

Highfield St Matthew's CofE Primary School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 106450 |
| Local Authority | Wigan |
| Inspection number | 309132 |
| Inspection date | 21 April 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Michael Onyon |

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

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 3-11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 464 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Rev Bob Pearson |
| Headteacher | Mrs E Tyrrell |
| Date of previous school inspection | 28 June 2004 |
| School address | Billinge Road Pemberton Wigan Lancashire WN3 6BL |
| Telephone number | 01942 747818 |
| Fax number | 01942 747819 |

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|--------------------------|---------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and the following issues were investigated: pupils' achievement, particularly in English; the impact of the quality of care, guidance and support on pupils' learning; and the quality of the curriculum. Evidence was gathered from observation of lessons; pupils' work; discussions with staff, governors and pupils; and scrutiny of school documents and questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This larger than average school serves a community of relative advantage. A small proportion of pupils is entitled to free school meals. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. A very small proportion is from minority ethnic backgrounds. A lower than average proportion of pupils has learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school has Healthy School accreditation and has gained the Activemark and Eco School awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Highfield Saint Matthew's is a good school that provides good value for money. A typical comment that summed up the views of many parents was, 'I cannot praise the school enough for the support, understanding and care given to the children.' The school has several outstanding features, including pupils' personal development, the way it cares for and guides pupils and the excellent start children make to their education in the Foundation Stage. As a result, this is a welcoming school that enables pupils to feel safe and to take full advantage of the richness of the curriculum that is on offer to them. Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and really enjoy school because 'teachers make learning interesting and fun.'

All staff share the excellent vision of the headteacher in providing a strong faith ethos and in enabling the school to sustain high standards and to improve. As a result, pupils achieve well and all make good progress. Standards at the end of Years 2 and 6 are above average in English, mathematics and science. Mathematics and science are strengths, with a trend of above average results in national tests at the end of Year 6. The focus on practical activities promotes pupils' interests and enables them to make good gains in their skills and knowledge in mathematics and science. Reading is stronger than writing, where standards should be higher especially for the more able pupils. An exciting approach to teaching letter sounds and basic writing skills is raising standards in Years 1 and 2. While older pupils write imaginatively, their punctuation is not consistently accurate and their handwriting is not always well presented. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because the school is quick to identify their needs, seek guidance and provide effective support. Pupils with a statement of special educational need also make good progress because of the well informed support they receive. When required, individual help is available for these pupils. This often involves the imaginative use of information and communication technology (ICT) to capture pupils' interest and gives an extra boost to their confidence and their learning. The school rightly has an excellent reputation in providing for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Factors contributing to pupils' good achievement are the good quality of teaching and the lively, stimulating curriculum. Pupils are motivated to learn and work conscientiously. Lessons are well organised and run smoothly. The best lessons have brisk pace and include a variety of activities that challenge and excite pupils. Science and numeracy lessons are practical and challenging. This is less evident in some literacy lessons, where there is less pace and teachers' expectations of pupils' written work are not always high enough. ICT is a real strength and is used well by teachers and pupils. For example, older pupils email their homework to school. Plans are well advanced to provide a 'learning platform' to enable pupils and their parents or carers to access work at home and to be informed about how well pupils are doing.

Outstanding relationships between staff and pupils lead to mutual respect. Because of this, pupils' behaviour is excellent and most rise to the teacher's challenge. Teachers mark pupils' books well and provide comments to tell them how to improve their work. In the best lessons teachers make the focus of the lesson very clear to pupils. As pupils commented, 'We know what we are expected to do and we can ask questions if we are not sure.' The effective practice of encouraging pupils to offer constructive comments about each other's work helps them to see how they can improve.

The effective curriculum provides pupils with a broad range of interesting activities. Many clubs, activities, visits and visitors not only enrich the curriculum but also extend pupils' skills,

especially in keeping fit and healthy. Teaching successfully focuses pupils on the importance of caring not only for themselves, but also for the environment. This is evident in the school's Healthy School status, Activemark award and Eco School status. The programme for personal, social and emotional development is detailed and varied. This was expressed well as, 'A good thing about this school is that you can express what you think and people listen and take you seriously.' Pupils learn to work cooperatively and to take responsibility. For example, older pupils act as play leaders at lunchtime organising and supervising activities for younger pupils. The school council represents well the opinions of its peers and is proud to have contributed to several improvements.

The focus on independent learning is good because the school uses ICT effectively for pupils to research and prepare presentations. The school provides some innovative activities to prepare pupils for their future. For example, Year 6 pupils confidently engage in video conferencing to communicate with pupils in other schools and to learn from their experiences. This greatly enhances pupils' self-confidence and, coupled with good academic standards, prepares pupils well for their future economic well-being.

At the heart of the school's ethos is the desire to provide effectively for the needs of all pupils. It contributes effectively to pupils maturing into caring young people, well informed about how to care for themselves and others. All adults involved with the school have pupils' welfare at the centre of their work. Response is prompt if a need arises and pupils know that they can turn to somebody if they have personal worries.

Leadership and management are good. Self-evaluation is accurate and honest. The school has a very clear understanding about priorities to sustain above average standards and to raise them further. These are translated into actions through a well organised school development plan. The school systematically evaluates each subject area and considers how things can be improved. All leaders have significant responsibilities and are accountable for standards and achievement. Detailed action plans have led to the positive actions to raise standards.

Governance is good. Improvement since the last inspection is good. The recent improvements in checking pupils' performance is enabling the school to set challenging targets and it is well placed to achieve them. There is a strong culture of effective teamwork, with all adults involved. Because of this and the effective leadership of the headteacher, the school's capacity to improve is excellent.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Most children enter school with the level of skills expected for their age. They achieve well and by the end of the Reception year the majority reach the goals expected in all areas of their learning and a significant number exceed them. Children are very well prepared for their work in the National Curriculum, in particular in the basic skills. Teaching is good. There are examples of outstanding teaching where children are encouraged to make decisions about their own learning. Leadership and management of the Foundation Stage are very good. The classrooms and outdoor areas are well structured and carefully organised. Children's responses to activities are observed and assessed carefully. The information is used effectively to plan the next steps in children's learning, ensuring that their different levels of knowledge and understanding are well catered for. In making the nationally required changes to the Foundation Stage curriculum, staff are in the process of encouraging children to increasingly explore and learn for themselves. For example, there is a variety of opportunities for children to learn through role play. The Foundation Stage provides children with an excellent start to their learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' punctuation and handwriting.
- Effectively challenge the more able pupils to improve their achievement in writing.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

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|---|-----|
| 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 | 1 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 1 |

Achievement and standards

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|--|---|
| 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

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|---|---|
| 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

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|--|---|
| 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? | 1 |

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

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| 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 | 1 |
| How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 1 |
| 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 |

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for the lovely time I had when I inspected your school. I appreciated your welcome and the way you talked to me about the things you do. You are right in saying that you go to a good school. There are also some excellent things going on. These include how well you behave and how hard you work. St Matthew's is a very caring school and I am pleased you feel safe and happy. Children get an excellent start to their education in the Nursery and in Reception.

As you told me, you are taught well and this helps you to make good progress. I was especially impressed with some of your work in ICT. The quality of your work is usually good, particularly in mathematics and science. Most of you write imaginative stories and poems but you do not always remember to use punctuation correctly and your handwriting is not always as neat as it could be! Some changes have already been made and I have asked the school to help you further with your writing.

I hope you will continue to enjoy your time at school and I am sure you will help your teachers by working hard and doing your best work.