

Barrow CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111270
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	310550
Inspection date	17 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Paul Bamber

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	47
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs E Johnson
Headteacher	Mr R Thomas
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2004
School address	Barrow Chester Cheshire CH3 7HW
Telephone number	01829 740455
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Pupils who attend this very small village school come from a wide range of backgrounds, with most from the immediate locality. The vast majority are of White British heritage. All pupils speak English as their first language. An average proportion is entitled to free school meals. A slightly lower than average percentage has learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school has the Healthy Schools Award and Investors in People status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

What immediately strikes one about this good school is its warm, very close-knit family atmosphere. The quality of relationships throughout the school is excellent and plays a very significant part in how much pupils enjoy school and in their exceptionally good behaviour. Their extremely positive attitudes to learning and well above average attendance are also indicative of their commitment to the school community. Members of the school council are very keen to say how lucky they feel to have such a lot of individual attention and to have, in their words, 'the amazing amount of outside space' in which to play. They also praise the quality of the school lunches and show a keen awareness of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Pupils thrive personally because they are so well looked after and they report that they feel very safe and secure. They and their parents enthuse about the many opportunities pupils have to visit places of interest which promote their understanding of their local and wider environment well. For example, visits to large cities inform them about how different living in their small village is to residing in large urban areas. Together with a range of out-of-class clubs and learning to speak French, these activities provide pupils, in Key Stage 2 particularly, with a rich curriculum. Limitations in the accommodation available for children in the Foundation Stage, together with some relative weaknesses in the range of activities they are given, mean that provision for them is satisfactory rather than good as the school judges.

Pupils achieve well overall and by the time they leave Year 6 attain above average standards. The quality of teaching is good, which keeps most pupils on their toes and enthusiastic and involved in their learning. The teaching of reading is particularly strong, with a newly introduced method to teach letter sounds to pupils in Years 1 and 2 being particularly successful. Pupils in Key Stage 2 make satisfactory progress in mathematics because some are not sufficiently secure with basic mathematical facts nor do they all develop effective problem-solving techniques. This aspect of pupils' work is a key area to improve.

The school is well led and managed competently. The systems to track pupils' progress and to assess the school's performance are now much better than at the time of the previous inspection. This has put the school in a much better position to intervene to support any pupil at risk of underachieving and has been particularly effective in helping pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make good progress. The headteacher's very good teaching contributes most effectively to pupils' learning, to their good achievements and as a positive role model to other staff. Since the previous inspection, he has delegated more responsibility to the willing staff. This has had a particularly positive impact on pupils' achievements in English and information and communication technology (ICT). The school is well supported by an active governing body, members of which work tirelessly to improve the facilities for pupils and staff. There is clear evidence from the strides made by the school since its previous inspection and the other successful innovations it has implemented to improve pupils' standards and achievement that it has a good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children enter the school with skills above those expected for their age. They make satisfactory progress and enter Year 1 having exceeded national expectations in all areas of their learning. The fact that their progress is not better is due to limitations placed on their curriculum caused by the lack of suitable accommodation. Some activities are also too directed by staff. Children

do not have the opportunities to move at will between the inside classroom and outside to pursue activities in the way that they might choose. There are restrictions placed on the breadth of their physical and creative development, and their knowledge and understanding of the world as a result of this lack of access and a paucity of equipment for climbing and exploring. Their communication and language skills are well developed because they have lots of opportunities to respond to questions and to discuss ideas among themselves. The Foundation Stage is currently managed satisfactorily. Many parents praise the admission arrangements for their children in to the Reception class. They comment how much the mixed-age grouping helps their children to settle in quickly, with older pupils in Years 1 and 2 befriending them and providing them with a 'grown up role model'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that pupils in Key Stage 2 make better progress in mathematics.
- Improve the Foundation Stage curriculum to ensure that children receive their full entitlement to outdoor learning and are encouraged to make more choices about their activities.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 achieve well overall. They make outstanding progress in reading, with many being very competent readers by age 7 and fluent by the time they leave Year 6. Successfully implemented strategies to improve pupils' writing mean that pupils' standards in English are now exceptionally high. Strong partnerships with local schools and the effective work of the literacy coordinator have contributed well to pupils' recent improvement in writing. Given the very small numbers in each year group, comparisons with national averages tend to be statistically unreliable. However, it is clear from the school's data that pupils throughout Key Stages 1 and 2 make good progress in science and attain above average standards. The same records also show that the progress Key Stage 2 pupils make in mathematics is only satisfactory. The school has recognised this and is beginning to apply strategies similar to those successfully used to improve pupils' writing. Nevertheless, there is currently no clear evidence of any significant improvement in pupils' achievement in mathematics. There are very few pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities but they are well supported and achieve as well as their classmates as a result.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils have extremely positive attitudes to their school and take great delight in learning. They eagerly seize opportunities to take on responsibility for jobs around the school or to involve themselves in activities. At playtime, it is a pleasure to see older girls organising games for younger children. The school council is active in campaigning for more playground equipment and members clearly articulate their understanding of the democratic way in which they were elected. However, although the council has a minute secretary it lacks a chairperson and official agendas for meetings. This means that the school is not fully exploiting opportunities to introduce pupils to how committees are organised and conducted. Pupils have contributed well through their participation in physical activities and sensible eating to the Healthy Schools Award. They have some awareness of the faiths and traditions of other cultures but this is not the strongest aspect of their otherwise good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Their excellent attendance, their ability to work independently and cooperatively and their very

well developed speaking and listening skills equip them effectively for their next steps in education and for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils are taught well and as a result make good progress. They are enthusiastic learners, enjoy challenge and are keen to succeed. Pupils know what they have to do in lessons because teachers plan carefully and ensure that learning objectives and targets for improvement are clear. In a Year 5/6 lesson, for example, pupils were left in no doubt that they should finish the lesson capable of calculating square numbers greater than 20, knowing that there was a number pattern relating to those calculations and how to check the accuracy of their answers.

Throughout the school, the high quality of relationships between staff and pupils encourages very positive behaviour. Pupils take responsibility for their own learning. In a Year 3/4 lesson, pupils who had finished the set tasks independently decided how they would extend their learning about persuasive writing and suggested to the teacher where they would carry out their task. In a few instances, teachers do not fully challenge the most able pupils. This is evident most particularly in mathematics and to a lesser degree in science.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum meets the needs of most pupils well and provides them with a range of interesting and fulfilling experiences. Pupils' basic skills in English are promoted extremely well and they are competent in ICT because they are encouraged to use computers and other technology as part of their day-to-day work. Provision promotes pupils' effective personal and social skills and their awareness of healthy lifestyles very well. There are many visits outside school to support pupils' academic work, for example in art, music, history and geography. In addition, visits and visitors to school add to pupils' knowledge and understanding of different environments and lifestyles. The residential visits made by pupils in Years 5 and 6 contribute significantly to their personal and social development. Pupils also benefit from the opportunities to learn a musical instrument and to be taught by specialists in French and music. Shortcomings in the school's accommodation place some limitations on pupils' physical education curriculum and on the breadth of learning available to children in the Foundation Stage. Notably, the lack of a school hall places restrictions on both of these areas and limits opportunities for activities such as drama.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are very well cared for and supported. Parents are unanimous in their praise for the time and energy the headteacher and all other staff devote to their children's welfare. A typical comment to sum up parents' feelings about this area of the school's work is, 'Our daughter has always been very happy here in the safe, secure and caring environment which has enabled her to make good progress educationally.' The systems to ensure pupils' excellent behaviour and very good attendance are effective. All procedures for child protection and the appropriateness of adults who work with pupils meet requirements. Close links with external agencies provide good support for any pupil who needs specialist help to overcome a specific learning difficulty

and/or disability. Pupils' progress is carefully tracked and this triggers effective intervention and support for those who find learning more difficult. The information gained from tracking is not as effectively used to identify those more able pupils who are not making the progress expected of them.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher works successfully to create an extremely positive ethos in which all staff can contribute ideas and play a full part in decision making. The headteacher has an extensive teaching commitment but the school is served extremely well by a very competent administrative officer/bursar who contributes greatly to the day-to-day very smooth running of the school and as a first contact for parents. Since the previous inspection, when there were serious concerns about how well the school was managed, there have been good improvements in subject leadership and in systems to check on and evaluate the school's performance. However, teachers are still not held fully accountable in a systematic way for the progress pupils in their classes make. More responsibilities have been delegated by the headteacher to other staff and pupils' standards and achievements, for example in writing, have improved as a result. The good links the school has established with other neighbouring small schools have provided support and fresh ideas for the headteacher and staff to the benefit of the pupils. Other partnerships, with feeder high schools for example, make the transfer from a very small school to a much larger one as smooth as possible for Year 6 pupils. Governors are active and knowledgeable. They check on the school's performance and campaign tirelessly to try to obtain improvements to the school's accommodation. They have recently completed a comprehensive travel plan, particularly important given that staff and pupils have to cross a busy road to access the village hall where indoor physical education lessons are held.

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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	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

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

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?	2
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 Barrow C of E Primary School, Chester, CH3 7HW

I would like to thank you all very much for how welcome you made me feel when I visited your school recently. Many of you I chatted with told me how much you enjoy your lessons and liked the surroundings in which you learn. You go to a good school. It gives you lots of opportunities to visit areas different from where you live and to become useful members of your community. I was most impressed with your excellent behaviour both in lessons and in the playground. I could see that you enjoyed the assembly about St Peter and I thought it was great that some of you acted out the Playlet with Andy and his friends.

You get on very well together. I was particularly impressed with the way that some of the older girls organised a game for the younger children at playtime and by the way that you shared ideas with your talking partners in class. What impressed me most about your school were the lovely family atmosphere and how all the adults work so hard to care for you. This is not just your teachers. Those staff who prepare your delicious lunches, make sure that the school is clean, the teaching assistants and those who work in the office all do a really super job. Last but not least, your headteacher makes all this happen, runs the school well and sets you all a very good example.

Part of my job is to make suggestions about how the school can be even better. I have asked your headteacher and the governors to do two things in particular.

- I want them to make sure that those of you in Years 3 to 6 do as well in mathematics as you do in other subjects.
- I have asked them to give the children in Reception more choice about what they do and where they do it and to try to give the children better equipment, especially outside.

Thank you for your help and I hope you carry on enjoying school and working really hard.