for some of the more able children.

What the school should do to improve further

- Evaluate the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school in terms of its impact on standards, particularly for the more able pupils.
- Refine assessment practice so that all pupils know exactly how they are doing in their work and precisely what they need to do in order to improve it.
- Ensure that the curriculum is planned and monitored effectively in order to raise standards in the key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before the next Section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are broadly average by the end of Year 6, which represents satisfactory achievement from pupils' starting points. Although standards in mathematics are average pupils' confidence in applying their knowledge is inconsistent. Progress is satisfactory in Years 1 to 6 with examples of good progress in some classes. Despite the average standards at the end of Year 2 and Year 6, not enough pupils reach the higher levels. The development of more challenging work and a more rigorous tracking of pupils' progress are beginning to address this. Assessment is not used consistently or well enough so that pupils know what to do to make their work better. Pupils who have difficulties in their learning make satisfactory progress. Their needs are identified and then supported through regular reviews and specialist teaching.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school is rightly proud of its contribution to pupils' personal development and well-being. A high standard is set by the headteacher and governors who, as they say, 'want to make a positive difference' to pupils' lives. School council members take their responsibilities seriously and are pleased at the changes they have initiated to improve the outdoor spaces and in representing the views of their classmates. They are active members of their community

especially through the busy eco committee. Pupils lead fundraising events throughout the year for the school, the community and globally. Assemblies encourage pupils to reflect and celebrate their achievements. Pupils are treated with respect and they, in turn, respect and value others. They learn and appreciate the diversity of the multicultural backgrounds of people living in Britain today. Pupils are well behaved and courteous to each other and to adults. This is demonstrated in the way they enjoy eating the nutritious and attractively presented food and mixing socially in pleasant surroundings. Opportunities for pupils to develop their independence and initiative are inconsistent. Their preparation for the future is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching is satisfactory and the school is taking steps to provide a greater continuity in pupils' learning following the period of staffing changes. The more able pupils in particular are not yet always sufficiently challenged. Most lessons are well organised and careful questioning helps pupils to understand what they are to learn. Relationships are good and pupils are well behaved and eager to take part in learning. Expectations of behaviour are clear although occasionally teachers refrain from emphasising good behaviour. Pupils who need extra help receive sensitive support from well deployed classroom assistants. Work is marked regularly but is not consistent in providing clear guidance for pupils on how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further. Progress is now carefully recorded and targets are set for individual pupils. Occasionally, these are not specific enough and it is difficult for pupils to understand what exactly they need to do in order to improve their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum meets the needs of pupils appropriately. There is a wide variety of clubs provided by outside agencies and teaching assistants which are well attended by pupils. Healthy living and personal development are embedded in curriculum programmes and daily school life. The curriculum is planned sensitively and adequately to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school is now engaged in planning to cater more for the needs of the more able pupils. Curriculum developments have been rightly focused on ensuring continuity in learning and greater emphasis on developing the key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT. Now, a new curriculum framework is beginning to be successful in linking pupils' learning in these key skills across the curriculum in order to improve standards.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Procedures for safeguarding pupils are fully in place and both staff and governors have relevant training, which is regularly updated. Pupils at risk of not achieving their targets are identified early. They are supported in groups and individually, as are pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, to ensure that their targets are reached. This works best in literacy because the school's tracking systems show exactly what aspects of reading, writing, speaking and listening require improvement. Academic guidance is satisfactory, but does not always give pupils enough feedback on how they can improve their standards.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

After a period of many staff changes, including at senior leadership level, the new headteacher acts as a role model for all staff through high expectations and an incisive vision for school improvement. The assertion, stemming from the headteacher's vision, that, 'We are going to be a good school very soon because we will work together rigorously to improve pupils' progress' underlies daily practice throughout the school. Leaders understand the school well and have correctly identified areas for improvement although these do not involve all school leaders sufficiently. Sharp and rigorous analysis of the school's performance has resulted in a precise and realistic improvement plan. However, the school is aware that the monitoring of teaching and learning is not yet robust enough in terms of evaluating its impact on raising standards, particularly for the more able pupils. Governance is strong and supportive. Governors welcome training to improve their roles and attend school regularly to help individual pupils and to review the school's performance. They are dedicated to providing a nurturing environment where all pupils can thrive.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of Fir Bank Primary School, Oldham, OL2 6SJ

On behalf of the inspection team, I wish to thank you for the warm welcome you gave to us when we visited your school. You were very polite and keen to tell us about your school. I would especially like to thank the members of the school council and all the individual pupils who took the time to talk to us. Your school provides you with a satisfactory education.

You are well behaved and look after each other. Older pupils look after the younger ones well and you enjoy using the lovely surroundings of your school. You enjoy school and congratulations on your good attendance. Children in the Reception class settle down quickly and enjoy school. You have had some changes of teachers in recent years and this has been difficult for you. Your school has worked hard to minimise disruption for you during these changes and your new headteacher is determined that you will do even better. We have asked the school to make sure it does the following things to help you all and improve the quality of education you receive:

- make sure the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school is really effective in helping you improve your standards, particularly for those of you who learn quickly
- ensure that you all know exactly how you are doing in your work and precisely what you need to do in order to improve it
- plan the curriculum and check it regularly to help you improve your standards in the key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT.

I am sure that you will help your school by working hard to achieve your targets and by checking what you could do to improve it.