

St Luke's CofE (C) Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124267
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	314866
Inspection date	25 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Martin Cole

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	102
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stuart Ansell
Headteacher	Heather Sherwood
Date of previous school inspection	22 November 2004
School address	Pepper Street Silverdale Newcastle ST5 6QJ
Telephone number	01782 297445
Fax number	01782 297446

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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:

differences in attainment between subjects and between different groups of pupils

pupils' attitudes and behaviour

the guidance pupils receive on their work

provision for information and communication technology (ICT)

the effectiveness of school leaders in improving the school.

Evidence was gathered from the school's assessment information, planning and monitoring documents, observation of lessons in each class, discussions with staff and pupils, and from parents' written comments. There was no detailed investigation of other aspects of the school's work 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

The school serves a former mining village which is now an area of significant social and economic disadvantage. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds. Pupils generally start at the school with attainment well below that expected for their age. An above average percentage of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Attainment on entry varies considerably from year to year and this is reflected in corresponding differences in the standards achieved by different year groups.

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. Pupils achieve well. Both at the Foundation Stage and in Years 1 to 6, pupils make good progress in their academic learning and take great strides in their personal development too. There has been much improvement in the school, particularly in the last year, which reflects the good, determined leadership and management provided by the headteacher, with good support from senior colleagues.

In 2007, the oldest pupils' results in national tests were very close to the national average. This represented good progress since pupils began at the school with below average attainment. The test results were a considerable improvement over previous years and the overall averages would have been higher still but for the effect of some low scores by a significant number of pupils who started at the school only weeks before the tests. The school's thorough and regular assessments show pupils throughout the school are making good progress during the present school year, although this is less so in writing than in other areas. Present Year 6 standards are below average, despite good progress, because an above average proportion of these pupils experience learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

An important reason for pupils' good academic achievement is their equally successful personal development. Good behaviour and positive attitudes provide an ideal basis for learning. This is the consequence of teachers' skilful encouragement of self-discipline and the stimulating, calm and happy lessons they provide. Pupils greatly enjoy school. There are many smiling faces throughout the school day. Pupils say that lessons are fun and that they much enjoy their good relationships with both adults and fellow pupils.

The staff make very caring and warm relationships with pupils, and pupils follow this lead in their good relationships with each other. A parent described 'the love that you feel when visiting'. Good relationships help the school to be particularly successful in building pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Pupils become increasingly self-assured, independent and responsible in the way they join in and contribute to school life. Pupils are adamant that bullying is not a feature of this school. They, and their parents, have great confidence in the staff to help them overcome any upsets. Rigorous welfare procedures ensure pupils feel safe and secure at school and good guidance has led them to a clear understanding of how to stay healthy. Close links with outside agencies contribute to the provision of the help necessary for pupils' well-being. Good care and guidance are supplemented by special provisions like the 'nurture group' which meets on some afternoons. Here, a small group of pupils learn more informally with adults within an intimate setting where they grow in confidence and resolve emotional issues through trusting relationships. Attendance is satisfactory; the great majority of pupils attend well, but despite the school's best efforts a few parents persist in allowing unexplained absence by their children.

All of these positive features of pupils' good personal development provide a sound grounding for pupils' present and future education and for the demands of later adult life. Pupils are able to take full advantage of the good teaching which is both challenging and supportive. Careful assessment procedures give the school a good understanding of pupils' abilities and needs. This is generally used well to plan suitable work for them. However, a small number of the most able pupils are not always fully challenged by their tasks. As one of them put it, 'Sometimes we could do harder work'. Pupils who need extra help, sometimes because of learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are quickly identified and effective arrangements are made for them. Teachers

give pupils good guidance on their work through discussion, in marking their books and by setting them targets for improving their work. However, some pupils have difficulty remembering all of their targets. The curriculum is satisfactory, with some strengths and one significant weakness. Both the Foundation Stage curriculum and the planning of support for pupils with learning or behavioural difficulties are strengths. So, too, is the wide range of educational visits and visitors and extra optional activities that enrich learning, generate interest and increase enjoyment. Good links with other primary and secondary schools and with the community substantially extend pupils' opportunities and experiences. However, opportunities for pupils to learn through using ICT are too few. This reflects both limited equipment and a current lack of the staff expertise needed to lead this aspect of the curriculum.

A strength of the school's good leadership and management is the senior staff's good understanding of the school's performance and how it can be still better. A clear determination to raise standards has led to extensive recent training and support for teachers, taking good advantage of external sources of expertise. This has been successful, although its impact has been hindered by staffing turbulence and changes in the recent past. One consequence is some present inconsistency in the way a new approach to the teaching of writing is being implemented. However, greater stability with staffing mean they are working very closely together in a shared commitment to raise standards and taking the school forward at a brisk pace. Much has been done to improve the school's partnership with parents and those parents who commented almost all gave the school much praise. However, a good many parents do not respond to the school's attempts to involve them in their children's education.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children in the Reception class soon become happy, confident and enthusiastic, thanks to the warm, encouraging and caring atmosphere staff create. Significant recent improvements in this part of the school mean that good teaching and a good curriculum are now promoting good progress in relation to the children's starting points. Current Reception children are on track to complete the Foundation Stage with broadly average attainment in most areas of learning. There is careful day-to-day assessment of the children which guides effective planning of the next steps in their learning. Child-chosen and play activities are carefully blended with structured and intensive adult-led learning. Activities are imaginatively designed to be both instructive and fun.

What the school should do to improve further

- Give pupils more opportunity to develop and apply ICT skills across the curriculum by improving resources and staff expertise.
- Raise achievement in writing by ensuring a full consistency in the way the subject is taught.
- Ensure the tasks given to more able pupils always challenge them.

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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?	2
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	3
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?	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?	2
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?	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

26 April 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Luke's CofE Primary School, Newcastle under Lyme, ST5 6QJ

I would like to thank all of you for your very friendly welcome when I visited your school recently. I enjoyed meeting you and talking to you.

It was good to see that you enjoy going to school. You clearly feel safe and happy there. I also saw that you get on very well with the adults and with each other. You have a sensible attitude to school. You work hard and you behave well. All of this is helping you to make good progress. Most of you achieve the standard of work that you should. I was disappointed though to learn that a few of you sometimes stay away from school even though you are not ill.

Some of you told me how well the teachers and the other adults look after you. I saw for myself that they give you lots of help and encouragement. The teachers give you good lessons which are often fun. They provide almost all of you with suitable work to do. Sometimes, though, a few of you could do harder work. The teachers also organise lots of interesting visits which you told me you enjoy.

I have said that yours is a good school. The adults who are in charge of the school are doing a good job. They are working hard to improve the school. However, I think there are three things that would make the school still better.

- I think you need more computers in school and more opportunities to use computers in different subjects.
- I believe some of your writing lessons work better than others, so I have asked the school to iron out the differences.
- I have asked the teachers to provide harder work for those of you who can do it, so that you make the best possible progress.

I hope you will make the most of these new opportunities and I wish you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

M H Cole Lead inspector

26 April 2008

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M H Cole
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