

# Darnhall Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	111133
<b>Local Authority</b>	Cheshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	310511
<b>Inspection dates</b>	15–16 January 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Brian Padgett HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	215
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Richard Strachan
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Simon Kidwell
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	28 June 2004
<b>School address</b>	Sandyhill Road Darnhall Winsford Cheshire CW7 1JL
<b>Telephone number</b>	01606 593315
<b>Fax number</b>	01606 861932

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

## Description of the school

The school is of an average size for a primary school. It is situated in an area of mixed housing to the south of Winsford town centre. The school is on two sites. The Foundation Stage (Nursery and Reception) and Key Stage 1 are housed in one building and Key Stage 2 in another. The two sites are separated by a road.

Much of the area is socially and economically disadvantaged and many of the pupils, about 40%, are eligible for a free school meal, which is over twice the national average. Nearly all the pupils are of White British heritage. A high proportion, about 35%, has learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school is designated as a centre for children with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, each of whom has a statement of special educational need. Currently, seven such children attend the school. They are based in the Key Stage 2 building.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is thereby given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to pupils' achievement and standards.

The school was last inspected in 2004 when it was judged to be a good school. Since then the impact of several changes in leadership have had a damaging effect on pupils' achievement and standards. Many parents lost confidence in the school's ability to care for and educate their children and many removed them to other schools in the neighbourhood. The main impact has been felt in Key Stage 2. Achievement and standards in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 have not been as badly affected by the disruption as in Key Stage 2, partly because the physical separation of the two parts of the school shielded the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 from the worst impact of the changes. By Year 6 in 2007 standards in the basic skills were very low and pupils' progress across the four years was so poor that the value added by the school during Key Stage 2 placed it amongst the least effective 3% in England. Many pupils were leaving the school inadequately prepared for secondary education.

From midway through 2006, and particularly since the present headteacher took up his post in January 2007, the situation within the school stabilised and is now improving. The confidence of parents in the school has returned. Pupils enjoy school. Their personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Teachers feel valued. Their morale is good and they are determined to work together to raise standards. All these improvements are the result of improved leadership and management that can be seen at all levels. Each major aspect of the school's work is now satisfactory with the exception of pupils' achievement and standards. Such is the legacy of poor performance and gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding that standards cannot be restored immediately. In the meantime, pupils are making better progress. With the support of the local authority, the school has put in place a rigorous tracking system to ensure teachers know the levels at which pupils are working and know to take action if pupils fall behind with their work.

The headteacher, staff and governors recognise there is still much to do. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, and there is outstanding practice to learn from, but not all teaching is consistently good enough. In particular, the many teaching assistants are not used as effectively as they could be to support the wide range of learning needs of pupils, from the very bright to those with significant learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Parents express concerns about children's behaviour. In fact, children's behaviour is satisfactory. During the inspection the school was calm and purposeful, but there was evidence of low level disruption in some lessons and this is a source of concern to pupils. The school is implementing clear procedures for behaviour management. These are necessary for all pupils but imperative for those pupils who attend the school with statements of special educational needs for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, who are not well served at present.

The school receives support from the local authority. However, all give testimony to the part the new headteacher has played in the recent improvement. Such is the progress being made in all its aspects, that although the school is judged ineffective at present and provides poor value for public money, it has good capacity for further improvement.

## Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

### Grade: 3

Children enter the Nursery with levels of knowledge and understanding that are generally lower than those of children of their age. The main emphasis in the Foundation Stage (the Nursery and Reception) is to ensure children settle well and enjoy school, and this is achieved successfully. Most children leave Reception working within the early learning goals considered appropriate for children about to begin the National Curriculum. Leadership and management of the Foundation Stage are satisfactory, but the quality of children's experiences is higher in the Reception class than in the Nursery. Practitioners plot children's progress adequately. The school recognises that the provision for children to learn outdoors is an area for development and inspectors agree that this is so.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Raise pupils' standards in English, mathematics and science.
- Ensure teaching and learning are at least of consistently good quality, including the contribution made by support staff.
- Further improve the management of pupils' behaviour, especially for pupils with statements of special educational need for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 4

Overall, achievement is inadequate and standards are very low.

Children make satisfactory progress in the Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1. Standards are consistently below average by age seven. However, achievement is satisfactory because, in each year, at least a third of the children have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Children's reading is better developed than their writing and numeracy skills, and these latter areas are where most improvement is required.

Pupils' achievement in Key Stage 2 is inadequate. Standards have been falling since 2004 and they are now very low. At Year 6 in 2007 standards fell to their lowest levels with only about half of pupils reaching the levels in English, mathematics and science expected for pupils of this age. This meant that many pupils entered secondary school up to two years behind in their work. This represents poor progress during Key Stage 2 in each of the core subjects. In relation to pupils with similar backgrounds, Darnhall pupils made less progress than almost all pupils of their age in England. Fresh data prepared by the school show that pupils currently in Years 4 to 6 are well behind in their work.

Generally, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with statements of special educational need, make broadly satisfactory progress. The group that makes least progress is the significant group of pupils who come from the poorest backgrounds.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are satisfactory. Pupils have a satisfactory attitude to learning. They enjoy school and generally behave appropriately in lessons and around the school. However, pupils made it clear that their aspirations for what they can achieve have only been high since the arrival of

the present headteacher and also since the appointment of new staff. Even so, they are occasionally disturbed by low level disruption from a few pupils who do not behave properly at all times. Attendance is below average, although it is improving slowly following a concerted effort by the school and the authorities.

Pupils trust staff to keep them safe and their knowledge of how to keep safe and healthy are satisfactory. Pupils' social development is good and they make a positive contribution to the school community and beyond: for example, through fund-raising. The school council is relatively new but already it has influenced the appointment of the headteacher and works with other school councils in the Winsford area. The pupils' preparation for the world of work is inadequate at present, since their levels of basic skills needed to secure employment are too low.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Typically, the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, although teaching of all grades was observed during the inspection. In all classes, relationships between teachers, teaching assistants and pupils are good. Teachers are increasingly involving pupils in assessing whether they have understood what they are learning and in setting targets for what they aim to achieve. There is outstanding teaching in Key Stage 2 to act as a model for all teachers, particularly in the teaching of English. Teachers' knowledge of what constitutes effective, modern teaching and good management of pupils' behaviour are improving after a period when few teachers undertook professional development. The main challenge facing the school in relation to the quality of teaching is to make it consistently good in all classes, so pupils' learning develops effectively from year to year.

The school has a high number of teaching assistants, compared to most schools, to support the high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, these staff are not always used in the most effective way. Examples of very effective working were observed when teaching assistants worked with groups of pupils in the class under the direction of the teacher. However, when teaching assistants were not actively involved in the learning, or when they withdrew children half way through lessons, they were considerably less effective.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 3**

The curriculum is broad and balanced. It is now more appropriately focused on providing for the teaching of the basic skills through the national literacy and numeracy strategies. The school has maintained its position as a centre of excellence in art. It has achieved the gold standard Artsmark three times in succession and the corridors of both parts of the school are full of art work of a high standard. There is a wide range of intervention programmes available for pupils who need extra support with their English and mathematics. As well as studying all the subjects of the National Curriculum and, more recently, French, the pupils have lessons to promote their personal and emotional development and their sense of responsibility. Parents are particularly appreciative of the number of residential, out-of-school trips the school undertakes. A range of extra-curricular activities is offered, which the school is considering extending, and a high proportion of pupils take part in these.

## Care, guidance and support

### Grade: 3

The care, guidance and support for pupils are satisfactory. They have improved from a poor position where many parents lost confidence in the ability of the school to care for their children. Parents' confidence is restored. This is a truly caring school where, in addition to the teachers and teaching assistants, the school manager and site manager also play significant roles in supporting relationships with pupils and parents. There is a breakfast club. Arrangements to protect and safeguard pupils, to reduce risks to health and safety and to provide care for looked after children are fully in place. There are strong links with other agencies that work with children to support their well-being and the strong links with the partnership of schools in the Winsford area have been maintained. The new headteacher has put in place monitoring systems to check the levels of pupils' work so that their progress can be measured over time. This is a development that was long overdue. There are satisfactory records maintained for pupils with special educational needs.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 3

The breakdown in the effectiveness of leadership and management was the root cause of the school's decline and the loss of confidence of parents. Equally, the success of leadership and management since mid-year 2006 is at the heart of the school's improvement. There has been a significant turnaround that has gathered momentum since the present headteacher took up his post in January 2007.

There have been significant improvements in a range of important aspects. These include the quality of teaching of literacy and numeracy, the introduction of progress measures for each class, more consistent management of behaviour, better links with parents and with other agencies and a radical improvement in the morale of staff. Alongside increased support for his staff, the headteacher has introduced increased accountability: teachers' performance in the classroom is monitored and the progress made by pupils is linked firmly to teachers' performance management.

The school's self-evaluation is fully accurate. The school is set on a clear course of self improvement. It receives support from the local authority, which began in 2006, and this has had a significant impact on teachers' subject knowledge of teaching the basic skills. New appointments have been made which have brought new energy to the staff. Parents have noticed this new enthusiasm. Teachers are now well placed to use their expertise to tailor more closely the general support they receive to the needs of the pupils in their classes.

The school's management team has expanded and is developing its responsibilities well. There is a strong sense of teamwork and a determination to solve problems. The two parts of the school work together more closely. Much is work in progress and there are inconsistencies to iron out. For example, the legacy of poor management decisions and inadequate professional development can be seen in the inconsistent quality of resource provision for children with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

The governing body has not proved effective in preventing the decline of the school. In particular, it has not monitored expenditure effectively and the school lurched alarmingly from deficit to surplus over a relatively short period of time. However, governors have worked

tirelessly to counter the worst effects of poor leadership and management. They ensured a rigorous selection process for the new headteacher and involved pupils in his appointment. The commitment of the governing body to improving the school is as high as that of the staff and it now has the capacity to provide effective oversight of the school.

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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
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	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

### 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	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
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	4

### 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

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	4
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?	Yes

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

You may remember that I visited your school recently with Mrs Sue Hunt to carry out an inspection. I would like to thank you for your welcome on the two days we were at Darnhall. Mrs Hunt and I thought you were very polite. For those children we talked to, thank you for your openness and honesty.

This letter is to tell you the results of the inspection. We realise that the school has been through difficult times since the last inspection in 2004. There have been lots of changes in teachers and several headteachers have been in charge. You have not had as good an education as you deserve and your standards of work have gone down to the point where they are too low.

That is the bad news. There is also good news. Mrs Hunt and I appreciate that the school is now a very different place from what it was two years ago. We listened to what you, your parents and the staff and governors had to say. You all said how much better the school was getting. We looked for evidence of that improvement and we agree with you - your school is improving rapidly. We can see how determined Mr Kidwell and your teachers are to make sure you do better in the future.

Your teachers and teaching assistants will need to make sure that they always teach well and match your work closely to what you need to learn next. For your part, you must make sure your behaviour is good.

Either I or another inspector will visit in a few months to check on the school's progress. You and your teachers have our very best wishes.