

The Reginald Mitchell Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124090
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	314804
Inspection dates	31 October –1 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Mary Hamby HMI

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	232
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Blood
Headteacher	Alan Stancliffe
Date of previous school inspection	4 July 2005
School address	Congleton Road Butt Lane Stoke-on-Trent ST7 1NA
Telephone number	01782 296778
Fax number	01782 296783

Age group	3-11
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Introduction

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector carried out this inspection.

Description of the school

This school is situated in an area of declining employment, and the proportion of pupils entitled to a free school meal is higher than average. Almost all pupils come from White British backgrounds and fewer than average have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Currently, there are more girls than boys in the school and this has been the case for the last few years. Most of the children attend the school's nursery class on a part-time basis before starting in the Reception class.

The school has stable staffing but, during the last two years, the staff in Key Stage 1 have had prolonged periods of absence from school. The deputy headteacher is currently on maternity leave.

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's overall effectiveness is satisfactory. Parents express their wholehearted support for the school and comment on the 'brilliant care' and 'welcoming staff'. The pupils have outstandingly good attitudes to their learning and love coming to school.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Attainment on entry to the school is below expected levels. This legacy stays with them through much of Key Stage 1 and is evident in lower than average standards in speaking and writing skills. Through Key Stage 2, achievement gathers momentum and, by the time pupils leave, standards are broadly average. Good provision ensures that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do well, but some of the more capable pupils do not achieve as much as they should, particularly in writing.

The pupils' personal development and well-being are good. They behave well, work together cooperatively and understand fair play. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall. A high level of care enables the pupils to grow in confidence and feel safe and free from bullying, but academic guidance is not good enough. Assessment is not accurate enough; the tracking of pupils' progress, though improving, lacks rigour, and the teachers' reading records do not pinpoint the next steps for the pupils.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The staff relate well to the pupils and make learning enjoyable. They value the pupils' views, but do not create enough opportunities for them to contribute to their own learning by asking them to comment on their work or involving them in setting their own targets. Marking is not helpful in identifying the next steps in learning, and handwriting is not taught effectively enough. The curriculum is satisfactory. The wide range of activities broadens the pupils' horizons and contributes greatly to their enjoyment of school, but there is too little in the curriculum to develop speaking skills.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has the confidence of the school community and shows a clear commitment to improvement. Senior staff are developing leadership skills but do not have sufficient opportunity to influence key areas for improvement. The school's evaluation of its work is mostly accurate, but is more positive in tone in some areas than inspection evidence supports. For example, the school judges its capacity to improve to be good, based on the strong teamwork and the commitment of the hardworking staff, but there are still issues to resolve from the last inspection. Nevertheless, the school has sound capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

The welcoming and purposeful atmosphere helps the children to settle and engages them in the activities provided. Staff interact sensitively with the children, which promotes a feeling of safety, whilst the well-thought-out routines help to ensure that children feel secure. The children make good progress in their personal development and steady progress in other areas of learning. The curriculum is interesting, but opportunities to foster imaginative play and curiosity outdoors are underdeveloped. The coordinator promotes effective liaison with parents and is keen to extend this partnership approach. Leadership of this phase is developing, but the coordinator has too few opportunities to observe teaching and learning to help her evaluate the provision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve assessment and record keeping to ensure that it is accurate, that data are used to set appropriate learning targets, particularly for more able pupils, and that the pupils themselves are given opportunities to contribute to assessment.
- Improve the teaching of writing so that pupils have regular constructive comments on their work, that more capable pupils have demanding work and that handwriting is taught more regularly.
- Improve the leadership of senior staff by increasing opportunities for them to monitor teaching and learning and evaluate progress.

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

When children start school, their skills and knowledge are below typical levels but the sensitive support ensures that they settle well and begin to catch up. Nevertheless, at the end of the Reception Year, children still struggle with reading, writing and mathematics and some have difficulty speaking in complete sentences. These difficulties hamper performance through Key Stage 1, where test results have been below average for the last few years. The school's focus on improving literacy and numeracy in the early years is starting to pay off and standards are rising.

Through Key Stage 2, progress continues at a steady rate but picks up speed once the pupils are fluent readers. Standards in mathematics, science and reading are typical of those seen nationally, but writing is not as far forward. Although most pupils make steady progress through the key stage, the tasks do not stretch some of the more able pupils and so they do not achieve as well as they should. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well because the teaching is effective and the staff encourage them to have positive self-esteem and contribute all they can to lessons.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school's motto, 'Work Together - Learn Together', is evident at all times. The pupils get on well and their enjoyment in lessons is clear to see. Parents are right to believe that behaviour is good and that the school is prompt and effective in responding to any incidents of misbehaviour. There have been no exclusions in the last few years, and attendance levels have improved.

The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Even the youngest children have an appreciation of the feelings of others, and are keen to help each other. Pupils show tolerance and respect for different points of view and care for children that are more vulnerable. They make a good contribution to their community by carrying out routine tasks, and their enterprising behaviour raises money for worthwhile causes. They would appreciate more opportunities to comment on their own progress, but do not yet have the skills to engage wholeheartedly in this because they are not clear enough about their targets.

The pupils appreciate festivals from different cultures and this is helping them to understand the diverse nature of society. They respond well to opportunities to learn how to keep healthy and stay safe and particularly enjoy the wide range of sporting activities and competitions. These opportunities enable them to understand exactly what qualities are needed to be a good team player. However, their ability to work on their own initiative and undertake independent research is not as well developed.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The good relationships all round engender a sense of great enjoyment in lessons. Teaching assistants are deployed very well and make a good contribution to the development of individuals and groups of pupils. The pupils respond very well to all adults; they know what they have to do, and this helps lessons to run smoothly. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are included properly in all activities and given good support. The care shown to all pupils encourages them to try hard and to feel that their efforts are valued.

Learning targets are set, but not reviewed regularly enough, and the pupils are not involved sufficiently in this process. The staff do not remind pupils of their targets frequently enough in lessons or when marking work. Marking is not detailed enough to identify what the pupils need to do next and this hampers their progress.

Most lessons are lively and the right amount of work is covered each time. However, there are occasions when the pupils are kept in whole-class groups for too long and then the pupils do not learn as much as they should. This particularly affects the more capable pupils because the questions are not demanding enough for them.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum provides well for the pupils' needs through its emphasis on the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. This prepares the pupils appropriately for the next phase of their education and life beyond school. Lessons include some incidental opportunities for speaking and listening, but these are not planned regularly enough and handwriting lessons are not included frequently enough. Opportunities for enrichment through clubs and visits are good and the emphasis on physical activity promotes a healthy lifestyle.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The staff display a high level of commitment to the pupils and their care for them is plain to see. Staff enjoy good relationships with parents and professionals from a variety of backgrounds and this partnership approach supports the pupils very well. The school enjoys good relationships with the local high school and this makes transition to Year 7 smooth.

A variety of methods is in place to track academic progress, but these lack rigour and focus. Assessments are recorded regularly, but they are not as helpful as they should be because they lack sufficient detail and are not checked meticulously against national standards.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher shows good pastoral leadership and has the confidence of the school community. His determination for the pupils to succeed is bearing fruit with improved test results at Key Stage 2. One of the very effective elements of school's leadership is the way in which it inspires all staff to work hard to provide a caring environment for all its pupils. This helps pupils to have confidence in their abilities and prepares them well for life beyond school.

The senior team are developing their understanding of school effectiveness but they do not have sufficient opportunity to check the quality of teaching and learning, or monitor progress towards targets. Targets are based on assessment data, but this process is not moderated tightly enough and so the process is not as effective as it should be. Last year, the school exceeded its academic targets. There are appropriate targets for continued improvement to attendance and this is having a beneficial impact on attendance rates. Efforts to remedy issues from the last inspection have been partially successful; some good progress is evident, but the issues have not been entirely eradicated. The school has sound capacity for further improvement.

Governors are very supportive of the school and are given regular information so that they understand key priorities. Some work has begun to help them evaluate the school's performance, but this is still at an early stage of development.

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

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

Dear Children

Inspection of The Reginald Mitchell Primary School, Stoke-on-Trent ST7 1NA

Thank you for the lovely welcome to the school that Mrs Tomlinson and I received. We were impressed by your friendliness; we enjoyed looking through your work and talking to you. It is good to know that you enjoy school and feel safe and secure there. We noticed that you all have a very caring attitude and help each other to make sure everyone is happy. The staff look after you very well and make sure you enjoy school in lessons and in the super range of clubs and other activities.

We judged your school to be satisfactory; that means there are more good things about it than bad. One of the really good things is that the school helps you to grow in confidence and become helpful and confident young people who are a delight to know. One of the things that needs to improve is your writing. It is not as good as it should be, and some of you are not given hard enough work. Your teachers need to help you out by making their marking more helpful, ensuring that you know your targets, and tracking your progress more carefully. We have also asked your headteacher to make sure that some of the teachers help out in the running of the school, by checking on lessons and writing about what needs to be done next.

You can help your teachers by:

- Working hard on your writing and practising your handwriting and spellings.
- Making sure you know your targets and trying your best to achieve them.
- Looking at your teacher's comments when they mark your work and trying your best to do what they suggest.

Remember to do your best by living out your school motto to work together and learn together. I'm sure that if you do that, Reginald Mitchell would have been very proud of you all.

Best wishes to each and every one of you

Mary Hamby Lead Inspector



1 November 2007

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Lead Inspector