

Gorse Covert Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111208
Local Authority	Warrington
Inspection number	310532
Inspection date	10 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Jean Kendall HMI

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	299
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Hart
Headteacher	Mrs Lynne Joughin
Date of previous school inspection	12 July 2004
School address	Gorse Covert Road Birchwood Warrington Cheshire WA3 6TS
Telephone number	01925 825070
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Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the progress that pupils make; their personal development and well-being; the quality of teaching; and the care, guidance and support provided by the school. Evidence was gathered from the school's own self-evaluation (SEF), national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records, policies and reports; observations of the school at work; discussions with pupils, staff, parents and the chair of governors; and the parents' questionnaire. 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 the SEF, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Gorse Covert is a large primary school situated in a relatively affluent new town in Warrington. About half the pupils are from the immediate area but the school takes pupils from a wide range of areas, some of which are economically disadvantaged. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly in line with the national average. Most pupils are of White British heritage and there are few from minority ethnic groups. Pupil mobility has been high following the closure of two nearby schools due to falling rolls, but has stabilised in the last two years.

The school has been awarded the Basic Skills Quality Mark twice, the Primary Activemark and the Financial Management Standard in Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The overall effectiveness of Gorse Covert School is outstanding: all major elements of the school's work are good and significant elements are exemplary. The headteacher, staff and governors have a common sense of purpose focused on enabling all children to achieve their full potential and be confident to live their lives to the full. They achieve this aim through providing a stimulating and secure learning environment where pupils develop excellent personal skills and achieve very high standards in their work. Pupils are happy at school, have high self-esteem and are highly motivated to do well.

Pupils make at least good and sometimes outstanding academic progress. Most children enter the Reception class with knowledge and skills that are broadly in line with what is expected for children of this age. Pupils make consistently good progress across Years 1 and 2 and they achieve standards that are well above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2. They continue to make good progress and standards at the end of Year 6 are well above average in English and science and above average in mathematics. An above average proportion of pupils achieve higher levels in English, mathematics and science. Some pupils did not do as well as expected in mathematics in 2007. As a result, the school has taken prompt action to ensure that mathematics teaching consistently addresses the needs of individual pupils. Most pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because they receive good support.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Asked to describe their school, pupils said it is, 'friendly', 'fun', 'brilliant'. Pupils' enjoyment is reflected in the higher than average attendance, their excellent behaviour and their positive attitudes to learning. They feel safe in school: bullying is rare and dealt with effectively if it should occur. Pupils understand the need for healthy lifestyles and take advantage of the healthy eating options and additional physical activities on offer. They have excellent opportunities to make a positive contribution both within school and in the broader community. They are supportive of each other in lessons and readily take responsibility for their own learning. Their support of each other extends to the playground where the 'playground friends' scheme is popular and further promotes the development of leadership skills. The links with a South African school are helping pupils to develop global knowledge and their understanding of different cultures and needs. The high academic and personal standards achieved prepare pupils well for the next stage of their education.

The school provides a high level of care, guidance and support for pupils. Pastoral support and guidance is integral to all aspects of the school and this is reflected in the excellent relationships and supportive ethos. There are rigorous systems to keep pupils safe and arrangements for safeguarding meet all requirements. Teachers track pupils' academic progress effectively and set challenging targets. Marking is supportive and pupils know what they need to do to improve the quality of their work. Pupils feel confident in seeking teachers' help if they do not understand aspects of their work or with any other concerns.

The quality of teaching and learning is good and there are some outstanding aspects. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and match work well to their learning needs. They use a range of teaching approaches which capture pupils' interest and challenge them to think creatively. Pupils are keen to learn and proud of their achievements. The most effective lessons leave them 'buzzing' with enthusiasm and eager to find out more. Pupils particularly enjoy themed

days and opportunities to use their own initiative, for example, in making resources for children in a South African school. Pupils understand the assessment procedures and readily take responsibility for their own work and ways to improve it. They are eager to apply what they have learned in different contexts and teachers help them to make links across their learning very effectively.

The curriculum is well matched to pupils' needs and enables pupils of all ability levels to make at least good progress. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution, delivering support for speech and language development and additional support to pupils who are underachieving or who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The more able pupils receive excellent support through integrated and additional activities under the guidance of the advanced skills teacher, who also works across the local authority. Literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology skills are effectively integrated into teaching across the curriculum. The school does much to enrich the pupils' experiences through international links, the teaching of Spanish, extra-curricular provision and exciting visits.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher provides dynamic and forward looking leadership and staff are constantly seeking ways to enrich and enhance the experience of pupils. They have excellent capacity to make further improvements. Staff have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and set challenging targets for themselves as well as for the pupils. Self-evaluation is accurate and priorities for school improvement are clearly understood by all staff and governors. The school has a strong track record of improving performance achieved through strong teamwork and mutual support. Where staff have taken action, there is demonstrable impact, for example, in the improvement of writing skills. The current focus on raising standards in mathematics is embraced by the whole school. Governors provide strong support and expertise in areas such as financial management.

The vast majority of parents are very supportive of the school and pleased with the quality of education it provides. Those who responded to the parent questionnaire commented on the variety of experience the school offers, the supportive and caring environment and their child's enthusiasm for learning. A typical comment was, 'My child looks forward to school, is full of energy for education and, more importantly, she is happy.' A few parents said that they feel the school could do more to share information regarding the decisions made in placing their children in mixed age classes. The recent launch of the 'learning platform' is helping to develop a more fluid learning link between home and school.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The quality of provision in the Foundation Stage is outstanding. Children come from a range of pre-school settings and settle well. Most of them enter the school with knowledge and skills that are in line with expectations for their age. By the end of the Reception Year, they have made at least good progress to achieve or exceed the expected goals in all areas of learning. Children are provided with stimulating and meaningful learning opportunities so that they rapidly become interested and motivated learners. Assessment is very robust and effectively used by adults to plan activities well matched to children's individual needs. The high quality of teaching enables children to build on their strengths and achieve highly. Children's personal development is excellent: they learn to play cooperatively, take turns and relate well to each other. The school has developed good links with pre-school settings so that children's particular needs are identified early. Children are very well prepared to begin the national curriculum in Year 1.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that parents understand how decisions are reached for placing children in mixed age classes and how well their individual needs are met within these classes.
- Share best practice to secure outstanding teaching and learning across the whole 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?	1
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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
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?	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	1
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	1

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?	1
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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
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	1
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	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited you recently. I really enjoyed talking with you and learning about your school. I was impressed by the way you expressed your views with such confidence and by your enthusiastic approach to learning. It is clear that you enjoy school and are highly motivated to do well.

Gorse Covert is an outstanding school where you develop excellent personal skills and achieve very high standards in your work. Most of you make consistently good and sometimes outstanding progress during your time in school. Your teachers have high expectations of what you can achieve and set challenging targets for you. Your school is safe and friendly and your behaviour is excellent. You are supportive of each other in lessons and readily take responsibility for your own learning. I particularly enjoyed seeing the resources you have made to send to the children in your South African partner school.

You told me how much you appreciate the work your teachers do to make learning fun and meaningful for you. You really enjoy themed days and the many opportunities you have to think creatively. Your teachers work hard and are constantly looking for ways to enrich and enhance your experience. They are going to make sure they share the best practice to secure outstanding teaching and learning across the whole school.

Your headteacher and the governors also work very hard and do an excellent job in running the school. The vast majority of your parents are extremely pleased with the school and know that you are very happy and achieve highly. A few of them think that the school could do more to share information regarding the decisions made to place children in mixed age classes. I have asked the headteacher to look at ways to address this.

I know you take great pride in your school and in your work and I am sure your parents are proud of your achievements too. Well done!