

Parklands Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111238
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	310540
Inspection dates	25–26 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Graham Martin

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	160
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr M Darby
Headteacher	Mrs Pat Downes
Date of previous school inspection	11 October 2004
School address	Little Sutton Ellesmere Port Cheshire CH66 3RL
Telephone number	0151 3382220
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This smaller than average school serves an area of high unemployment. Nearly one third of pupils is entitled to free school meals, which is nearly twice the national average. A quarter of pupils have some form of learning difficulty and/or disability, which is higher than the national average. Most pupils are White British but a small proportion are from minority ethnic groups and/or speak English as an additional language.

The school has a number of national recognitions: the Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark, Activemark Gold, Investor in People and Healthy Schools Award. It also has some local awards: the Primary Care Trust 'Tasty Tuck' award and one for risk awareness from the local fire service.

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. Parents typically comment that the school's work makes a real difference to their children's opportunities, aspirations and hopes. Inspectors agree with them. Parents value the exceptionally good care the school provides for their children's social, emotional and personal development. This care helps to establish trust, respect and a good climate for learning in which pupils thrive and achieve well, resulting in their good personal development. The school's welcoming and caring atmosphere promotes good partnerships with the community and positive relationships so that pupils enjoy coming to school. Pupils are proud of their school, and this is reflected in their exceptionally good behaviour. Most are happy to come to school and it is only poor attendance by a minority of families, much challenged by the school, that prevents attendance from being better than average. Day-to-day management is good, ensuring that the school runs successfully and provides good value for money.

National test results vary from year to year due to small year group sizes and the widely varying proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in each cohort. Pupils' achievement is good, frequently from exceptionally low starting points on entry to the Nursery class. Standards are satisfactory overall in Year 2 and Year 6. In the national tests in 2007, standards in mathematics in Year 2 and in writing in Year 6 were below the national average, still reflected to an extent in the writing and mathematics work seen in some classes. Current assessments show that the present Year 6 pupils are expected to meet the realistic targets set for them. The curriculum is satisfactory with evidence of good moves to link learning opportunities to pupils' wider interests. There is good enrichment of the curriculum through a wide range of popular activities including sports, arts and residential visits. The school meets its obligations to safeguard pupils' well-being.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers explain to pupils what they must do to reach the next level in their learning. Where this is done well it helps to speed up pupils' progress. However, the quality of this academic guidance is not consistent across the school, which is one reason for the lower standards seen in mathematics in Year 2 and in writing across the school. Although the progress pupils make between entry to Nursery and leaving in Year 6 is good overall, it varies depending on the quality of advice that teachers give pupils to help them review their own learning.

Leadership and management are good. The school evaluates its work well. It has responded to the vulnerability of some pupils by providing strong support networks for their families. This shows good improvement in the school's partnership with parents and the local community since the last inspection. The many comments from parents about how welcome they feel in school is proof of how well the school encourages families to take an interest in their children's learning. Careful assessments and checks on pupils' learning provide leaders with a clear knowledge of how well the school is meeting its own challenging targets. This has resulted in the steps taken to improve the curriculum to make learning more relevant and fun. Good partnerships exist with local high schools, the local authority and the wider community to support its work. All this gives the school good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Foundation Stage is good. When they arrive in the Nursery class, most children have skills exceptionally low in comparison with the levels typical for children their age. Good teaching enables children's learning to move on at a good pace, particularly in their personal and social development. The development of children's communication, language and literacy skills is also good due to the emphasis on developing speaking and listening skills. Progress in all of the areas of learning is good. Even so, by the end of the Reception year, very few children reach the early learning goals expected for children their age and most are still working at levels below those expected.

The school adapts the Foundation Stage curriculum well so that the many pupils in Year 1 who still need it have access to learning opportunities at the appropriate Foundation Stage level. Parents greatly appreciate the arrangements that help their children settle quickly into the Nursery class, saying how well they and their children feel welcomed by the teachers in both Foundation Stage classes. Children soon learn routines. They enjoy sharing their learning experiences with visitors, showing how happy, confident and settled they are. There is good teamwork with teaching assistants and good procedures are in place to ensure that the care and welfare of children have a high priority.

The Foundation Stage is led well. Teachers' planning and assessments take good account of children's individual needs. All the areas of learning are planned for to give children wide-ranging learning opportunities. The indoor areas provide interest, with a relevant and appropriate focus on children's personal development and basic skills, although the separate classrooms provide few opportunities for Nursery and Reception children to learn together. The outside areas are used well to provide the same levels of challenge and stimulation as the classrooms.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in mathematics in Years 1 and 2.
- Raise standards in writing in Years 1 to 6.
- Ensure that target setting is used consistently so that all pupils have a clear understanding of how to achieve the next steps in their learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The exceptionally low levels of skill that significant numbers of children start with affect the overall standards the school achieves. Small year group sizes and wide variations in the number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in each class explain the peaks and troughs that the school sees in its overall standards. For example, although overall standards were satisfactory in 2007, the school expects a dip in its 2008 national test results because more than half the current Year 6 group has some form of learning difficulty and/or disability or other barrier to learning. Nevertheless, the majority of pupils make good progress and achieve well overall from their very low starting point on entry to the Nursery. However, some could achieve better in mathematics in Years 1 and 2 and in writing across the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are polite and helpful. Their exceptionally good behaviour enables the school to operate as a happy and orderly learning community. Pupils grow in confidence, forming positive relationships with the adults in school and with each other. They are proud of their school and the opportunities it provides for them to learn well and apply themselves to their work. Their great willingness to take on responsibilities shows in their enjoyment of working as play leaders, school councillors and road safety officers. They have plentiful opportunities to contribute to their community, including looking after the school garden, raising funds for charity and organising road safety competitions. Pupils have a good awareness of the importance of keeping healthy and safe. Their spiritual, social and moral development is good. Pupils' appreciation of cultures beyond their own is beginning to expand but the school recognises this as an area for further development. Links with local businesses are limited so the opportunities for pupils to extend their awareness of workplace skills are satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils are enthusiastic about learning because teachers manage lessons and engage their interest. Lessons are stimulating and challenging, which helps pupils to understand the purpose of their learning. Good planning for lessons ensures that the different age groups and wide range of abilities in classes is usually catered for well. Information from assessments is used effectively to plan for pupils' learning needs. Pupils benefit from good teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants. A feature of the best teaching is how good questions and prompts help pupils to widen their vocabulary and develop their thinking. Pupils have frequent opportunities to discuss ideas with partners or in small groups, which help them gain in confidence as learners. Targets for learning are explained well in some classes but this is not consistent across the school. Because of this, some pupils are not clear about how to move on to the next national curriculum level in mathematics and writing, which hampers their achievement. The good support and guidance given to pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities helps them to make good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school is taking steps to provide greater relevance and interest in its curriculum by making useful links between subjects and developing an approach based on learning themes. Increasingly, pupils are given opportunities to develop and practise their key English and mathematics skills alongside other subjects. Good evidence of this was seen in the exciting 'Focus on Food' activities taking place during the inspection. It is too soon, however, to judge the impact of these initiatives on standards. A popular range of activities and wider opportunities bring good enrichment to the curriculum, including arts events, residential visits and after-school clubs. Pupils enjoy these and attend them well. Key Stage 2 pupils also enjoy learning French. Adaptations to the curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well thought out, enabling these pupils to enjoy full access to learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The day-to-day care for pupils' social and emotional needs is outstanding as is the support pupils receive to enable them to unburden any worries or anxieties and enjoy school. Pupils with additional learning needs are identified early. Good, focused intervention and dedicated work by well trained teaching assistants help them to make good progress in relation to their abilities and starting points. Vulnerable children are readily identified and supported very well. Pupils really value and trust the guidance given by learning mentors, who skilfully nurture pupils' emotional well-being and help to remove barriers to learning. In lessons, pupils understand the purposes of the learning activities but in some classes they are not always given clear explanations of their learning targets or how best to achieve them.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and leadership team have high aspirations for the school, its pupils and the community. There is a sense of purpose in the school and it has good capacity to improve. The sharing of leadership roles and checks on the work of teachers are helping to raise standards. Wider partnerships, such as positive links with the community, local high schools and the local authority are good and support the drive for improvement. School self-evaluation is largely accurate, giving leaders a clear picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Priorities for improvement are identified and the improvement plan states clearly the steps that need to be taken to achieve them. How the success of the plan will be measured is clearly defined. The governing body is expertly led and, despite vacancies, works well to give the school valued support and guidance. Governors share the aspirations for the school to succeed and raise its profile in the community. Good management of resources to obtain best value helps to achieve these objectives.

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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?	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	2
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	1
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	3

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?	3
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	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

You will probably remember that two inspectors visited your school a little while ago. We promised to tell you what we found out. Your Year 6 school councillors also promised to read this letter out to you. Before I tell you what we discovered, I would like to say thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the school inspectors and the polite and friendly way you shared your thoughts with us.

I agree with you and your parents that you have a good school. The school council and other pupils I talked to were great ambassadors for Parklands School, speaking to me honestly about their views. I was impressed with how proud you are of your school and how keen you are to make it even more successful and respected. I was also impressed with how well you behave in lessons and around school. I was pleased to see how much you enjoy learning. You told us this is because the teachers work hard to make lessons fun and interesting. I agree with that too. I was pleased to see how this helps you all to achieve well. I also agree with your view that you are well cared for. You are fortunate to have teachers who give you good support for your personal development. This shows in how well you care for one another and how much you know about healthy living and keeping safe.

Your headteacher and teachers help you to ensure that Parklands is a welcoming and friendly school. They have the right plans to keep improving your school but it would be good if they could help the infants get better at mathematics and also help you all improve your writing skills. One way they could do this is by giving you better advice about how to reach the next level in your learning.

Having met you and enjoyed talking with you, I am sure that you will play your part in helping your school to get better still by working hard and keeping up your very good standard of behaviour. It was delightful to meet you and I wish you all every success for the future. Please keep giving of your best.

Thank you once again, and best wishes for the future.