

Victoria Road Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113289
Local Authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	311191
Inspection dates	30–31 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Paul Sadler

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	259
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Vacant Position
Headteacher	Kevin Duggan
Date of previous school inspection	17 May 2004
School address	Trelawney Avenue St Budeaux Plymouth PL5 1RH
Telephone number	01752 365411
Fax number	01752 351012

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school serves an area of social and private housing. The proportion of pupils in receipt of free school meals is well above average. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. Almost all pupils are of White British origin and few are in the early stages of learning English.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school with a number of good features. Children start school with levels of skill and knowledge that are well below those usually found. They make good progress in the Foundation Stage, although attainment at the end of the Reception Year remains below average, especially in social development and aspects of communication, language and literacy. Standards attained in national tests at the end of Year 6 are well below average, although in 2007 improved standards were attained in English and science. In spite of these below-average standards, pupils make progress that is satisfactory and, in some respects, good. Good progress occurs in English in Years 3 to 6, and most pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress.

The school rightly places great emphasis on pupils' personal development and on their care, welfare and guidance. It works very well with external agencies and other partners to achieve good quality in these areas. As a result, pupils generally respond well. Their social, moral and cultural development is good, as is their behaviour, as a result of effective management by staff. Bullying is taken seriously and is usually dealt with effectively. A minority of pupils do not enjoy school as much as they might, due to the variable quality of teaching and some weakness in the curriculum. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep healthy and safe. They make a good contribution to the community and especially within the school, where they have many opportunities to take responsibility.

Overall, teaching is satisfactory. In the Foundation Stage and in Years 1, 5 and 6, it is good, leading to good progress, but in the middle years it is of variable quality. The main weakness is that the tasks set do not always meet the pupils' needs as they are either too easy or too difficult, or are not well explained by teachers. Some pupils and parents rightly comment that where there are mixed-age classes, older pupils are required to repeat work. Progress is slower in these middle years, a major factor being the failure to teach pupils to present their work neatly and quickly. This results in pupils struggling to achieve visible success. Although the curriculum has strengths, including the range of out-of-school activities available, there is a lack of excitement in some lessons, as opportunities are not always taken to develop pupils' skills through an interesting activity.

Many parents are pleased with the school. 'My son and I feel the school is continuously growing and improving', is a typical comment. However, a significant minority have concerns which fall into two main areas, pupils' behaviour and a lack of confidence in leadership and management. Evidence from the inspection does not support these concerns. However, the school's communications with parents often have a level of formality and complexity which some might find off-putting. Under the effective leadership of the Headteacher, leaders and managers at all levels have developed their skills and now work well together. The effectiveness of the governing body is improving rapidly under the leadership of an excellent new chair. In recent years, the local authority has rightly given a high level of challenge and support to the school. This is having a positive impact on pupils' progress, but there is a lack of shared purpose and common goals to ensure that the support has maximum benefit for pupils and staff.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children's skills are carefully assessed before they start school, both in the home and at pre-school settings. Programmes are planned to meet each child's needs through an exciting range of activities which develop their learning skills so that they make good progress. Staff, including teaching assistants, give good support, especially when children are learning in small groups or through play. The school has good resources for the children, although the outdoor environment lacks variety and a covered area. On occasion, the staff have felt inappropriately under pressure to adopt methods more suited to the teaching of older pupils, which they have rightly resisted. There is good communication with parents, which enhances children's progress, so that by the end of the Foundation Stage most are attaining the expected goals.

What the school should do to improve further

- Build on the success achieved in raising standards in English by extending this to other subjects, including mathematics.
- Improve pupils' progress by ensuring that they are taught ways of presenting their work neatly and quickly.
- Improve pupils' enjoyment of school by ensuring that they are given exciting tasks that are matched well to their learning needs.
- Improve the quality of the school's communication with parents.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage and this continues into Year 1. By the end of Year 2, pupils have made satisfactory progress, although standards attained in national assessments in reading, writing and mathematics are well below average. Progress in mathematics is better than in reading and writing. Most pupils can write a sentence with capital letter and full stop, but very few have acquired the skills of presentation that enable them to make rapid progress in their writing. In Years 3 to 6, progress in English is good. All pupils who left Year 6 in 2007 made the expected progress in English, a considerable achievement on the part of the school. By Year 6, most pupils can write at length with accuracy, although the quality of their work is still hampered by poor presentation. Progress in mathematics is satisfactory as, although attainment remains well below average, it represents adequate progress from when the pupils started school. The school has identified that boys outperformed girls in 2007 and is taking effective action to address this. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well, especially in the early years.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils behave well because of effective management on the part of staff. Rules and expectations are clear and are generally adhered to well. Occasionally, however, when the control of staff slips, such as when tasks are too easy or difficult, behaviour can deteriorate. High quality personal, social and health education leads to good moral, social and cultural development.

With a reasonable range of opportunities on offer, spiritual development is satisfactory. Pupils have a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle and know how to stay safe at school and in their urban environment. They make good use of the wide range of opportunities to contribute to the community by taking on responsibilities, such as school council membership and playground befriending, or by collecting for charity. The development of the skills pupils will need in adult life, such as literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT), is satisfactory. Although most pupils enjoy school, some find aspects boring because they do not always see the relevance of the activity. Attendance is below average, although it has improved following effective action taken by the school and external agencies.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

As well as in the Foundation Stage, teaching is good in Years 1, 5 and 6 because teachers adapt the training they have received to ensure that interesting tasks are set that meet the needs of individual pupils, as when Year 6 pupils analysed the items on the previous evening's television 'Newsround'. In most classes, marking is of good quality, helping pupils to improve their work. Targets are used well to show pupils what they need to learn next. In Years 2 to 4, these features are sometimes present but in other cases assessment is used less well to plan tasks and staff lack confidence to adapt the lesson to meet the pupils' needs. In these lessons, although teaching is generally satisfactory, progress is slower. Teaching assistants give very good support to pupils of lower ability but they occasionally talk audibly when the teacher is teaching the whole class, which is distracting for all.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum has some good features, notably the wide range of out-of-school activities, many of which are organised in partnership with other schools and agencies. Examples include activities designed specifically to raise pupils' self-esteem or to expand their knowledge of other countries and cultures. In school time, the curriculum rightly emphasises the development of basic skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT. However, these are sometimes taught in isolation, rather than by making use of subject matter that interests pupils. In classes where there are pupils of mixed age, there is some repetition of tasks for older pupils, which slows their progress.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils receive excellent care and support. There are very good procedures for protecting children and ensuring their health and safety. Some parents are concerned about safety issues concerning access to the school, but these are largely outside the school's direct control. The school has very good relationships with a wide range of external agencies concerned with pupils' welfare. Targets are used well to give pupils guidance on what they need to learn. Pupils are enthusiastic about their targets and have a good understanding of how to use them. This is having a positive impact on their progress in English but does not have the same impact in other subjects.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leaders and managers have worked hard, and with some success, to improve the school in recent years. There are effective systems in place to manage the school's work. Monitoring is extensive and has been effective in identifying strengths and weaknesses, not only in teaching and in pupils' progress, which is tracked effectively, but also in aspects such as pupils' behaviour and attendance. However, the school does not accurately monitor its effectiveness in comparison with other schools. Effective action has been taken, for instance, in improving behaviour and pupils' progress in English. Until recently, the targets the school sets itself have been insufficiently challenging but targets for the future are more rigorous. The excellent new chair of governors has established an action plan and training programme for the governing body, leading to rapid improvements in its effectiveness. The support of the local authority, although effective, is seen by most staff as externally imposed. Some staff lack the confidence to adapt it in a way that best meets the needs of the pupils. There has been adequate improvement since the last inspection and the school is in a satisfactory position to make further improvements.

The school tries hard to communicate well with parents and many appreciate this, especially those who have been put in touch with external agencies, such as those with expertise in improving children's behaviour.

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
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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?	3
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	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
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?	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	3
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?	3
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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
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	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

13 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Victoria Road Primary School, St Budeaux, Plymouth PL5 1RH

We very much enjoyed talking with and listening to you and seeing your work when we visited your school recently. We found you confident, and that you have a good understanding of what your school is like.

Yours is a satisfactory school with a number of good features. Some of the most important things about it are:

- Although results in the Year 6 tests are below average, you make satisfactory progress. In English, your progress is good.
- You behave well and tell us that bullying is usually dealt with effectively.
- You understand the importance of a healthy diet and exercise.
- You contribute well to the community through the school council, and through your work for charities.
- Teaching is satisfactory and has a number of good points, such as the way your work is marked to help you improve.
- You understand your targets and these are helping you to improve your work.
- Teaching assistants are good at helping you to learn.
- All the staff know you and look after you well, and you rightly trust and respect them.
- The school is led and managed in a satisfactory way.

There are ways in which the school can be improved further. We have asked that the successful work done to improve your English is now extended to mathematics and other subjects, and that you are taught how to present your work neatly and quickly so that you make better progress. We have also asked that the tasks you are given are made interesting and not too easy or difficult, and that the school makes sure that letters to your parents are friendly and clear.

Yours sincerely

Paul Sadler Lead inspector

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