

Urmston Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106314
Local Authority	Trafford
Inspection number	309093
Inspection dates	29–30 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Jim Crouch

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	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	279
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Derek Seex
Headteacher	Mrs A Castaneda
Date of previous school inspection	21 February 2005
School address	Hereford Grove Urmston Manchester Lancashire M41 5AJ
Telephone number	0161 7482855
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This above average sized school serves the community of Urmston, a residential suburb of Manchester. The vast majority of pupils are White British. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is very low. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average, as is the number with a statement of special educational need. The school holds the Healthy School Gold award, the Eco-school Green Flag and an Action in Nature award. The headteacher was appointed in September 2006.

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 very caring school, which provides a good standard of education. Prior to 2006, it experienced significant senior leadership problems which affected pupils' progress. Since her appointment, the headteacher has successfully restructured the leadership and management team, placed a greater focus on tracking pupils' progress, tackled areas of underperformance and raised levels of achievement. The school has made good progress in addressing issues raised at the last inspection and has good capacity to improve further.

Pupils greatly enjoy school. This is reflected in their good attendance and punctuality. Their personal development is outstanding. They are courteous and friendly towards visitors and talk about their school with confidence and enthusiasm. Staff and pupils work well together to produce a lively, happy and optimistic community where pupils behave very well and want to learn. Care, guidance and support are of good quality. Staff consistently express their appreciation of pupils' efforts; they praise and reward them. Being 'Star of the Week' is particularly coveted by pupils who say, 'you feel happy about yourself and everyone else knows how well you have done.' Pupils say that they feel safe and secure and that there is always someone to turn to at times of need. The small numbers of pupils from minority ethnic groups are well integrated into the school because of the good interpersonal relationships that exist. Pupils are very aware of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. This is reflected in their choice of healthy meals at lunchtime and their keenness to participate in the many sporting activities provided by the school. They enjoy contributing to the life of the school through, for example, serving on the school council and the Eco Committee. They have made a significant contribution to improving the school environment and even grow some of the fruit and vegetables served at lunchtime. Pupils have a good awareness of the needs of others, as illustrated by their willing support for a wide range of charities.

After some years when pupils achieved broadly average standards at the end of Year 6, in 2007, the results rose significantly to above average. The good progress made by pupils in 2007 is now being sustained throughout the school. The quality of teaching is good and successfully promotes pupils' learning, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, the school's traditional, subject-based approach to teaching the curriculum means that opportunities are missed to put learning into more meaningful contexts. Learning is enriched through plentiful extra-curricular activities and a good range of visiting speakers and educational visits. Teachers make good use of data to monitor pupils' progress and to inform teaching. Marking is used well to encourage pupils, but is not used consistently to inform them of what they need to do to improve.

The headteacher and governors have created a very supportive school where staff work well together. There is an agreed vision for the school and a well planned approach to developing the confidence and competence of teachers and teaching assistants. This means that increasingly good use is made of the school's resources. The school works well with outside organisations to promote the well-being of all pupils, and parents say they are pleased by the way the school has moved forward.

What the school should do to improve further

- Plan better links between subjects to make learning more meaningful and enjoyable.
- Improve pupils' awareness of what they need to do to improve so that they can be more involved in their own learning and make further progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress throughout the school and achieve well. In recent years there has been an improvement in attainment at the end of Key Stage 2, so that standards in English, mathematics and science are now above average. In 2007, pupils exceeded their targets in English, mathematics and science, with impressive numbers gaining the higher level expected for their age, particularly in science. The relative attainment of boys and girls was similar to national trends, with girls doing better in English and boys out-performing girls in mathematics. Analysis of the school's own data indicates that current Year 6 pupils are making good progress and working at above average levels. Pupils with learning difficulties and other vulnerable pupils are well supported and make good progress. Recent improvements in the arrangements for tracking pupils' progress mean that the school is now able to quickly put into place appropriate support strategies, such as deploying a teaching assistant to work with individuals or groups of pupils. These strategies are contributing to improved standards and progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and there is a very strong sense of community harmony within the school. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and that incidents of bullying and racism are rare and always dealt with promptly. They make comments such as, 'I knew what to do when I was bullied, if I hadn't, I may still be being bullied'. Their behaviour in and around the school is very good. Pupils are proud of their Healthy School Award. They have a very good understanding of how to stay fit and healthy. For example, they not only know which foods are not healthy but also the reasons why. They play actively at break and lunchtimes, ably supported by the pupil play leaders. They show a very good understanding of their responsibilities. For example, they are extremely proud of their Green Flag and all that they have achieved since the school became an Eco-school. They raise a lot of money for a range of charities. Pupils' above average literacy and numeracy skills enhance their economic well-being. They speak with pride about sharing their electronic presentations with the class and being able to use the interactive whiteboards with confidence. They say that they feel very well prepared for the move to secondary education; they know how to work together as a team and say that 'because of the work we do here, we won't be shocked by the work there'. It is clear that they are very caring, thoughtful, well rounded and mature individuals who are well prepared not only for the next stage of education but also the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and is maintained and improved by regular lesson observations and the sharing of effective practice. Some lessons are outstanding. In these, the teaching is tightly structured to match the needs of all pupils. The lessons are stimulating and challenging and, as a result, pupils, thrive and make exceptionally good progress. For example, in a Year 5 class, the children were spellbound by the teacher's spirited reading of a rap poem and, consequently, this inspired them to write their own poems in a similar vein.

Teachers use a wide range of questions and are good at using pupils' responses as teaching points. Good use of 'Talking Partners' helps pupils to generate ideas and ensures that everyone is involved. Teachers use interactive whiteboards well to explain difficult concepts and to move lessons on at a good pace. Other resources are chosen well and used to good effect. In the few less effective lessons there is an over-emphasis on whole-class activities which do not provide sufficient challenge for the more able, or sufficient support for slower learners and, as a result, progress is not as good as it could be.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum meets the needs of most learners and contributes effectively to their good progress and outstanding personal development. For example, the comprehensive study of Islam, including a visit to a local mosque, the strong links forged with a school in India and the opportunity to learn a modern foreign language, help pupils to develop empathy with and understanding of other cultures.

Subject leaders make good use of a wide range of resources in their schemes of work and incorporate assessment opportunities into their plans. They support their colleagues well, but there is little evidence of them working cooperatively to make learning more effective and meaningful through, for example, cross-curricular projects. A computer suite gives pupils access to information and communication technology to enhance their learning, but there is only limited access to computers in classrooms. The use of assessment data to inform planning is well established in English and mathematics and is being developed in other subjects. The outstanding range of lunchtime and after-school activities, many of which are oversubscribed, extends pupils' learning and develops their health and fitness. Educational visits, including a residential course for pupils in Year 6, add to pupils' enjoyment and their personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school's strong caring ethos is evident in all aspects of its work. School rules are clear and the system of rewards motivates pupils extremely well. The very positive relationships between pupils and adults ensure that pupils feel safe and there is someone to turn to, to ease any worries that they might have. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and their families, receive excellent support from the school special educational needs coordinator. The extra help they are given, both in the class and in small groups, from well trained teaching assistants, enables them to make good progress and to be fully involved in the work of the school. Very strong links with outside agencies mean that extra help is on hand when needed. This is particularly so for vulnerable pupils. Overall, marking is supportive and informs pupils about what they do well. At times, it gives good guidance on how they can improve their work. However, it is not consistent throughout the school and does not always refer to pupils' individual targets. Some, but not all, pupils are aware of their targets. Safeguarding procedures are in place. Parents show overwhelming support for the school with comments such as, 'teachers work hard and are well respected by the children', and, 'teachers and other staff are very approachable, professional and caring of the children and parents.'

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and governing body have created a strong sense of common purpose in the school and a real sense of community. Since her appointment, the headteacher has provided very good direction and has led a whole-school review of policy and practice. Staff confidence and competence have been enhanced through professional development and this is leading to improved standards and progress.

Parents say that they are well informed of their children's personal and academic progress and have confidence in the school's leaders. Senior leaders have a clear view of the strengths of the school and the areas for improvement. The school development plan is closely linked to subject development plans and the school budget. It is used effectively to promote change and to guide the work of leaders and managers, but is used less well to evaluate the impact of change. Middle leaders monitor the work of teachers and pupils in their area of responsibility and are developing leadership skills so that they can contribute more to whole-school improvement and evaluation. The governing body has a clear understanding of its role and responsibilities. It is developing the capacity to challenge the work of the school and is becoming increasingly involved in the self-evaluation process. Financial constraints have led to increased class sizes and affected the provision of resources, both of which have raised concerns among parents. The school has responded well to these challenges and taken appropriate actions to prevent them having a negative impact on pupils' progress. It gives good value for money.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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	2
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

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful when we came to your school. The inspectors enjoyed talking to you and hearing all of the things you like about your school. You are clearly very proud of it.

We found that your school gives you a good education and helps you make good progress. Here are some of the things we thought were really good about your school:

- the way you are developing as individuals and how well you all get on together
- the good progress you are making
- the above average standards that you achieve in your work
- the good care everyone takes of you
- how hard all the staff and governors work to do their best for you
- the way your headteacher works with other people to help you in your education.

There are two important things that could be better and so we have asked the school to:

- plan better links between subjects to make your learning more meaningful and enjoyable
- give you more guidance on what you need to do to improve the standard of your work.

Thank you once again for making us feel so welcome.