

Cobbs Brow School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119329
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	313260
Inspection date	22 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Kathryn Dodd

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	260
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sian Jay
Headteacher	Mrs Annette Hirst
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2004
School address	Manfield Ashurst Skelmersdale Lancashire WN8 6SU
Telephone number	01695 720632
Fax number	01695 50749

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards; pupils' personal development and well-being; the quality of the teaching and learning; and leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation, plans for further improvement, nationally published assessment data and the school's records of pupils' progress over time. Observations of lessons and scrutiny of the work in pupils' books were undertaken together with the headteacher. Discussions were held with staff, pupils and a representative from the governing body. Questionnaires returned by parents were read. 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 its self-evaluation, were not justified and these have been included, where appropriate, in this report.

Description of the school

Almost all the pupils at this larger than average sized primary school are from White British backgrounds. It serves a mixed community that includes an area of social and economic disadvantage. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The school holds a range of awards, including Investors in People, Lancashire Healthy Eating, Particularly Successful Schools and the Premier Partnership award that recognises the school's work with a local further education college. The headteacher took up post in September 2006, following a short period as acting headteacher. An acting deputy headteacher is currently in place. The Little Acorns Nursery, which opened in September 2007, is situated within the school premises.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This good school has an accurate view of its own effectiveness and provides good value for money. It also has a number of outstanding features. Pupils flourish in the very caring, warm and welcoming setting, so that they make outstanding progress in their personal development and achieve well. They reach above average standards by Year 6 in English and mathematics, and standards in science are particularly strong. Excellent partnerships, for example with parents and within the locality, help pupils to feel a strong sense of belonging to their school and local communities and, as a result, they are very eager to contribute positively to them. Parents are confident that their children receive a high quality of education, and many say that this reflects the commitment and dedication of the staff to their children's achievements and welfare.

Good teaching and learning ensure that pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress. The enthusiasm of the teachers is infectious. Their very positive relationships with pupils, along with lively and well organised activities that make learning fun and interesting, are strong features of lessons. Teachers regularly assess pupils to find out what they already know and can do. In English, for example, teachers use this information particularly skilfully to make sure that the curriculum is matched closely to pupils' varying learning needs. A recent whole school focus on raising standards in English by ensuring that pupils spend more time improving their writing skills as part of work in other subjects is now paying dividends. Standards in reading and writing over the last two years have risen sharply, both by Year 2 and Year 6. Most pupils make good progress between Years 3 and 6 and their learning accelerates in Years 5 and 6. This is because of the booster programmes in place and because the work given to pupils of all abilities consistently challenges them to reach higher learning targets. These effective practices, however, are not always adopted consistently in all classes and lessons, particularly in Years 3 and 4. As a result, the more able pupils could sometimes achieve more than they do.

Making sure that pupils enjoy learning, are safe and healthy and make a positive contribution to their community has a very high priority in the life of the school. Pupils thoroughly enjoy learning because the curriculum includes an outstanding range of enriching experiences, both in lessons and beyond the normal school day. This is one of the reasons why pupils talk with such enthusiasm about school life. The science club for example, is extremely popular and contributes both to pupils' enjoyment and to the significantly above average standards reached in that subject by Year 6. Similarly, as a result of the improvements to provision for information and communication technology (ICT) since the previous inspection, pupils have many opportunities to practise their skills across the subjects of the curriculum. Pupils' growing confidence and maturity is seen in the wide range of responsibilities that they eagerly undertake. They behave extremely well, and are especially respectful and polite towards adults and one another. Pupils' outstanding personal development, along with their good academic progress, is why they are so well placed to succeed at secondary school and to become responsible young adults of the future.

A key factor in the school's success is the effective leadership of the headteacher. Making sure that every child is nurtured in a very caring and supportive environment so that they can reach their full potential is never off her agenda. As a result, standards are rising, particularly in English and science and pupils' personal development continues to be a major strength of the school. Parents acknowledge that recent developments, such as encouraging them to become more involved in their children's education and the opening of the on-site nursery, are good

examples of the continual improvements being made. This school does not stand still and is not prepared to leave any stone unturned when it comes to searching out opportunities for achieving even more. Staff and governors are extremely committed and supportive. They play a crucial part in the school's continued success. As a result of recent changes in leadership and management roles and responsibilities, the skills of senior staff, particularly in interpreting information about pupils' progress, are still developing. This is why they do not always have a clear picture of whether or not pupils are on track to reach their challenging targets or are able to pinpoint where or how their progress could be better. Nevertheless, the good improvements since the previous inspection, and the rigour with which weaknesses in pupils' achievement in English are being tackled, demonstrate that the school has a good capacity to improve even further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

When children join the Reception class, their skills are below those typical for their age. The very warm and caring relationships between adults and children, along with the bright and lively learning environment, both indoors and outside, ensure that children quickly develop a real thirst for learning and settle quickly into school routines. Adults make the most of every opportunity to help children to learn to get along well together, grow in confidence and behave well. As a result, children make good progress and, by the time they start Year 1, most achieve the goals set nationally in all the areas of learning. Children's communication, language and literacy development is particularly marked because of the high priority that staff give to developing children's speaking and listening skills. The Foundation Stage leader plays a crucial role by ensuring that staff communicate regularly and are clear about how well individual children are getting on. Staff use the information they record about the small day-to-day steps in children's progress well in order to ensure that learning activities help children to build on what they can already do. There remains scope, however, to use this information more robustly in order to identify where children's progress might be accelerated, and to pinpoint how the curriculum could be adjusted accordingly.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the skills of leaders and managers so that they make more effective use of information about pupils' progress to ensure that they reach challenging learning targets.
- Make sure that teachers consistently plan and provide work that challenges pupils, particularly the more able in Years 3 and 4.

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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?	1
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	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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

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

23 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Cobbs Brow Primary School, Skelmersdale, WN8 6SU

Thank you so much for the very warm welcome you gave me when I visited your school. I thoroughly enjoyed being part of your school family and you helped me to see why you enjoy coming to school so much. You were so very keen to talk to me and answered all my questions very thoughtfully. I particularly enjoyed seeing you singing so joyfully in assembly and hearing about the many chances you have to do special jobs around school. This is making your school a happier and safer place to be. You get lots of chances to take part in many exciting activities, such as the science and ICT clubs which some of you told me about with such enthusiasm. It is also good to know that you understand that taking part in activities, such as Tai Chi, helps to keep your mind and body healthy and gets you ready for learning. All the adults in the school care about you a great deal. They give you lots of encouragement to do well, to grow in confidence and to make sure that you know exactly what you should do if you are feeling uncomfortable in school. It is because of this, and the fact that you are all so kind and caring and you behave so well, that you feel so safe in your school. Your parents also told me how pleased they are with your school. They are very proud of your achievements.

Your school is a good school. You are really well prepared for going to secondary school at the end of Year 6. Your school works very hard indeed to make sure that everyone helps with making things even better for you. This is one of the reasons why you are now doing much better in English than you did before. There is still more that can be done and your school is going to make sure that:

- your work is never too easy for you and always gives you the chance to show what you are really capable of so that you reach your targets more quickly
- teachers keep a closer check on how quickly you are learning and whether you might be able to do even better.

You can help by making sure that you continue to try your best in everything that you do.

Best wishes to you all for a very successful future

Kathryn Dodd

Lead inspector