

Blackwell First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116665
Local Authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	312361
Inspection date	26 November 2007
Reporting inspector	David Driscoll

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

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4-9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	93
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lesley S Penfold
Headteacher	Ian Howells
Date of previous school inspection	15 March 2004
School address	St Catherine's Road Blackwell Bromsgrove B60 1BN
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Age group	4-9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Blackwell is a very small school, with more boys than girls on roll. Virtually all pupils are from White British backgrounds and all pupils speak English as their first language. Although the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average, there is not an even distribution throughout the school so some years have very high proportions whilst others have none. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Blackwell provides a good education for its pupils. Through good care, support and guidance and a good curriculum, the school successfully encourages pupils' personal and academic development. Children join the Foundation Stage with skills and experiences a little higher than would be expected for their age and from then on they achieve well to reach the goals expected of them at the end of their Reception year. Good progress continues in Years 1 and 2 and results in standards which are above average for pupils aged seven. Pupils leave Year 4 with standards that are consistently high and with skills that leave them well prepared for the next stage of their education. The Foundation Stage fosters a love of letters, which is built upon in the rest of the school, so pupils' progress in reading is outstanding. Girls make good progress in their writing, but for boys this is only satisfactory. Pupils do not get enough opportunities to use computers to help them with their writing. This has particularly affected boys' progress. The school is already taking action to encourage boys to write, by giving them topics such as 'Superheroes' that they find more interesting. In mathematics, in common with the national trend, boys achieve better than girls who nevertheless reach standards which are well above average.

Many of the reasons for pupils' good progress lie in good quality teaching. Lessons proceed at an excellent pace. There is often a wide range of ability in a class, but work is very well planned and successfully challenges pupils from the least to the most able. Teaching assistants give effective support especially to the least able pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. All pupils know what they are trying to achieve in lessons, and marking makes clear when they have met their targets. In writing, however, some of the marking does not tell pupils what they need to do if they have not met their targets. Pupils love their teachers, and describe the headteacher as 'the best in the world'. Pupils thoroughly enjoy coming to school, everyone feels safe and they get on well with each other.

The school is well led and managed. The headteacher and governors have a clear picture of the school's performance and are driving it forwards. Careful tracking of pupils' progress in Years 1 to 4 allows areas of relative weakness to be pinpointed, so that actions can be targeted where they will be most effective. However, the first assessment of children arriving in the Foundation Stage comes too late to identify children's strengths and weaknesses and so use this information to plan lessons. The school's managers are already working on many of the relative weaknesses identified in this report. Their past successes clearly indicate that they have the skills necessary to improve the school still further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Many parents praise the way the school helps their children to settle quickly into life at school. Teachers go to great lengths to ensure that children feel secure and happy, making sure that they all have friends. Children make good progress in all areas of development, academically and personally from the time, towards the end of their first term, when they are first assessed. Before this, however, the school does not get a clear enough picture of children's skills and capabilities, so is unable to evaluate their progress. Standards are improving each year as the Foundation Stage manager focuses on dealing with any weakness in provision that becomes apparent. Provision is well led and managed and children are well cared for. Progress is best in reading and calculating, because teachers never miss an opportunity to improve these skills

regardless of the activity. Children also receive lots of encouragement to work things out for themselves, as well as praise when they succeed. Lessons are often a hive of activity, with full use made of the available resources, both indoors and outside.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide pupils (especially boys) with more opportunities to use computers to improve their writing, and ensure marking identifies what all pupils need to do to reach higher standards.
- Assess children's skills earlier in the year to gain a clearer view of progress in the Foundation Stage.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils make outstanding progress in their reading. Standards of reading on joining the Foundation Stage are as expected for this age. By the end Reception children exceed what is expected nationally and at the end of Year 2 standards are above average. By the time they leave Year 4, the large majority of pupils have reached the standards expected of 11-year-olds, with some possessing the reading skills expected of even older pupils. Pupils' overall achievement is good rather than outstanding because progress in mathematics although good is less marked than in reading. Not as many pupils' standards reach the dizzy heights of those in reading, but the school is already working on this. Girls also make strong progress in writing, but progress for boys is slower. They do not like writing as much as the girls and they see it as a bit of a chore, unless they are working on a computer. In contrast, boys do better than girls in mathematics. They love doing difficult sums, where they compete against each other to see who can get most correct. Standards at the end of Year 4 are consistently well above average with pupils of all abilities doing well

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils play a good part in the school's decision-making processes. The school council sounds out other pupils before helping to draw up the school rules. At present, the councillors are working on some new school rules that reflect their good understanding of right and wrong. Pupils also play a good part in the local community, with performances by the choir and parades around the village.

Attendance is good. Pupils clearly enjoy school and feel safe at Blackwell. Pupils are polite and well behaved. They usually work hard, but in some lessons, one or two do not concentrate on the task in hand. Pupils get on very well with one another because 'everyone is kind, thoughtful and help each other'. This is obvious at playtime, where pupils keep a close eye on the friendship bench to make sure that nobody is feeling unhappy because they do not have anyone to play with. The older pupils make sure that younger ones are not at risk in ball games, by slowing their play and making sure younger ones get a turn. Pupils know what to eat to remain healthy, but too many bring crisps and sweets to eat at breaks. The combination of strong basic literacy and numeracy skills and the well established ability to work with others effectively prepares pupils for future study and life in general.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers know their subjects very well and are good at planning work for all abilities. Good use of assessment information allows staff to adapt lessons very quickly, for example when pupils have not understood something the first time. Teaching assistants provide good support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They adapt tasks or gently encourage pupils to think for themselves, so that the pupils make the same good progress as their peers. Teaching is good throughout the school with very positive effects on pupils' learning. The rapid pace of lessons, teachers' good questioning techniques, and very strong relationships are some of the main reasons why pupils achieve well. On a few occasions, however, less able pupils lose concentration. When this happens, the teaching assistant working with the group does not always get them back on task quickly enough. Teachers throughout the school have a love of books which they convey to pupils. Younger children play lots of games to learn their letters and show real joy when putting them together to form first words. From then on, teachers go to great length to encourage pupils to read. They generate excitement through the way they tell stories that make pupils desperate to know what comes next, and to find out by reading the story for themselves.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is matched well to the wide range of abilities in each year group. It is well planned to make sure basic skills are used and developed across a range of subjects. A good programme for personal, social and health education has positive effects on pupils' personal development. The school has recently successfully introduced extra classes for the most able in mathematics (known as 'Magats'!) to boost their progress and try to match the outstanding performance in reading. There are plans in the pipeline to do the same for writing. The school has already had some success in encouraging boys to write by making the topics they write about more 'boy-friendly'. Similarly, girls have opportunities to write about the things they like. The work for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is carefully matched to their targets, so all staff are clear about the approaches needed to ensure their progress is as good as other pupils. The school provides a good range of extra clubs and activities that help pupils to understand the part they can play in the world by, for example, developing their environmental understanding.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Many parents rightly comment on the warm, friendly and caring atmosphere at the school. Child protection, safeguarding and health and safety procedures meet all requirements and ensure that pupils are safe and well looked after. Pupils know who to turn to if they have a problem. Pupils have lots of space to be active at playtime, so the school wisely deploys a large number of staff to keep an eye on them. Supervision is good..

Pupils are all very clear about their academic targets. These are used well in lessons, where pupils are frequently reminded what they are aiming for in a particular piece of work. When

marking work, teachers praise pupils for reaching their targets. However, some marking does not tell pupils what they have to do to improve if they do not meet a target in writing.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school has made good progress since its last inspection. Its self evaluation is effective. Consequently, standards are higher and many aspects of the school's work have been improved. Such success arises from the headteacher's detailed and accurate analysis of data in order to pinpoint where improvements in achievement are possible. The analysis is then underpinned by careful checks on teaching that highlight what could be improved in order to raise standards. Even the best of lessons have areas for improvement, and this reflects the complete lack of complacency by the school's managers, leaders and teachers. Most actions are well thought through to ensure they will be successful, but in a few cases have not been specific enough. The plans to improve writing, for example, have not focused sufficiently on the boys. Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They support the school well, but also question its work when appropriate and are prepared to take difficult decisions where necessary.

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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	1
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	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
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	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

27 November 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Blackwell First School, Bromsgrove, B60 1BN

Thank you very much for helping us when we came to visit your school. You told us how much you enjoy coming to school, because everyone is kind to each other. We agree with you. Your school is a very nice place because of all the people who work and learn there. The teachers make sure you stay safe and do their best to make sure you are happy at school. Your teachers are also good at making sure that the work you are given is just hard enough so that you can do it if you really try your best. You get on well with each other and help to make the school a happy place to be.

You are getting a good education. The youngest ones very quickly get used to coming to school, and from then on, you learn lots more than we expect to see. Your teachers make sure that not a minute is wasted, and you usually work hard. Your reading is brilliant! You are also good at maths too. Girls are good at writing, but some of you boys could still do better. We know that the boys don't like writing by hand as much as the girls, so we have asked the teachers to let you use the computers more. We have also asked them to let you know what you need to do to meet your targets when you have not quite met them. So, come on, boys, let's see the same hard work in writing as you put into your maths.

We were very impressed by the school council and the way you help make the rules for the school. The headteacher is very grateful for your help in making the school a better place. The school is getting better every year. The grown-ups who run the school know exactly how well you are doing in most years, although we have asked them to check the Reception class a bit earlier in the term. They also know what to do to make sure that you learn even more in the future, so the school can continue to get even better. But I shall leave the last word to you. We asked what you liked best about the school, and you said 'the headteacher, because he is 'the best in the world. He never shouts and is always very, very, very kind'.

With all my best wishes for your future.

David Driscoll Lead inspector