

Poulton-le-Sands Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119538
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	313330
Inspection dates	24–25 January 2008
Reporting inspector	George Crowther

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	195
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Woodhouse
Headteacher	Miss Victoria Atkins
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2005
School address	Church Street Morecambe Lancashire LA4 5QA
Telephone number	01524 413273
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average primary school. Its social context is diverse, with significant disadvantage in the local area and some pupils travelling from further away, owing to the school's denominational status. The proportion of pupils from the local area has increased in recent years. An average proportion of pupils is eligible for free school meals. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is about average. Almost all the pupils are from White British backgrounds and very few are at the early stages of learning English. The school has a Basic Skills Quality Mark award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. It has a number of good features but there are also weaknesses that are holding back pupils' achievement. A positive, friendly and caring environment, much appreciated by parents, gives pupils the confidence to enjoy their learning. Over recent years, standards when children start school have fallen significantly. They are now below those typical for their age and this has created extra challenges for the staff. Leaders were not quick enough to identify aspects of the school's work that needed to be strengthened and, as result, weaknesses in pupils' achievement developed. For example, children are starting school with much weaker language skills, but strategies to enrich these were only put in place when Year 2 writing standards fell. The school has now recognised what needs to be done and is taking concerted action to improve pupils' achievement.

In Years 1 and 2, the pupils make satisfactory progress. Good teaching in some lessons helps them to build their basic skills quickly, but work in other lessons is not targeted well enough at what individual pupils need to learn next. The school has taken strong, successful action to improve pupils' achievement in writing, but realises that more needs to be done. In Years 3 to 6, whilst pupils make satisfactory progress overall, the quality of teaching and learning is variable. The best lessons help pupils to learn quickly, but others lack the pace and challenge to get the most out of them. Achievement is weakest in mathematics, for the more able and the girls, but the school has identified and is tackling these issues. Standards in the current Year 6 are broadly average.

The pupils gain great enjoyment from school and are keen to learn in lessons. They are friendly, polite and well behaved. Relationships are good and pupils of all ages mix together happily. The pupils have a good understanding about being healthy and they feel safe and cared for. They make a good contribution to the school community, for example through the school council and by acting as buddies. They have a good understanding of the wider community through work about other faiths and countries. Pupils' good personal qualities prepare them well for the future, but their academic skills are not strong enough. The curriculum largely meets pupils' needs and has a good variety of additional activities. Levels of care are good and support for pupils' learning is satisfactory.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Although the school did not react quickly enough to a change in pupils' learning needs, leaders are now taking determined action to strengthen crucial aspects of the school's provision; there is already evidence of success. The headteacher is leading these improvements well. Better systems to track pupils' progress are helping the school to identify potential underachievement more rapidly. Through honest and accurate self-evaluation, leaders have a clear picture of the effectiveness of the school and know what needs to be done next. This puts the school in a sound position to make further, necessary improvements. It provides satisfactory value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Provision in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory. Good standards of care, with close attention to the needs of each child, create a happy and secure environment that supports children's learning effectively. The children behave well because the staff set high expectations, establish good routines and give plenty of praise. The staff provide a sound range of learning activities

but these are not always purposeful or stimulating enough. For example, children listened to a poem about noisy food, but were not encouraged to become involved by making the noises themselves. At times, the children spend too long listening to the teacher rather than being involved actively in learning. When the children are learning through play, adults do not guide them sufficiently towards the skills they should be developing. The staff keep track of each child's progress through observations of how they are learning but this information is not used well enough to make sure activities are always challenging. The school's data and observations of lessons show that children are making satisfactory progress but, because many start school with weak skills, only a small proportion is on track to reach the learning goals expected at the end of the Reception year.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' achievement across the school, particularly in the Foundation Stage, for writing in Key Stage 1 and for mathematics in Key Stage 2.
- Improve the consistency of teaching and learning.
- Identify potential underachievement at an early stage and take the necessary action to improve it.

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 the next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards when children start school have fallen in recent years and are now below those typical for their ages, particularly in language skills. Although progress in the Reception class is satisfactory, standards are still below average by the time children join Year 1. By Year 2, pupils' achievement is satisfactory but standards are below average. The school has identified and is tackling a weakness in pupils' writing skills that led to results in the 2007 Year 2 national tests that were significantly below average. Progress in writing is now satisfactory. By Year 6, pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Results of the 2007 Year 6 national tests were broadly average, but this group of pupils started Year 3 with average standards. The more able pupils and the girls have not been making good enough progress in mathematics, but better activities in lessons are leading to an improvement. Standards in the current Year 6 are broadly average. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar progress to others, but there are examples of good progress where needs have been identified precisely and extra support given.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development is good. The pupils thoroughly enjoy school and have positive attitudes to learning. A typical comment was, 'We do lots of different things in lessons and they are fun.' Most parents say their children are eager to go to school; attendance is satisfactory. The pupils are well behaved, polite and helpful. Within a very caring, Christian community, relationships are extremely positive with pupils of all ages showing great respect for each other. Older pupils commented on how they enjoy being buddies for the younger ones. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. For example, a thought-provoking assembly encouraged pupils to consider the qualities of bravery, and a link

with a school in Tanzania helps pupils to learn about other cultures. Activities such as these encourage pupils' understanding of themselves and their place in the wider world. Pupils know how to make healthy choices in the food they eat and the exercise they take. They feel safe at school and they know about dangers out of school. Pupils make a strong contribution to the school community. Almost everyone has a class job and the older pupils have special responsibilities such as running the fruit tuck shop. They also contribute to the church and wider community, such as learning about and supporting the RNLI. Good personal qualities equip pupils well for the future, but academic skills are not always strong enough.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. It tends to vary between classes and there are lessons where pupils do not learn quickly enough. Teachers' good relationships with their pupils support learning effectively. Lessons are planned carefully with clear learning objectives that are shared with the pupils. Where teaching is good, the activities are carefully matched to pupils' needs and are challenging. Teachers use a good range of methods to hold the pupils' interest and move learning on at a brisk pace. For example, Year 4 pupils explored a variety of mathematical statements to find out if they were true, such as 'Do three odd numbers always add up to an odd number?' which required a range of possible solutions. Where teaching has weaknesses, the tasks are not interesting or challenging enough. Sometimes the teacher leads the lesson for too long and the pupils are not sufficiently involved in a variety of learning tasks. In these lessons, the pace of learning is too slow and the teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not high enough. The school's systems for assessing pupils' attainment and tracking their progress are good but teachers are not always using this information to ensure that work is best matched to pupils' needs.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

A satisfactory curriculum, with a number of strong elements, generally meets the needs of all pupils. Work for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is planned carefully and enriched by many special programmes. The pupils' good personal development owes much to a strong programme of personal, social and health education, which supports all aspects of their learning. The curriculum is enriched by a good range of clubs and other activities outside lessons. For example, older pupils enjoy a residential visit to the Lake District that develops a range of skills, including their independence. Some aspects of the curriculum, however, have weaknesses. Reception class activities are not always best suited to the learning needs of the children. In Years 3 to 6, work in mathematics has too few tasks that encourage pupils to explore the patterns in numbers and shapes. A new computer room is helping to raise standards, such as when Year 6 pupils created a presentation about the Second World War including pictures, text and sound.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Levels of pastoral care are good and academic guidance is satisfactory. The school's caring, Christian ethos creates an environment in which very good attention to pupils' welfare is a very

high priority. This is increasingly important because a growing proportion of pupils have difficulties in their lives; the school is supporting these pupils admirably. Good relationships between staff, parents and pupils lead to a safe and happy school where pupils are ready to learn. Parents have great confidence in the care the school provides and say that, if they have a concern, they are very comfortable approaching the staff. The school provides a secure environment where the required safeguarding procedures are in place. The school tracks pupils' progress carefully but individual targets for pupils' learning are used inconsistently. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified early and education plans contain targets that are appropriate and achievable. Good links with outside agencies ensure additional support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Since the last inspection, the school has faced the twin challenges of staff changes and a shift in the nature of the school's population. Children's knowledge and skills when they start school have fallen and many now face social disadvantages. The school's very caring ethos caters well for pupils' personal needs, but leaders were not quick enough to recognise that pupils with weak skills would require more rigorous approaches to learning. As a result, the school's improvement since its last inspection has been no better than satisfactory. Over the past year, leaders have adopted a much more determined approach to improving pupils' achievement. For example, a stronger focus on children's early language skills is beginning to raise standards, including those in writing in Years 1 and 2, although there is still some way to go.

Leaders are now setting a clear direction for further improvement. The school's evaluation of its own effectiveness is honest and accurate. Increasingly, leaders are checking carefully on pupils' progress and the quality of learning in lessons, and using the information to identify and tackle areas for improvement. As yet, however, action is not focused sharply enough on the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. The school is successful in ensuring that all pupils have good opportunities to develop their personal skills, but some pupils do better than others in their academic development.

Governors are very committed to the school and have a good grasp of what it does well. They are less clear about areas for improvement and what the school is doing about them, but they are not afraid to ask challenging questions about the school's performance.

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	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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	2
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

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

27 January 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Poulton-le-Sands CofE Primary School, Morecambe, LA4 5QA

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful when we visited your school to find out how well you are doing. Yours is a satisfactory school which means there are many good things about it, but we also found some ways in which it could be even better.

On our very first morning at your school, we knew it was a friendly, caring place because everyone was happy and pleased to be there. We know you like being at school because you enjoyed the lessons we saw and you said the work is interesting and fun. You also enjoyed activities such as the good work assembly when you celebrated all the children who had done well during the week. Everyone gets on well together, in lessons and at playtime. You said that, if there are any problems, the teachers sort them out quickly. Your behaviour is good, in lessons and around the school, which supports your learning and makes your school a pleasant place to be. You are making satisfactory progress with your work, but many of you could do even better. Your lessons are often interesting, but the work is not always challenging enough. We saw some good examples of your work, such as the letters you have been writing to children in Tanzania and the work you have been doing with a local artist. All the staff look after you very well and make sure you are happy and ready to learn. Your headteacher and all the staff are working hard to find new ways to help you learn quickly.

We have asked your school to do these things to improve your learning.

- We think many of you could make more progress, particularly in the Reception class and, for some of you, in writing and in mathematics. We have asked your school to make sure the work you are given helps you to learn quickly.
- We have asked your school to give you more challenging work in lessons so that you can make good progress. You will have to try your best as well.
- We want your school to spot when you are not doing as well as you could and give you extra support so you can be successful.

Thank you for helping us with the inspection of your school.

Yours sincerely

George Crowther

Lead Inspector