

Fulfen Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124209
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	314846
Inspection dates	9–10 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Doris Bell

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	409
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Phillip Tuxford
Headteacher	Robert Baker
Date of previous school inspection	26 January 2004
School address	Rugeley Road Burntwood WS7 9BJ
Telephone number	01543 510400
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This very large primary school has a below average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and few pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils in receipt of free school meals is well below average. The school has gone through several changes in staffing, including at management level, in the past three years. The headteacher was appointed in September 2006 and the present senior management team during 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school. The quality of educational provision is improving rapidly because the headteacher and senior managers have successfully created a climate where teachers enjoy teaching and pupils enjoy learning. Parents recognise this, typically describing the school as 'a happy place' where staff help their children to learn. Pupils start each day joyfully with a 'wake and shake' session that sets them and the staff up well for the work ahead. The pupils' enjoyment of school continues into lessons, where they engage well with the good range of activities planned for them. Recent improvements in the quality of teaching contribute to this as teaching increasingly caters for different learning styles.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. It is beginning to accelerate because teachers in different year groups are beginning to realise that they all have a part to play in how well pupils do by Year 6. Systems for assessing and tracking individual pupils' progress are relatively new but they demonstrate variations in progress that the school is beginning successfully to eliminate. Nevertheless, there is still some way to go to ensure that assessment information is used consistently well in planning and in lessons, particularly to provide additional challenge for more able pupils.

Provision and progress are satisfactory in the Foundation Stage and standards are above average by Year 6. However, weaknesses in writing and in pupils' ability to use and apply their mathematical skills to solve problems hinder their progress. In literacy and numeracy, teachers plan well for three different levels of ability in their class. However, they do not always respond well enough in lessons, or in their marking, to individual pupils who are ready to move on faster, particularly in mathematics. Pupils have many opportunities to write in different subjects but they do not use their writing skills well enough when they do so. Teachers' marking does not always encourage them to do this and marking is not as helpful as it could be in moving pupils' learning on. This leaves pupils unsure about how to improve their own learning to reach their targets faster.

The good quality pastoral care pupils receive contributes greatly to their good personal development and well-being. As a result, pupils behave well and show good levels of care and respect for each other and for adults. The curriculum includes a wide range of enrichment activities that contribute well to pupils' learning and personal development. Good links are starting to be made between subjects but the curriculum misses opportunities to promote, for example, information and communication technology (ICT). At present, the school does not have enough computers to enable pupils to use ICT as a natural tool for learning in all subjects.

The headteacher is a steady hand at the helm of a school poised for further improvement. His measured approach to managing change has resulted in high staff morale and strong teamwork as staff respond positively to the good guidance they receive. The relatively new senior management team is providing exceptionally good support for the headteacher. All of this is beginning to improve pupils' progress. The roles of other leaders and managers, including governors, are currently underdeveloped but there are good plans to improve them in the coming year. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory but it is now gathering pace, as is the school's currently satisfactory capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children start school with the skills and experiences expected for their age. They make satisfactory progress and reach average standards by the end of Reception. Good teamwork amongst the staff ensures that children settle quickly, enjoy learning and relate well to each other and to adults. They work and play in a safe, secure environment. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Sound planning ensures that children have a good range of learning activities across all six areas of learning with due emphasis on developing literacy skills, the weakest area on entry. However, there are not always enough opportunities for children to gain independence by choosing activities for themselves. Staff keep notes on how well children are doing on a day-to-day basis but systems to track their progress over time are not yet fully in place. The school uses the outdoor area well when it can, but budgetary constraints mean that the outdoor equipment and facilities are limited. The school has a clear and well focused action plan to deal with all of these things.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make sure teachers use all assessment information consistently well to plan work that provides the additional challenge needed to accelerate learning, especially for more able pupils.
- Improve the quality of teachers' marking in all subjects, making sure it always shows pupils clearly how to improve their work, especially when writing in different subjects.
- Give pupils more opportunities to use and apply their mathematical skills to solve real problems, and to use computers to extend their learning in different subjects.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged to be 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

Pupils' achievement, which is satisfactory overall, is improving throughout the school. Standards are above average by Year 6. Pupils write at length with a good sense of audience and purpose. In Years 1 and 2, they really enjoy writing and they present their work well. They write legibly, use punctuation accurately and for the most part, spell correctly. These aspects of English are much more variable in Years 3 to 6. For example, handwriting is not always joined and simple spelling and punctuation errors are evident still in Year 6, especially when pupils write in different subjects.

Pupils have a good understanding of basic mathematical skills. However, they do not always use and apply these skills well enough when they have problems to solve. There are too few opportunities for them to do this through real-life, hands-on activities. More able pupils do not do as well as they could in mathematics. This is because when they get everything right, as seen in their books, or their understanding forges ahead of the rest of the class, as observed in lessons, they are not often enough given harder work to do or more complex problems to solve.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school and they behave well in and out of lessons. They fully understand the importance of following a healthy lifestyle and readily take part in the wide variety of exercise activities available to them. Pupils reflect thoughtfully on a number of issues in assembly and in class as they begin to understand their place in the world. They care for and respect each other and adults, and make a good contribution to the school and wider community as school councillors and play leaders, and by raising money for charity. Younger pupils look forward to older ones helping them with their reading. Older pupils take their roles seriously. They report, for example, that the school council's influence in obtaining play equipment has improved the quality of playtimes. Pupils work and play in an atmosphere free from harassment. They know how to keep themselves safe in and out of school, report that there is little or no bullying, and are confident that staff would always help them if they did have any concerns. Attendance is satisfactory and pupils leave the school adequately prepared for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Planning within literacy and numeracy lessons is good because it takes account of pupils' different learning needs. This good practice is not always evident in other subjects. Relationships between staff and pupils are good. They contribute well to pupils' enjoyment of learning and to their good behaviour. Teachers involve pupils well in lessons, sustaining their interest and encouraging them, for example, to discuss their answers with a partner before putting their hands up. This successfully helps pupils to collect their thoughts and learn from each other. Teachers use their teaching assistants well to support pupils with learning difficulties, particularly in group work.

Systems for assessing and recording pupils' progress are improving. However, the information gained from them is not always used as effectively as it might be to accelerate pupils' progress. Where this is done well, pupils rise to the challenge of checking and improving their work as the lesson proceeds and they sometimes make excellent progress as a result. However, teachers do not often enough build on pupils' responses in lessons or through their marking to provide pupils with more challenging work. This particularly affects the progress of more able pupils and is most evident in mathematics.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school's drive to provide pupils with a more creative curriculum means that links between subjects are being used increasingly effectively to benefit pupils' learning. In one lesson, for example, the planned links between geography and history greatly extended pupils' thinking and research skills as they 'discovered' where the Vikings settled and why. The curriculum provides pupils with many opportunities for writing and it greatly enhances pupils' personal development, health and safety. The school provides pupils with weekly opportunities to use ICT to enhance their learning, and computers are being used increasingly well in literacy. However, their use as a natural tool for learning is restricted by the number of computers available. The school plans to address this as soon as finance allows.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pupils work and play in a community that laughs and smiles together because staff care deeply for them and help them to enjoy learning. Pupils and the vast majority of their parents acknowledge this. Safeguarding procedures are robust, as are those for ensuring good behaviour and promoting good attendance, and for helping pupils to deal with personal problems. Worry boxes and suggestion boxes provide pupils with an anonymous forum to voice any concerns and the school does its best to eliminate any form of harassment.

Academic guidance, though satisfactory and improving, is underdeveloped. Younger pupils enjoy the challenge of assessing and improving their work and readily point out their targets. However, older pupils are not as clear about their targets or how to reach them, and teachers do not always provide them with enough guidance on how to do so. This limits the usefulness of target-setting as a tool to accelerate pupils' learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher is successfully focusing the school on reaching increasingly challenging targets through improving how teachers use assessment information in their planning. The senior management team is particularly effective in helping him in his drive to ensure all pupils do as well as they can. Other leaders and managers are new to their roles and responsibilities. They understand them, but have not yet had the opportunity to carry them out. There is a clear timetable for them to begin to do this next year. Governors fulfil their roles satisfactorily.

Staff listen to and act on the good advice they receive from senior staff following their rigorous checks on teaching and learning. This is successfully raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can do, and increasing their awareness of their collective responsibility for what happens in Year 6. Nevertheless, there is still some way to go for all of this to be fully effective throughout the school. The school's evaluation of its own work is accurate and the school development and improvement plans provide a secure scaffold on which to build and sustain improvement.

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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	2
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?	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 Pupils

Inspection of Fulfen Primary School, Burntwood WS7 9BJ

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school this week. It was good to hear how much you enjoy school and to note that you work hard in lessons. We found that your school is satisfactory. That means it does some things well but there are things it can do better to help you learn faster. It has started to do many of them and it is getting better and better all the time. This is because the headteacher and senior managers guide the teachers well, helping them to help you learn better.

All of the staff care for you very much and want you to do well in your personal lives as well as in your learning. You show in your good behaviour and attitudes how much you care for and respect each other and the adults in your school. You told us that the school listens to you and you are obviously proud of being able to obtain the equipment that has helped to improve playtimes. You certainly know how to keep yourselves safe, fit and healthy, and clearly have a great deal of confidence in the staff to help you should you have any concerns.

We have asked the school to do the following things to improve your progress even faster.

- Make sure teachers use everything they know about how well you are doing to plan work that helps all of you to do as well as you can, particularly those of you who are able to reach the higher levels in your work.
- Make sure that when teachers mark your work, especially your writing, they always make clear to you how you can improve it.
- Give you more opportunities to use your different mathematical skills to solve problems, and to use computers more often to extend your learning in different subjects.

You can help by continuing to work hard and remembering to check and improve your work at all times. We hope you will always enjoy learning as much as you do now and wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Doris Bell Lead inspector