

Sycamore Lane Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111193
Local Authority	Warrington
Inspection number	310530
Inspection dates	14–15 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Wainwright

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	344
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Claire Earps
Headteacher	Mrs Joanne Hewson
Date of previous school inspection	9 February 2004
School address	Sycamore Lane Great Sankey Warrington Cheshire WA5 1LA
Telephone number	01925 723558
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Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Sycamore Lane is a larger than average primary school. The number on roll has steadily decreased in recent years. The vast majority of pupils are of White British origin with a small number of pupils from minority ethnic groups and very few pupils with English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals and the number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are below average. The headteacher, previously the deputy headteacher, has been in post for two terms. The school has received the Activemark award for physical education for two consecutive years and is currently working towards healthy school status. The school has an Artsmark Gold School award and is a school of 'Developing Excellence' within the local authority for Modern Foreign Languages. It has links with schools in France and Spain.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Sycamore Lane is a satisfactory and improving school where pupils' personal development is good and they enjoy a stimulating and vibrant curriculum. Good links exist with parents, with most of them expressing positive views of the school. Good relationships are evident in school and pupils speak of the friendliness of adults and of their fellow pupils. Pupils and parents recognise that the pupils are cared for well and have good pastoral support. The school has strong links with outside agencies, which helps support pupils' learning. The school also has good links with schools overseas which helps to broaden the pupils' horizons.

Recently, there have been disruptions to staffing which are now being overcome successfully. However, this has resulted in the quality of teaching being inconsistent throughout the school, particularly in ensuring all pupils are sufficiently challenged in their learning. This is causing some fluctuation in pupils' progress. Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory. The recently appointed headteacher has assessed the school's strengths and weaknesses accurately and has swiftly put in place a range of measures aimed at improving teaching and learning, and raising achievement.

Pupils make satisfactory progress throughout the school. Standards at the end of Year 2 are broadly average with strengths in reading and writing. Standards at the end of Year 6 are also broadly average with the most significant recent improvement seen in science. A system is now in place so that the progress of all pupils can be tracked closely as they move through the school. This allows the school to provide additional support for those who need it. As this initiative is newly implemented, it is too soon to judge its effectiveness in helping to promote higher standards for all pupils. The extra support and attention given to pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has resulted in them making good progress. Whilst this group of pupils have good support and achieve well, the school recognises that challenge for the more able pupils and provision for gifted and talented pupils is not yet good enough.

A strength of the recent curriculum development is the way the school actively seeks and acts on the views of pupils. This is impacting strongly not only in improving the curriculum but also on the pupils' involvement in the life of the school and their personal development. The vast majority of pupils show good attitudes to learning and behave well in all areas of the school. In some lessons their behaviour is excellent, stemming from good relationships and high levels of respect. Pupils work together harmoniously and productively. Pupils clearly enjoy their schooling and this is shown in their above average attendance.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher is providing vigorous and purposeful leadership to the school. She is gathering a very supportive team around her who share her vision and understand the school's needs. The team is too new to have had any significant impact on improving pupils' achievement, but has put in place the building blocks for improvement and shows a satisfactory capacity to improve. Governance is good, with some strong and effective members of the governing body. They are holding the school to account whilst providing good support to the headteacher and the school as a whole.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children enter the Foundation Stage with skills that are typical of children of their age. There are good links with parents and other early years' providers so that children settle quickly when

they enter the school. They make good friends, treating each other and adults with respect, and become happy and confident learners. Consequently, they make satisfactory progress and by the end of the Foundation Stage most reach the levels expected of them. The adults comprise a good professional team, working well together. Good procedures are in place to ensure that the children's care and welfare have a high priority. The children seek to follow the adult role models well and show how responsible they are when carrying out tasks such as serving each other at snack time. Teachers' planning and assessments take account of children's individual needs and all areas of learning are covered. The indoor environment is stimulating yet calm and orderly so that children are keen to learn. The outdoor environment is developing. The access to it, however, is very restricted and inhibits a free flow of movement so that it is hard for the children to pursue their learning outdoors. The newly appointed Foundation Stage leader is a good leader and manager and has a clear vision for the further development of a fully-integrated Foundation Stage unit.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the achievement of all pupils, particularly the more able and including the gifted and talented.
- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching to ensure all pupils are challenged to learn to the best of their ability.
- Improve the access to outdoor learning for children in the Foundation Stage.

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

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory and standards at the end of Year 6 are broadly average. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 make satisfactory progress so that by the end of Year 2, standards are broadly average. Achievement is better in reading and writing than in mathematics. There is a similar picture by the end of Year 6 where standards are broadly average but the pupils do better in English and science than they do in mathematics. The school has identified, rightly, that achievement in mathematics is not as good as that in English and science and has put strategies in place to address this. Current data and observation show that standards in Year 6 are broadly average as in previous years. In all subjects the school is setting appropriately challenging targets. Progress is satisfactory overall but uneven because the quality of teaching is inconsistent. A focus on the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has resulted in these pupils performing better than similar pupils nationally. The school has recognised that the achievement of all pupils can be improved and this is especially so for the more able pupils and those pupils who have particular gifts and talents.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They show an awareness of and respect for the needs of others. When working or playing together they collaborate fairly and helpfully. Behaviour is good in all areas of the school and in some lessons is excellent, as are the pupils' attitude and appetite for learning. Pupils believe that an important feature of their school is the friendliness of all. Many make strong contributions to their school community,

although contributions to the wider community are not so evident. The school council is empowered, being consulted and taking decisions and responsibility for activities. There is satisfactory awareness of safe practices and of healthy lifestyles. These are being developed through the recently introduced and effective programme for personal, social, health and citizenship education. Pupils clearly enjoy school and the range of opportunities offered. Attendance has been above the national average for the last three years. Pupils are gaining skills which prepare them well for their future economic well-being. For example, the school council takes responsibility for finances, pupils experience roles in banking and inter-personal skills are developing well, seen in the mature attitudes of older pupils. Personal development is a strength of the school. Parents speak highly of this. 'My son's behaviour and skills have improved greatly since starting at Sycamore Lane School.'

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory. The quality of teaching is, however, inconsistent. It ranges from good to occasionally inadequate, with a subsequent impact on pupils' learning. Where lessons are good, they are stimulating and interesting, resulting in pupils' good progress. In lessons which are not successful in capturing pupils' interest, a small minority lose interest and this slows the learning of the whole class. Relationships are strong, promoting very positive behaviour and attitudes to learning. Pupils are eager to engage in their tasks and work very well with partners. Teachers pose questions, which challenge and extend pupils' understanding well. Teachers generally use assessment information well to plan work, which matches pupils' needs. However, on occasions, the challenge, particularly for the more able pupils is insufficiently demanding and the pace of learning is too slow. The sharing of clear learning objectives has developed this year and is beginning to have a positive impact on achievement as pupils have a better understanding of what they are learning. A further inconsistency is seen in the way that pupils' work is marked. At times it is good and shows pupils the next steps in learning. In other cases, whilst providing encouragement, it does not give the pupils clear guidance on how they can improve their work. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or other disabilities are provided for well, with good support from skilled teaching assistants. Consequently, they make good progress in lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and is still improving. It is effective in meeting the needs and interests of the vast majority of pupils, helping to promote both their academic and personal development. The development of cross-curricular links based around the arts is having a positive impact on the pupils' enjoyment and enthusiasm for learning. For example, pupils' writing has been stimulated through role play and history topics have been brought to life. Standards in art are of a notably high quality. Pupils are offered meaningful learning experiences, for example, Year 5 pupils made soap on their science industry day and this soap is now used in the school cloakroom. The school has rightly identified the need to focus on the provision for the more able pupils and on mathematics across the school by focusing on the planning for these aspects. Currently, there is no provision for gifted and talented pupils. There are many varied enrichment opportunities, which are popular with the pupils, as are the many residential visits in Key Stage

2. Pupils in both key stages have links with pupils in either Spain or France, exchanging correspondence with them and gaining some insight into their cultures.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Good relationships exist in the school and pupils are confident that they know who to turn to for help when necessary. The deployment of support staff is focused on the pupils need. This results in, for example, the good progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or other disabilities in both their academic and personal development. Behaviour is monitored and rare incidents of any which is unacceptable are dealt with effectively. Safeguarding procedures meet current requirements and child protection procedures are in place. Academic guidance is satisfactory. Tracking of pupils' progress has been developed recently, providing clear information about pupils' progress. Improvements in the school are being driven by this data. It has identified already that provision for more able pupils needs to be reviewed and improved. Transition arrangements for pupils moving to the high school are satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The recently appointed headteacher is clearly the driving force behind the implementation of many new strategies. She has a determined vision for school development, having evaluated the provision in the school and identified accurately what needs to be done to improve. Various staffing issues with which she had to contend have been dealt with effectively. Newly appointed senior leaders are developing their roles and providing sound support. The school's evaluation of itself is good and actions are suitably prioritised. It is, however, too soon to gauge the impact of those already in place. Whilst there is an intention to ensure that all pupils have equal opportunities, provision for the more able is not good enough and those pupils with gifts and talents are not yet catered for. Resources are deployed satisfactorily. Governance is good. The governing body has a clear view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They are fully involved in school activities, well informed and pose suitable challenges to senior leaders. The school provides satisfactory 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?	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?	2
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
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	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
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?	3
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?	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	2
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	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

Inspection of Sycamore Lane Community Primary School, Warrington, WA5 1LA

Thank you very much for making us so welcome when we visited your school recently. We were impressed with your good behaviour and the enthusiasm you showed in your lessons. It was a pleasure to see you looking happy around the school and you were always most polite. You obviously enjoy going to school and the interesting things you do there.

We judged your school to be satisfactory with some things which are good. We were particularly pleased about:

? your behaviour and the respect you show to each other and to the adults in school and the way you work well with each other in lessons

? the interesting things you are given to do, such as your art, which is really good

? the opportunities you are given to take part in activities after school and all the residential visits available

? children who find their learning difficult are helped really well

? how the headteacher and other adults in school are trying to make things even better for you.

There are many positive things in your school but we have asked your teachers to make some things better. In some classes you do not make the progress you should and we have asked the teachers to look at ways to improve this. We also think that some of you could do harder work and we have asked your teachers to make sure that you have work which makes you really think. Those of you who particularly like and are good at hard problems should benefit from this. Some of you have good skills in specific subjects and we have asked your teachers to help you get even better in these areas. We have also asked if it can be made easier for the children in Reception to be able to learn outside as well as in the classroom as this is important for their learning.

Thank you once again for helping us. I hope you continue to work hard and enjoy all the things that the school provides for you.