

Vernon Park Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106082
Local Authority	Stockport
Inspection number	309023
Inspection date	23 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Derek Aitken

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	3-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	276
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Mrs Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	16 June 2003
School address	Peak Street Stockport Cheshire SK1 2NF
Telephone number	0161 4804378
Fax number	0161 4808809

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the quality of the school's inclusive practice with particular reference to the children in the Speech and Language Unit; the quality of assessment and academic guidance, and the effectiveness of the systems the school has for monitoring its performance. The inspector gathered evidence from the school's self-evaluation, national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records, policies and minutes, observation of the school at work, interviews with senior members of staff and pupils and parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in similar detail. The evidence found the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, to be largely justified and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Vernon Park is a medium-sized school near the town centre. Its pupils come from a variety of social and economic backgrounds, but most pupils live in areas with significant levels of deprivation. The vast majority of pupils are White British. While the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average, the number of pupils with a statement of special educational need is above average. The school operates a well-established Speech and Language Unit for the local authority for three-to-five year old children. The deputy headteacher is acting as headteacher until the new headteacher takes up her post in January 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school where pupils enjoy their education and achieve well. Parents and carers are supportive of the school and value the contribution it makes to the all-round education of their children. They commend, rightly, the quality of its work in equipping their children with basic skills in literacy and the help it provides for pupils, including those in the Speech and Language Unit, with severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage, but there are still relative weaknesses in their writing and mathematical development when they begin Year 1. The school works hard to ensure these weaknesses are progressively eliminated by Year 2. The success of their efforts is demonstrated in the most recent national assessments of Year 2 pupils, which show improved results in mathematics and above average scores for writing. The school's results in the national tests at the end of Year 6 have not been less than average over the past five years. In 2007, they dipped to average as a higher than usual number of pupils had severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The present Year 6 cohort, that contains an even higher proportion of pupils with these levels of need, is on track to reach broadly average standards. This represents consistently good progress for all pupils from their below average starting points in Year 1. Pupils achieve a little better in English than in mathematics or science. This is because they have a wider variety of creative opportunities across the curriculum to reinforce their literacy skills. They also receive more precise guidance in English on how to improve their work. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also achieve well, as their progress is effectively monitored. The high quality of specialist support enables those pupils with more severe levels of need to give of their best. A prime example of this is the Speech and Language Unit. Here pupils make rapid gains in acquiring the language skills they need to cope with the increasing academic demands in the next stage of their learning. They also build up their self-esteem and acquire improved behavioural habits, which help them integrate better with the other pupils.

Pupils' personal development is good, as is the quality of care, guidance and support the school provides. The school strikes an effective balance of nurturing children and promoting their self-confidence. Examples of this are the very good opportunities pupils have to contribute to the school community in responsible roles, for example, as school councillors, play leaders and play pals. These opportunities are well managed, as pupils recognise. They comment that 'No-one gets left out, everyone gets a turn.' Pupils enjoy their lessons and the educational visits but recognise that the school's accommodation places some restrictions on the possible range of after-school activities. Pupils have a good understanding of healthy food and other aspects of healthy lifestyles. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. Moral development is particularly strong, but some opportunities are missed in lessons to reinforce the social aspect. However, pupils behave well, are open and welcoming and take particularly good care of the pupils with physical difficulties in their midst. The school's procedures for ensuring their welfare are comprehensive and effective. Strong relationships ensure that pupils are confident in sharing concerns with adults, including the learning mentor. The school works well with outside agencies to support pupils with identified needs. Pupils develop well the basic skills they need for later life.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have good subject knowledge, provide clear explanations and manage pupils well. They capitalise effectively on pupils' responsiveness and positive attitudes. Teachers plan for an appropriate mix of teacher-directed and independent work. They use creative resources imaginatively to sustain pupils' interest and concentration.

The pace of learning is often brisk, but is sometimes slower when work is not matched closely enough to the needs of all learners. Homework is used well to develop good work habits and instil high standards of presentation. While teachers' marking is conscientious and often contains useful pointers to help pupils improve in English, it is insufficiently related to individual targets to push pupils' learning on very quickly. Opportunities are missed in lessons for pupils to assess their own learning and so gain a better understanding of their next steps.

The curriculum makes a good contribution to pupils' learning and personal development. The school has put in place several well-considered initiatives to promote pupils' understanding of healthy lifestyles and there are good links, which enable pupils to make connections in their learning, between English, history and geography. An example of this is the project work based on the school's established ties with its Swedish partner school. Effective individual education plans provide the basis for the exceptional support offered, often on a one-to-one basis, for pupils with more severe needs.

Leadership and management are good. School leaders, including governors, have a clear vision and high expectations for developing the inclusive aspects of the work of the school, especially those aspects which have a positive impact on pupils' personal development and welfare. Leaders have used performance management targets imaginatively and successfully to drive through improvements in these areas. A good example of this is the school council, which has very quickly established itself as an asset to the school under the guidance of one of the teachers. Pupils make good progress and meet or exceed appropriate targets. The plans for school improvement set out appropriate actions for some priorities but lack clear success criteria, particularly in identifying how staff at all levels will assess improvements in pupils' standards and academic achievements.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The Foundation Stage provides a good education for the youngest children. Children start Nursery with skills that are below, and in some cases, well below those expected nationally for three-year-olds. They make good progress overall in their learning. When they leave the Reception class, the majority are working towards the early learning goals, but a significant number are meeting or exceeding them. Children make good progress in areas such as personal, social and emotional development, because these aspects of their learning are regularly reinforced across the curriculum, in their interactions with adults and in circle-time activities. Children make good use of opportunities to develop their oral and thinking skills in story-time sessions. Children often have weaknesses in their writing skills and in linking sounds and letters. This is less of a problem for the current more able Reception cohort, whose linguistic development is being successfully promoted through a systematic scheme. Children are consistently well taught and their progress is aided by effective lesson planning and regular assessments. The Foundation Stage is led and managed well.

What the school should do to improve further

- Involve pupils more effectively in assessing their work to help them learn faster.
- Ensure that development planning is sufficiently detailed to help managers to evaluate the impact of actions.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
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?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

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	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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 Vernon Park Primary School, Stockport, SK1 2NF

I visited your school recently to find out how well you are learning. Thank you for giving your 'special visitor' such a warm welcome and being so helpful when I asked you questions. You told me you enjoyed school and I could see that throughout my short visit. I was especially impressed by how well all of you cared for the pupils who could not move easily without extra help.

I judge that you are receiving a good education, but some things are 'top-notch'.

Examples of these are:

- the work that goes on in the Speech and Language Unit
- the support given by adults to help these pupils who find learning very difficult
- the opportunities the school gives you to do your bit for the community and become responsible young people

The good teaching you receive helps you make good progress in your subjects, including English, mathematics and science. The teachers use their imagination well to give you creative sources to work from, which helps you enjoy your learning. The staff are always looking to make your learning more interesting and Santa (or someone else) is due to give you more interactive whiteboards in the New Year! The staff also look after you very well to make sure that each and everyone gets the respect they deserve and are included in all the activities. The staff help you stay safe and keep you healthy. I know you have played a full part in this, for example, in the school council. I expect you to keep up the good work by persuading the small number of children who eat chocolate bars and salty crisps to change their habits.

The acting headteacher and other senior staff lead and manage the school well. I have asked them to do two things to make your learning better. First, to ensure that you are all involved better in checking your own work to help you learn more quickly. Second, to write better plans for school improvement to help them judge clearly that the actions they take do, in fact, raise standards and speed your progress.