

Wolverham Primary and Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111089
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	310498
Inspection date	13 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Paul Bamber

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	117
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Thorley
Headteacher	Mrs Jo Airey
Date of previous school inspection	27 April 2004
School address	Milton Road Wolverham Ellesmere Port CH65 5AT
Telephone number	0151 3552411
Fax number	0151 3572852

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and particularly investigated the following issues: pupils' achievement; the quality of teaching; how well the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils and the quality of the school's self-evaluation and of governance. Evidence was gathered from: national published assessment data; the school's self-evaluation, assessment records, policies, minutes and other documentation; observation of the school at work; discussions with members of staff, pupils, the governors and a group of parents and the questionnaires returned by parents. 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

Most pupils who attend this smaller than average sized school live in an area of significant social and economic disadvantage. A much higher than average proportion can claim a free school meal. A lower percentage of pupils than normal come from a minority ethnic background. Very few pupils are at an early stage of speaking English as an additional language. An average proportion have learning difficulties and/or disabilities with a slightly higher than average percentage having a statement of special educational need. Many more pupils than is usual leave or join the school during term time.

The school has an Activemark, the Artsmark Silver, Inclusion Mark and national Healthy School status.

There has been considerable lack of continuity in the leadership of the school since September 2007, with one headteacher and two different acting headteachers in post. The school is currently led by an acting headteacher who has been in post since April 2008. A permanent headteacher has been appointed to lead the school from September 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 and its provision in the Foundation Stage is outstanding. Underpinning pupils' good achievements and effective personal development is a rich curriculum, sensitive care and support and well focused leadership. Because the school has secure systems to manage its performance and for its day-to-day running, it has been able to take in its stride the three changes in headteachers that have occurred over the last eight months. This means that the pupils have continued to make good progress and that initiatives designed to further improve aspects of the school's provision have been implemented smoothly.

From entering the school with well below expected skills, pupils achieve well and leave Year 6 having attained average standards in English, mathematics and science. Year 6 national test results over the last two years have indicated improved standards from previous years and the current Year 6 is attaining broadly average standards. Over the last two years the progress pupils have made through Years 3 to 6 has been remarkably good, being in the top percentile nationally overall and individually in mathematics and science. The areas of relative weakness in pupils' performance are in their spelling and handwriting. Despite the school's recent implementation of strategies to improve pupils' spelling, too many of them spell familiar words or those copied from displays or whiteboards, incorrectly. Pupils' handwriting in their day-to-day work does not reflect the better quality found in their handwriting books. Overall, pupils make good progress in Years 1 and 2, though not as spectacular as that recently in Years 3 to 6. In Years 1 and 2, a lot of consolidation of pupils' basic skills is required to help them lay the foundation for their excellent progress in Year 3 to 6.

Because they feel safe and secure and they are encouraged to lead healthy and active lives, pupils respond by eating sensibly and taking advantage of playground games and the many after-school clubs organised for them. Those involving physical activities tend to be the best attended and the school's Activemark award reflects this excellent provision. Pupils of all abilities and backgrounds are keenly encouraged to participate fully in all aspects of school life and in activities that contribute extremely well to the community. For example, the school has a science garden in which they plant, tend and harvest flowers and vegetables with the help of a local resident. In addition, pupils have been involved in designing a local park and in a recycling project.

Pupils enjoy school greatly. The comment, 'lessons are fun and teachers are kind', sums up their feelings about their learning. Teaching is of good quality. Contributing to pupils' good progress are careful planning, the creative use of information and communication technology (ICT), well deployed and dedicated teaching assistants, accurate assessments and frequent target-setting. The very positive relationships that exist throughout the school mean that lessons proceed in an orderly fashion and that the vast majority of pupils behave well in and out of the classroom. Where a very few pupils do have more difficulty behaving well, the well thought out and rigorously applied systems to manage behaviour and the productive interventions of the learning mentor help to resolve any issues. Parents and school leaders report that playground behaviour has improved as a result of the training midday supervisors have received. This enables them to play a much more positive role in rewarding good behaviour at lunchtimes. The learning mentor's sensitive support for more vulnerable pupils helps them to cope better with school routines. It has also helped to improve attendance to the national average, a good achievement given the school's context.

The curriculum effectively meets the needs of all pupils and enables them to acquire life skills that will stand them in good stead in later life. For example, there are many occasions when pupils apply their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills in a range of subjects. In one lesson observed, pupils practised writing an explanatory text about making musical instruments they had made in a technology topic and that they had studied in music lessons. In another, pupils used their knowledge of negative numbers to read temperatures in a science lesson. In both these lessons pupils gained good experience of working in teams to share their knowledge and skills.

Leaders and managers ensure that pupils are well cared for and supported. For example, all statutory requirements are met regarding safeguarding checks on adults who work in the school and for child protection. Their success in improving standards and pupils' progress in recent years is testament to the effectiveness of their improvement planning and the rigorous checks they carry out on the school's performance. School leaders can be too hard on themselves when evaluating aspects of the school's work. For example, their self-evaluations of the quality of teaching and learning and of the curriculum were too modest. In both cases, they underestimated their impact on pupils' good achievement, focusing more on the average standards attained. An area in need of improvement is governance. Currently, the governing body as a whole is insufficiently knowledgeable about the school's work and performance to fully challenge any real areas of weakness which may emerge. Although governors' sub-committees were formed two years ago, none has met as yet. Governors are supportive and meet statutory requirements.

Given its record of good improvement since the last inspection, especially in raising standards, the careful way in which developments are planned and implemented and the increasingly good partnerships with parents and the local community, the school demonstrates a good capacity to improve even further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children enter the Nursery with skills well below those nationally expected in their personal and social development, in communication, language and literacy and in mathematics. They are slightly higher in other areas of their learning. As a result of the excellent leadership of this stage of the children's education, they flourish in all aspects of their development, making rapid progress through both the Nursery and Reception. Children settle extremely happily as a result of the very sensitive way in which they are introduced into the school and to Nursery routines. This includes a very strong partnership with parents who overwhelmingly praise the way in which they are included in the induction arrangements and in their children's learning thereafter.

Children's days are full of fun and activity. They quickly develop independence, confidence and the ability to fill their time through choosing a wide variety of practical activities, both indoors and out. Staff ensure that children are guided gently to accept challenge and to work at levels that will help them acquire a wide range of skills. Where teaching is more directed, for example, when the Foundation Stage leader worked with a group of Reception children to add, subtract and form mathematical sentences, it is based on secure and detailed assessments of children's progress. The many opportunities children have to role play, invent their own games and to work cooperatively, promote their creative development and their knowledge and understanding of the world around them extremely well. As a result of the excellent teaching and a rich curriculum, many enter Year 1 with skills in line with, and some above, those expected nationally.

What the school should do to improve further

- To ensure that pupils take more care with their spelling and handwriting.
- Make sure the governors become more knowledgeable about the school's work so that they can better hold it to account for its performance.

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	1
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	2

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	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	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**

Inspection of Wolverham Primary and Nursery School, Ellesmere Port, CH65 5AT

Thank you very much for chatting to me in such a friendly way when I inspected your school recently. I enjoyed talking to you in lessons, around the school and with the school council. You told me that you enjoyed a lot of things about school and that you thought it was really good. I agree it is a good school.

You have good teachers and get on well with your work. The way that pupils in Years 3 to 6 improved since they were in Year 2 has been particularly good recently. Many of you obviously enjoy the clubs you can go to after school; those for sports seem really popular! I was impressed with your behaviour, especially in lessons and there are clearly lots of ways in which you greatly help your local area. Most of you seem very keen to learn and to help new pupils settle in, for example, those who come from other countries or who are just starting in the Nursery or Reception. This goes a long way to make sure that they make a really good and happy start to school.

Part of my job is to try to help school be even better. For your school I have asked your teachers to do these two things.

- To make sure that when you are writing in lessons you take much more care with your spelling and your handwriting.
- For the school to find ways to help the governors to get to know the school better so that they can help to improve too.

Obviously, you can help with the first one. I noticed, for instance, that in your special handwriting books your writing was much better than in your other books.

Keep on working hard and supporting your school.