

Lowerhouses CofE (Controlled) Junior Infant and Early Years School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107698
Local Authority	Kirklees
Inspection number	309478
Inspection dates	9–10 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Ann Sharpe

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	179
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jill Mitchell
Headteacher	Mr Paul Scrimshaw
Date of previous school inspection	19 January 2004
School address	Lowerhouses Lane Almondbury Huddersfield West Yorkshire HD5 8JY
Telephone number	01484 226672
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Most pupils who attend this smaller than average sized school are of White British heritage. About 20% are from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The school is situated in an area of considerable social disadvantage. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is more than twice the national average. Although the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average, the percentage with a statement of special educational need is high. There is resource based provision for pupils with hearing impairment, speech and language or communication delay. A few pupils have recently arrived from Eastern Europe or Africa and some do not speak English. A larger than average proportion of pupils join or leave the school at times other than normal. There is a children's centre on the same site. A new headteacher was appointed 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: 3

This is a satisfactory and improving school. It has a mainly accurate view of its effectiveness and gives satisfactory value for money. It provides a safe, welcoming and happy setting where pupils enjoy their education. The school has come through an unsettling period, owing to a change of headteacher and governing body. A major reason for this is the strong support the staff and governors have given to the new headteacher to initiate improvement.

Parents think very highly of the school. Many sing its praises for all that has been achieved in a short time. They say that they particularly like being asked for their opinions and given encouragement to be involved in the new parents' council. They appreciate the breakfast club, in which many children have a healthy, calm and enjoyable start to their day. They say their children enjoy school more now because of the improvements to the building and outdoor play areas. Standards in Year 2 and Year 6 are well below average, although standards in reading in Year 2 and in mathematics in Year 6 have improved this year. The leadership are making satisfactory use of challenging targets in a bid to try and raise standards. Most pupils make satisfactory progress towards their targets as a result of satisfactory teaching and learning. However, their lack of good speaking and listening skills holds them back, particularly in writing, as do their weak calculating skills in mathematics. Efforts to improve teaching and learning are paying dividends, but there is still work to do to see more consistently good teaching across the school. Insufficient use is made by teachers of assessment information. Consequently, pupils' work is not always matched closely enough to their needs. Pupils are not well informed about their current learning targets, how to reach them or what they have to do to improve their work.

The school's intake is considerably more diverse than that of many schools. Staff rise well to this challenge. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need make good progress. Pupils with hearing impairment and those with speech and language or communication delay also make good progress and achieve well. This is the result of skilfully managed provision in the resource base, links with support agencies, expert teaching and sensitive and caring support. It is a delight to see so many staff and pupils communicating by using sign language. Pupils who have recently arrived at the school or to this country quickly settle into their new surroundings because they are made to feel welcome. Overall, the care, guidance and support provided by the school are satisfactory.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. They behave well and most attend regularly. They are friendly towards one another and most know the difference between right and wrong. For example, a typical comment was, 'If you get bullied don't bully back – just walk away, be the bigger person and tell an adult!' The satisfactory curriculum helps pupils acquire a sound knowledge of how to live a healthy and safe lifestyle. Pupils make a satisfactory contribution to their school and wider community, for example, by planning the refurbishment of the toilets, designing the outside play areas, taking part in local tournaments and visiting local churches. Pupils' satisfactory progress in their basic skills gives them a sound start to the next stage of their education.

Leadership, management and governance are satisfactory. The very good leadership of the headteacher has set the school on a clear pathway to improvement. The impact of this is starting to be seen in improved standards in reading and mathematics. However, there has been

insufficient time for the recently implemented strategies to have a broader impact on pupils' performance in national tests and assessments. Senior staff play a strong part in helping the school to improve. A close working relationship with the local authority is helping significantly to raise standards. Other initiatives such as a parents' council have got off to a good start. All this provides clear evidence of the school's good capacity to improve further. Governors' raised expectations about what the school and the community can do together are evidenced in the facelift of the building, the credit union and the pride with which pupils wear their uniforms.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children enter Nursery with skills that are well below those expected for their age, especially in their personal, social and emotional development and in their communication, language and literacy skills. Although children make sound progress as a result of satisfactory teaching and learning, very few reach the national goals set for them by the end of Reception. Consequently, they are not well prepared for work in Year 1. Good leadership is now steering staff in the right direction, with a strong emphasis on quickening the development of children's social and language skills. In a short space of time, children's progress has started to accelerate. Children with hearing impairments and those with speech and language or communication delay, happily work and play alongside other children and make good progress. However, assessments that show what children can do are not always used to focus sharply on what they need to learn next. Children come to school happily, they are safe and secure and quickly learn to follow routines, both indoors and out.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching and the use of assessment information in order that standards may be raised, especially in speaking, listening, writing and mathematics.
- Make sure that children in the Foundation Stage make better progress in their personal, social and emotional development and in communication, language and literacy so that they are better prepared for work in Year 1.
- Keep pupils well informed about their current learning targets and how to reach them, and ensure that they know what they have to do to improve their work.

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

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Although standards in Year 2 and in Year 6 are well below average, pupils make satisfactory progress overall. Year 2 pupils do well in reading and standards have improved further this year. However, across the school, pupils' weaker speaking and listening skills hinder their progress in writing. Consequently, standards in writing have remained a weakness since the previous inspection. Standards in mathematics have fallen over the last few years, but they are now improving. Pupils' calculation skills let them down in national assessments and tests and partly, as a result, the school missed its statutory targets in mathematics in both 2007 and 2008. Currently, there is evidence that pupils are making better progress which is reversing a declining trend in overall standards. This is because senior leaders and managers are successfully improving the quality of teaching and learning. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and

pupils with hearing impairment or speech and language or communication delay, make good progress. Staff work closely together, and understand and meet these pupils' needs well. Pupils who are at an early stage of learning English make satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are satisfactory. The school recognises that pupils' understanding of cultural diversity is not yet as strong as it could be. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are good. The new 'Circle of Care' gives them an increased sense of pride in themselves and their school. Attendance is average overall, although unauthorised absence is above average. Pupils have an increasing sense of belonging to their school and the wider community. They enjoy raising funds for charity and understand their responsibility to look after the environment. They say how much they enjoy being involved in improving the outdoor play areas. Pupils' knowledge of how to stay healthy and safe is satisfactory. Their satisfactory progress in basic literacy and numeracy skills provides a sound foundation upon which pupils can move onto the next stage of their education and be equipped for adult life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Satisfactory teaching and learning are leading to satisfactory progress for most pupils, including those at an early stage of learning English. Teachers are well organised and keen to extend their skills. They are good role models and manage pupils' behaviour well. Lessons are calm and purposeful and pupils have a satisfactory enjoyment of their learning. Teaching and learning are improving partly as a result of efforts to address previous inspection issues relating to shortcomings in the teaching of writing and in teachers' marking. Despite clear evidence of an improving picture, there remain relative weaknesses. Insufficient use is made of assessment information to match pupils' work to their varying ages and abilities. As a result, teachers' expectations, particularly of the more able pupils, are not always as high as they could be and some teaching is mundane. Teachers do not always keep pupils informed about their current learning targets, how to reach them and what they have to do to improve their work. The quality of teaching and learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for those pupils with hearing impairment or speech and language or communication delay is good. This is because of the very strong expertise of all the staff involved and pupils' evident enjoyment of their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The satisfactory curriculum meets statutory requirements. It is enriched through opportunities for pupils to participate in visits locally and beyond, to welcome visitors and to enjoy out-of-class activities. All pupils in Years 3 to 6 particularly enjoy residential visits. After returning from their recent visit to an outdoor centre, pupils in Years 5 and 6 improved their writing skills by reflecting on their thrilling experiences. Such visits encourage team-building, foster independence and boost pupils' self-esteem. Pupils who are gifted and talented have satisfactory opportunities to further their learning. The more able pupils generally, however,

are not always challenged by the curriculum. The curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for those attached to the resource base is well matched to their widely varying needs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those attached to the resource base is good. Caring staff identify the needs of the more vulnerable pupils. They provide sensitive and enthusiastic support that helps pupils to overcome barriers to their learning. Parents of these pupils, however, are not yet involved as much as they could be by the school in supporting their children's learning. Safeguarding procedures are in place and meet statutory requirements. The breakfast club provides a calm and purposeful start to the day for many pupils. It has already helped to improve attendance, punctuality and pupils' learning. The 'Circle of Care' makes each pupil feel that little bit 'special'. They know who to go to for help if they need it. Staff have an overview of pupils' progress over time, but do not always use this information well enough to inform pupils about what they need to do to meet their targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new headteacher has very quickly and astutely weighed up the school's strengths and weaknesses. He has earned the trust and confidence of pupils, parents and staff. Consequently, initiatives, such as the breakfast club and the parents' council, have got off to a strong start. Improving the quality of pupils' education and raising standards are at the very heart of the school's work. The deputy headteacher and senior staff play a major part in raising standards in the Foundation Stage and in English and mathematics. Self-evaluation of the school's performance has resulted in the identification of appropriate priorities for improvement. Although the school is now collecting more data from which to evaluate its performance, the use of this data is still to have a full impact on raising standards. Many governors are new to the school and still developing their roles. They have made a good start in being more influential in financial management; for example, in correcting an historical underspend and in supporting the school. This sense of determination to do the very best for the pupils and evidence of significant improvements such as the rise in standards over a short period of time shows the school's good capacity to continue to improve.

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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?	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	3

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	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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	3
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	3
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 making us feel so welcome when we inspected your school and for answering all our questions so thoughtfully. We thoroughly enjoyed our two days with you, especially hearing about all the exciting things that happen. We were impressed with how well you behave in lessons, in assemblies and around the school. I would like to tell you more about what we found out during our visit.

We found that Lowerhouses is a satisfactory and improving school. It is getting better because your new headteacher and all the other adults work hard together. They are beginning to give you all the things you need to help you improve your work. Your parents are very pleased with the school, especially the breakfast club, 'Circle of Care' and the parents' council. Your teachers and other adults take good care of you and want you all to do well. They help you a lot, especially those of you who find it more difficult to learn. You do better in reading than you do in speaking and listening, writing and mathematics.

One of my jobs is to give the school ideas about how it can improve. To do this, I have asked the school to make sure that teachers help you to make better progress in your learning by making better use of assessment information when planning your lessons so that you can improve your speaking, listening, writing and mathematics. I have also asked your teachers to help the children in Nursery and Reception learn faster, so that they are more ready for work in Year 1. Finally, I have asked the school to make sure that you know what your learning targets are and what you have to do to reach them.

You can help by continuing to behave so well. With best wishes for the future.