

Saighton CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111350
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	310574
Inspection dates	4–5 December 2007
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 aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	86
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Davies-Colley
Headteacher	Mr Paul Sweetnam (Acting)
Date of previous school inspection	17 March 2003
School address	Saighton Lane Saighton Chester Cheshire CH3 6EG
Telephone number	01244 335822
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This smaller-than-average school serves a village community but takes around two thirds of pupils from the surrounding area. Pupils come from the whole range of social and economic backgrounds but more than is usual come from relatively advantaged families. There are many more boys than girls than normally found in a school of this size. The proportion of pupils entitled to a free school meal is much less than average. Although a much smaller than average percentage have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the proportion with a statement of need is higher than usual. The proportion of pupils who use English as an additional language is low. Most pupils are White British. More than is found nationally join or leave the school other than at the normal time of transfer. The school has been awarded the Basic Skills Achievement Status, the Artsmark Silver status and very recently an Activemark.

Since the beginning of the spring term 2007, the school has been without its permanent headteacher, apart from a short period of two weeks. During this time, there have been two temporary headteachers, the second of whom has been in the school for five weeks and is to leave at the end of the current term. No arrangements have been made to cover the continued absence of the permanent headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 23(3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

The school has gone through a very difficult period over the last eight months and this has exacerbated some longer standing weaknesses in the school's leadership and management and in the lack of effective systems to check on pupils' standards and their achievements. As a result the school is currently underperforming and pupils do not make enough progress.

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The school has some strengths. It is well thought of by parents because it has a welcoming ethos and relationships are very positive. Pupils are well cared for and parents feel that their children are safe and that, if troubled, they will be reassured and helped to work through problems. There are positive aspects of the curriculum which pupils appreciate and enjoy. For example, they make day and residential visits connected with their learning that satisfactorily promote their spiritual, social and moral development. Opportunities for pupils to play a musical instrument and to learn French also add value to their learning. Pupils' achievements in sport have improved significantly recently because of effective partnerships with professional sports clubs and with specialist coaches. This improvement has culminated in the recent award of the Activemark and has concentrated pupils' minds on the importance of taking regular exercise.

However, these strengths are far outweighed by the school's weaknesses. Over the past two years standards in Year 6 have declined from above average to broadly average. In 2007, standards slipped considerably, especially in mathematics and science. Given their starting points, pupils do not achieve highly enough, notably in Key Stage 2. Pupils' achievement has declined over the last three years; in 2007 the school was in the bottom one per cent of school's nationally in relation to achievement in this key stage.

Underachievement is still prevalent. Whilst the quality of teaching in lessons is mostly satisfactory, it is not underpinned by sufficiently accurate assessments or rigorous analysis of what individual pupils need to do to raise their standards and achievement. This often results in insufficient challenge for the most able pupils, who mark time in lessons, and not enough support for those pupils who are attaining at just below expected levels for their age. As a result of these weaknesses, teaching is inadequate because it does not enable pupils to learn as well as they should. Hence they underachieve. This mismatch between the work set and the needs of pupils also leads to some disruption in lessons, as pupils lose interest and concentration. There is also a lack of accurate target-setting to help individuals or groups of pupils focus clearly on those aspects of their work they need to improve. There is not enough detailed analysis of test data to inform the school about relative strengths, but more importantly weaknesses, in the standards pupils reach.

Although some potentially effective management systems have been introduced very recently, there is no evidence as yet that these are improving pupils' achievements. The skills of subject leaders are underdeveloped. The school has lacked sufficient direction or accurate

self-evaluation. Governors, though supportive, have not informed themselves enough about the school's performance. As a result the significance of the school's decline in standards and achievement has not been sufficiently recognised.

The school's self-evaluation is too optimistic because it has been based on past performance data rather than being securely lodged in the present. Given the lack of improvement since the 2003 inspection in key areas such as in information and communication technology (ICT) and in systems to track pupils' progress, together with the decline in pupils' standards and achievement and the current uncertainties about the school's leadership, the school provides inadequate value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children generally enter the Foundation Stage with average to above-average skills in most areas of their learning. Most have had pre-school education. They are soundly taught and well supported, with good care provided for them to settle into school initially and continue through Reception. This enables them to make good progress in their personal and emotional development. Children are helped in this by being taught alongside Year 1 pupils, which makes their transfer into Year 1 seamless; they are also aided by the kindness shown to them by older pupils, especially in the playground.

Activities are satisfactorily balanced between those that adults direct and those that the children choose. There is an outside classroom, but it is small and the equipment is sparse. This places restrictions on the number of children that can be accommodated outside and on the range of activities in which they engage. Children make satisfactory progress overall. It is best in their personal and physical development, in their speaking skills and in their ability to recognise numbers. Progress is slower in linking letters to sounds, in the ability to calculate in mathematics, in knowledge and understanding of the world and in creative development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards, especially in mathematics and science, in Key Stage 2.
- Make sure that pupils make at least satisfactory progress, especially in Key Stage 2.
- Improve the levels of challenge and support for pupils in lessons so that pupils achieve as well as they can and behave consistently well.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management so that it ensures all groups of pupils achieve at least satisfactorily.
- Implement rigorous systems to track pupils' progress and to analyse test data, in order to set appropriate targets and use these to raise achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

The decline in standards and in achievement since 2005 indicates that the school is not enabling all pupils to achieve well enough. This has its roots in poor academic guidance based on weak assessment and tracking systems. Not enough detail is available about individual pupils' progress to ensure that teachers match work well to pupils' needs. This means that, especially in Key Stage 2, the more able pupils and those who are currently attaining at just below expected levels make inadequate progress. Standards throughout the school are broadly average but, given many pupils' starting points, they are not high enough.

Standards and achievement are best in English, especially in reading, but in mathematics and science standards have slipped. This is particularly the case in science in Year 6. Pupils with the most severe learning difficulties, including those who have a statement of special educational need, make satisfactory progress because they have much focused support. Those few pupils with less significant difficulties do not progress as well as they should because the school has not mapped out how the available support for them can be best utilised. This means that they are not always given enough support to help them to improve. Although the percentage of more able pupils who attain the higher Level 5 in the Year 6 national tests is in line with the national average in English and mathematics, given their starting points the percentage is not high enough.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Although personal development and well-being are satisfactory overall, there are strengths in pupils' good relationships, in the way in which many willingly take on responsibility and in their good attendance and punctuality. The pupils know how to keep safe and understand the importance of being healthy. However, in most lessons some pupils lose concentration and do not show a great enthusiasm for learning. They are not very effective independent learners because they are given too few opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning or to assess their own or others' progress. They do make effective contributions to the school and local community, though the school council, as playground buddies in the school choir. Whilst pupils eagerly seize opportunities to take responsibility, these are not fully exploited; for example, the school council has no officers to run or record its meetings.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Teaching is satisfactory in most lessons but, because class teachers and teaching assistants are not supported by clear, detailed information about pupils' progress, its impact on the quality of pupils' learning and of their achievements is inadequate. This leads to underachievement because the tasks teachers set pupils do not relate well enough to their individual needs. There are examples of effective planning, demanding questioning and an appropriate range of teaching methods used to give pupils practical, challenging tasks. There is not enough of this, however, which results in some pupils, especially those who are more able, in 'switching off'. Relationships are generally good, which means pupils confidently admit difficulties and they respect and celebrate others' efforts. Where support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well directed - for example, on the one day a week that a teacher works effectively to support pupils with more severe learning difficulties - these pupils make satisfactory progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Overall, the curriculum meets the needs of children in the Foundation Stage and most pupils in Key Stage 1 and most of those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. It is less effective for pupils in Key Stage 2. The curriculum provides them with some exciting opportunities to develop their skills and interests outside the classroom. It satisfactorily promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and makes pupils aware of the benefits

of good relationships and a healthy lifestyle. It is not effective in ensuring that all pupils achieve as well as they should in their basic skills or in developing them as independent learners who can confidently solve problems or take responsibility for their own learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

Although pupils are well cared for and parents attest to their great satisfaction with how well their children are looked after, there are weaknesses in the way the support for some pupils with learning difficulties is organised. There are also significant weaknesses in the systems to track pupils' progress and in the use of assessment information. The setting of individual and school targets is inadequate and a significant factor in pupils' underachievement. For those pupils with more extreme learning difficulties, support through adult help and detailed individual education plans are effective. For those with less severe difficulties, support is not well directed and consequently these pupils do not always cope well in lessons. Systems to safeguard and protect pupils are in place. Those to ensure good behaviour, partly initiated by pupils, are understood well but are not always effectively implemented.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Leadership and management lack the robust systems and expertise to ensure that pupils achieve as well as they should, or to establish a sustained and successful momentum for improvement.

Recent initiatives implemented by the current acting headteacher have the potential to improve matters but there is no evidence yet of these resulting in any substantial improvements in those aspects of the school's work that are inadequate. Leaders have been successful in creating a friendly welcoming ethos, which pupils and their parents comment on very positively. The way in which pupils new to the school are welcomed helps them to settle quickly and happily. The school has established satisfactory partnerships with other schools, the local community and with outside providers that have contributed soundly to aspects of pupils' learning and their personal and physical development.

Subject leadership is inadequate. Of the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, the latter is the only one to have its own subject leader. The lack of an ICT coordinator has contributed to the fact that standards are below average and to the absence of suitable hardware and software. Governance has been ineffective in challenging the school about its declining performance. Governors, although very supportive of the school during its recent and ongoing difficulties, are not sufficiently knowledgeable about the school's curriculum or the reasons for its current underperformance.

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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	3
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?	4
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?	4

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?	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
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	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	Yes
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

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

Thank you for welcoming me in such a friendly way when I visited your school recently to see how well it is helping you to learn and develop personally.

There are things to celebrate. You have good opportunities to go out on interesting visits, to take part in after-school clubs, to learn French and musical instruments and to develop your sporting skills. The school is a friendly place and those of you who act as playground buddies, house captains and school councillors make a good contribution to the good relationships that most of you enjoy. Your attendance is good and you arrive at school on time.

However, there are things that could be a lot better. I have recommended that the school needs 'special measures' to help make these improvements. This means that your school will receive extra support and inspectors will return each term to check on its progress.

Quite a lot of you, particularly older pupils, should be making much more progress with your work, especially in mathematics and science. Those who find learning easier than most need harder work and those of you who are not quite reaching the standards expected for your age need more support. Some systems that could help your teachers set you work that exactly matches what you need to help you to improve are either not working very well or are not there at all.

Although most of you seem to enjoy lessons, some of you can help make this a better school by paying more attention in lessons and being more enthusiastic about things such as singing in assembly. I also think that the school committee could take more responsibility for running council meetings.

I wish you well in the future.