

Alexandra Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124033
Local Authority	Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number	314787
Inspection date	4 June 2008
Reporting inspector	John Eadie

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	217
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Jackson
Headteacher	Stephen Knight
Date of previous school inspection	4 October 2004
School address	Meir Road Normacot Stoke-on-Trent ST3 7JG
Telephone number	01782 235377
Fax number	01782 235378

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

pupils' achievement, particularly for boys, pupils who do not speak English at home and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

whether teaching and curriculum provision is meeting the needs of all pupils, particularly those groups already mentioned

the effectiveness of management strategies for improving the achievement of all pupils, but particularly the groups mentioned.

Evidence was gathered from:

discussions with leaders, a governor, pupils and staff

visits to all classes

scrutiny of pupils' work

observation of other aspects of the school day such as assembly, break and lunchtime

analysis of parents' questionnaires and school documentation, in particular data on pupils' progress.

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

Alexandra Junior is an average sized school set in an urban area where there are pockets of deprivation, indicated by the well above average proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. More than half of the pupils are from minority ethnic heritages, most of these being from Pakistani backgrounds. Almost all of the minority ethnic pupils speak languages other than English at home. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than usual. There is also a much higher than average number of pupils who leave or start at times other than the usual times of leaving or starting. For example, there are currently 54 pupils in Year 6 and, in their four years in the school, no fewer than 34 have joined the year group and 32 have moved on. Many of those who join the school late have little or no English.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. It has travelled a fair way along the route to becoming outstanding and is not far from reaching its destination. Several aspects are already outstanding. One of the key strengths is the way that systems have been set up to integrate the many pupils who join the school at later stages. These are extremely thorough and enable these pupils to quickly take part in all that the school has to offer. This was well demonstrated by a parent who said, 'My child joined the school recently and loves coming every day. He says the teachers are great and the children are very friendly.' Those who join with little or no English are given excellent support and are soon making the same good progress as their classmates.

A further outstanding feature is pupils' personal development and well-being. They are growing up into extremely thoughtful and personable young people, who have a keen awareness of their place in society and their responsibilities to it. For instance, the school eco committee is extremely active in encouraging recycling and energy saving. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the school and wider community through the very many opportunities to take responsibility and their involvement in local and wider issues. For example, the trained buddies ensure that none are left lonely during play times and a wide variety of charities have been supported through fund raising projects. A particularly strong feature of pupils' personal development is their preparation for their future. Parents recognise this commitment of the school to lifelong learning, saying such things as, 'Our child has been given many opportunities beyond the curriculum to develop his confidence and skills and is very well prepared for transition to secondary school.' Pupils have a good awareness of how to stay healthy and safe although some do not always put this into practice. For example, too many packets of crisps and chocolate bars find their way into packed lunches.

The major reason for pupils' excellent personal development is the outstanding care and support they are given. Child protection procedures are rigorous, as are health and safety processes. Pastoral care is exceptional and extends to families, as a parent typically demonstrated when they said, 'The staff all have time for each child and their parents/carers.' Pupils respond to this care by behaving impeccably and their enjoyment of school is outstanding. Typical comments from pupils show this when they say, 'The teachers really understand us', 'Everyone gets on well and the teachers are really nice', and 'This school is fun!'

Another key factor in pupils' outstanding personal development and the progress that they make is the outstanding curriculum. A great deal of thought has been put in to developing a curriculum that is responsive to the needs of the pupils and the community. It has been designed to be motivating and to build pupils' self-confidence and particularly their aspirations. An innovative feature is the entrepreneurial project run as part of the curriculum. This involves pupils growing and selling plants and produce as the Eco Angels Foundation. Pupils are hugely enthusiastic about this project, particularly as most of their initiatives make a profit! This project is giving pupils a real understanding of the world of trade and business. The pupils' learning also benefits from a wide range of extra-curricular activities, visits and visitors.

The academic side has not been left behind in all this and standards have been rising steadily in recent years and are now generally above average. Pupils join the school with standards that are below average and achieve well and make good progress. Particularly pleasing has been the improvement in standards in English. The school has put a great deal of work into improving standards of writing, particularly for boys. Initiatives such as the daily blog, where pupils write

about their own experiences, have appealed and been particularly effective with boys and standards of writing have improved significantly in the last year.

Teaching is good and improving because of rigorous monitoring. Teachers ensure that their lessons are lively and interesting so pupils are involved and keen to learn. A good feature is that teachers stick into pupils' books at the beginning of each week what they will be learning during the week, so that pupils can appreciate where learning is heading. Another strength is the very regular checks made on pupils' progress, which enable pupils who might be in danger of falling behind to be identified early. Very good systems are then put in place to help them catch up. Skilled teaching assistants play a key role in delivering these interventions and in aiding pupils' progress, particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, some of whom make outstanding progress. The systems to check on pupils' progress are very effective and used well to set targets for pupils' future learning. However, these targets are not always specific enough, particularly in mathematics, so that pupils do not always know what they need to learn next. Also, there is variable practice in teachers' marking. Some teachers give pupils very clear guidance on how to improve, whereas others rely too much on ticks and broad encouragement.

So what is the key reason behind the success of this school? Many parents rightly gave credit to the extremely clear leadership of the headteacher, very ably supported by the senior leadership team and all staff. This is indicated in parental comments such as, 'The headteacher is excellent and he and the staff take great care in making sure the children are happy and are making good progress.' There are very good systems for evaluating the school's effectiveness which, although often informal, include staff at all levels and have built a very clear and accurate picture of the school's successes and areas for development. Governance is good, with governors being knowledgeable and involved and they offer good levels of support and challenge for leaders. Extremely productive links have been established with parents and the local community. For instance, a number of courses are run in school for members of the community and the home-school link worker works tirelessly to involve parents in their children's education. Close links have also been established with the feeder infant school, so there is effective continuity of education between the two schools.

Bearing in mind the progress that the school is making and the very evident teamwork and desire to take the school forward, there is an outstanding capacity to make further improvements.

What the school should do to improve further

- Set precise targets for pupils, particularly in mathematics, so that they know clearly how to improve their work and ensure that teachers consistently use these targets when they mark pupils' work.

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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

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	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	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?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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	1
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

5 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Alexandra Junior School, Stoke-on-Trent, ST3 7JG

Thank you so much for welcoming me so warmly when I visited your school recently. You all had so much to tell me that I was never short of someone to talk to. You are right to be proud of your school as it is a good school and there are a number of things that are outstanding. I was really impressed with how friendly you all are; as one of you told me, 'Everyone gets on well together.'

These are the best things I found about your school.

- You are developing extremely well into polite, thoughtful and sensible young people and I was particularly impressed with the work of your eco committee.
- You are making good progress and reach above average standards because you are being taught well.
- Another reason for your good progress is the extremely interesting range of things planned for you to do in lessons. I think your Eco Angels project is splendid.
- All adults look after you and care for you exceptionally well.
- Those of you who join the school after Year 3 are helped to settle in very quickly and the buddies make sure that they soon have friends. Those who arrive speaking little English are helped to learn it very quickly.
- Your headteacher and teachers have very good plans to make your school even better.

I have suggested that your headteacher and teachers should improve the following.

- Make sure that the targets you are given tell you exactly how to make your work better, particularly in maths. When teachers mark your work they should remember these targets and comment on how well you are working towards them.

I am sure you will all continue to work hard and help your headteacher and teachers make your school even better. For instance, you could ask your teachers how you can improve your work and ask how well you are working towards your targets.

With very best wishes

John D Eadie Lead inspector

Annex B

5 June 2008

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With very best wishes

John D Eadie
Lead inspector