

Hale Bank Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111244
Local Authority	Halton
Inspection number	310541
Inspection date	23 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Kevin Johnson

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	5-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	66
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Kath Williams
Headteacher	Miss Gill Threadgold
Date of previous school inspection	10 January 2005
School address	Heathview Road Widnes Cheshire WA8 8UZ
Telephone number	0151 424 4878
Fax number	0151 420 8525

Age group	5-11
Inspection date	23 June 2008
Inspection number	310541

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the standards reached by pupils and the progress they make, particularly in writing; the effectiveness of provision for children in the Foundation Stage; the quality of teaching and learning; aspects of care, guidance and support and pupils' personal development; leadership and management of the school. Evidence was gathered from national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records, policies and minutes; observation of the school at work; interviews with members of staff, pupils and governors and the; parents' questionnaires. 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 self-evaluation were not justified and these have been included, where appropriate, in the report.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average school. It is located in a regeneration area where there is a considerable level of social need. An above average proportion of pupils is eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also above average. The school has achieved a Healthy Schools Award and holds the Activemark and Artsmark.

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 in which pupils are well cared for and supported and achieve well.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They have caring attitudes towards one another and proudly recognise others' successes and achievements. They have a good understanding of different faiths and cultures, which they gain from visits to places of worship and through the art, music and dance of different nations. Behaviour is good. Pupils are well mannered and polite. They work hard in lessons and are mindful of each other in the playground. Attendance is average. Pupils respond well to incentives such as the Class Cup, which has contributed to their improved attendance. Pupils fully understand the importance of a sensible diet and lots of exercise in order to stay healthy. They are encouraged to stay safe through learning about the dangers of drugs and other substances. The programme which deals with social and emotional matters helps pupils to make informed decisions about secure relationships. Pupils are keen to take on responsibilities. They carry out a wide variety of daily tasks which help the school to run smoothly. The school council gives all pupils a say in important issues. For example, school councillors recently conducted a survey about bullying. Pupils' views were analysed and positive action was taken. Pupils now say that they feel safe in the playground and that aggression is very rare. There are productive links with the local church. These enable pupils to play an active part during harvest celebrations and to help with stalls at the summer fete. Pupils' literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology skills (ICT) are developing well and provide a sound basis on which they can prepare for their future economic well-being.

Standards in Year 6 have improved over the past year and are currently in line with those expected nationally in English, mathematics and science. This represents good achievement given pupils' low skills when they enter Reception. Standards in writing show good improvement due to the positive action taken by the school. A whole-school writing project which focuses on developing and applying, in a structured way, pupils' use of vocabulary, grammar and punctuation is raising the overall quality of writing across the school. This approach is also beginning to have a promising impact on writing in other subjects, such as in science and in history. This initiative is relatively recent, however, and has not yet led to the more able writers reaching their full potential. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 were average in 2007, but currently school assessments show a dip overall because over half of the small cohort has learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Nevertheless, all pupils in Year 2 make good progress because the school provides strong additional support for this class. Extra resources have been bought specifically to help boost pupils' reading and writing skills, particularly those of boys, and progress has been accelerated.

Throughout the school, there is good support for pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Consequently, they make good progress. Individual education plans give precise learning targets for pupils to aim for. These pupils are involved in measuring their own step-by-step progress and this motivates them to try harder because they can see what they achieve. The most vulnerable learners are supported very well. For example, they are given opportunities to reflect on and confront their own difficulties before discussing with a mentor how best to move forward. This sensitive approach ensures that pupils access their learning more easily and progress well alongside others.

Consistently effective teaching accounts for pupils' good achievement. Pupils enjoy lessons because, they say, 'There's lots to do and teachers challenge us.' Lessons are planned well, taking account of varying age groups and abilities. Good use of resources, especially ICT, adds interest and pace to learning. Academic support for pupils is good. Teachers use assessment very well to help pupils plan the next steps in their learning. At the end of one lesson, the teacher asked pupils to write 'two stars and a wish' on their work. This self-assessment task helped pupils to see where they had made progress and gave them the target for their next piece of work. Teachers' marking is very good because it acknowledges pupils' progress and challenges them to improve further. Teaching assistants are a crucial part of the teaching team. Their individual skills and experiences enable them to work effectively with groups and individual pupils to ensure their good progress. Relationships are very good. Pupils contribute keenly to lessons because they know that their views are valued. This increases their confidence so that they are more willing to 'have a go'.

The curriculum is satisfactory overall. There is sufficient emphasis on literacy and numeracy. Provision in science and ICT has improved since the last inspection. The school has made a good start towards establishing French teaching throughout the school. Activities to enrich pupils' learning experiences, including after-school clubs, are a strong feature of the curriculum.

The school is led and managed well. Since taking charge of the school the acting headteacher has clearly identified relative weaknesses and has led decisive action to bring about good improvement. All staff and governors are fully committed to raising standards and achievement and ensuring high quality care for all pupils. The acting headteacher's inclusive style of management ensures that all staff members understand how they are accountable for pupils' achievement and standards. She has won the confidence of parents, who are unanimous in the view that their children are well cared for in school. Safeguarding procedures, including those related to internet access, meet requirements. Issues from the previous report have been fully resolved. New initiatives introduced by the acting headteacher have improved the accuracy of assessments and the way in which teachers use the information gained. This in turn has raised the quality of teaching and learning, leading directly to good progress and improving standards. Senior leaders effectively fulfil their role in supporting the acting headteacher and colleagues and rigorously check on quality and standards throughout the school. This has helped leaders to gain an accurate picture of the school's work. Evaluations are incisive and have led to effective action to bring about improvements. Good links with local schools benefit pupils' learning in the arts and in design and technology. Governors provide good support and challenge. They know the school well and some actively support school ventures, such as class outings. They manage finances well to ensure that spending is linked to school development and to provide good value for money. Given the qualities in leadership and in the good improvements leaders have implemented, the school has good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

There is good provision for children in the Foundation Stage and as a result they achieve well. When they enter Reception their skills are well below those expected for their age in all areas of their learning. Good teaching ensures that by the time they enter Year 1, although their skills are still below expectations for their age, most children are progressing well towards their expected goals. Children achieve particularly well in their personal, social and emotional development. Teachers encourage independence and responsibility. For example, a group of children who planned their own role-play activity in the outside area, after reading a story,

were sent off to find the things they needed. This encouraged them to use their imagination and to solve problems in an inventive way. The effective teaching of letters and sounds is having a good impact on children's early reading and writing skills, enabling them to be more confident about attempting to write.

Good leadership and management have resulted in early years provision being extended into Year 1, so that children build on their skills continuously. Reception and Year 1 children frequently mingle during activities and this helps build the confidence of the younger children, especially in developing their speaking and listening, creative and physical skills. All staff members share the task of assessing and tracking children's progress and in planning the next steps in their learning. Parents are welcomed into the Foundation Stage. There are good opportunities for them to share information and help children to settle in to routines.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of pupils who achieve higher levels in writing in Year 2 and Year 6.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

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?	3
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	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	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of Hale Bank Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Widnes, WA8 8UZ

Thank you for the very friendly welcome you gave me when I visited your school recently to find out how well you are learning. I was really impressed by your politeness and good manners and I enjoyed talking to you about your school.

Hale Bank is a good school. You told me that your lessons are fun and I agree. Your teachers plan lots of enjoyable activities for you. That is why you make good progress and achieve well. The grown ups in school take good care of you and equally you take good care of each other. Your parents and school governors are very proud of your school. Your acting headteacher runs the school well and has some good ideas about how to make it even better.

We discussed these ideas and agreed on one thing that we think is important and that will help your school to improve further; that is, to help more of you to reach higher levels in your writing.