

Sankey Valley St James Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133676
Local Authority	Warrington
Inspection number	316189
Inspection dates	28–29 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Janette Corlett

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	161
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev Stephen Boyd
Headteacher	Mrs Vivienne Formby
Date of previous school inspection	15 September 2003
School address	Dorchester Road off Raikes Close Great Sankey Warrington Cheshire WA5 1XE
Telephone number	01925 659307
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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 which attracts pupils from a range of public and private housing in the local area. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is above the national average, and the immediate vicinity of the school includes areas of significant social and economic deprivation. The majority of children start school with standards that are below those expected. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The vast majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds and very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The number of pupils starting and leaving school at times other than the normal admission or departure dates is higher than that found nationally.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness of the school is satisfactory, and pupils' personal development and well-being are good. The school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection and this is demonstrated by the way in which pupils are now confident in taking responsibility for finding things out for themselves and trying out their writing skills across a broad range of subjects.

Pupils enjoy school. They feel safe and understand the importance of keeping fit and eating healthily. This is due to the school's good provision for physical activities and its encouragement for pupils to choose healthy options in meals and snacks. Attendance is satisfactory and behaviour is good. Pupils are polite and courteous to one another and show respect for adults in the school. Close links with the Church and the wider community foster pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They learn Christian values and traditions along with those of other cultures and faiths, and this prepares them well for their future in modern British society. The great majority of parents feel welcome in school, and know that their children are safe and happy in a warm and caring environment. Effective partnership working with school networks promotes good achievement in art and design, music and technology. All these experiences stimulate enjoyment in learning and nurture pupils' talents and interests.

Pupils make satisfactory progress and reach standards at the end of Year 6 which are broadly average in English, mathematics and science. Standards in writing are lower than those in reading because pupils are not always given clear guidance on how to improve their written work. More able pupils are not always given sufficiently challenging tasks and activities, and this means that not enough pupils reach the highest levels in the statutory tests in English and mathematics at the end of Years 2 and 6. The school uses effective strategies, including good use of well-trained teaching assistants, to support pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. As a result, these pupils make good progress.

Teaching is satisfactory with some good features. Teachers are approachable and friendly. They really care for their pupils' welfare and this results in pupils' positive attitudes to learning. Classrooms are well-managed and the high quality of displays around the school reflects the way teachers value pupils' work and the school's strong provision for pupils to develop their creative skills through music and the arts. Teachers set targets for improvement in English and mathematics, but there are too many targets to allow pupils to fully understand them and be aware of the next steps in their learning.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher and newly-established leadership team have a strong commitment to the welfare of all pupils within the school. Their systems for monitoring and evaluating standards and achievement are not sufficiently rigorous to enable them to have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses, give a clear account of its performance or offer accurate advice to individual pupils. This means that progress is not always as rapid as it should be. Governors are supportive of the school and fulfil their statutory duties with regard to safeguarding children and promoting inclusion. The school gives satisfactory value for money and has a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

The school's provision in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory with some good features. Children enter the Nursery with levels of skill and development which are below those expected for children of similar age, particularly in communication and language. They make satisfactory progress overall, but the majority of children have not reached the expected standards by the time they enter Year 1 in most areas of learning.

The school has good introductory procedures to enable children to settle quickly and happily into school. Relationships with adults are strong and the children are well cared for. Similarly, teaching and support staff communicate well with parents. Parents really appreciate this and also the help they receive in supporting their children's learning at home. Children's behaviour and attitudes to learning are good because they enjoy the activities planned for them. Teachers' planning and assessment procedures enable them to match tasks to children's needs, particularly those of less able children. Teachers do not always make full use of play activities and the classroom environment to allow children to practise their speech and language skills. A newly appointed Foundation Stage phase leader is providing satisfactory leadership and management and has a clear vision for the development of the unit.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the rigour of school self-evaluation processes so that pupils not making enough progress are quickly identified and supported.
- Improve target-setting procedures to enable pupils to know and understand the next steps in their learning.
- Raise standards in writing.
- Provide tasks and activities with a sufficient level of challenge for more able pupils throughout the school.

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

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. From generally lower than expected levels of development on entering the school, pupils make good progress in Key Stage 1 and reach broadly average standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2. Following satisfactory progress in Key Stage 2, by the end of Year 6, standards in English, mathematics and science are again broadly in line with the national average. Standards in English are slightly below those in mathematics and science because pupils do not make enough progress in writing. Too few of the more able pupils reach above average standards in English and mathematics.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. They are considerate towards one another and take pride in welcoming visitors to their school. Well-organised residential visits from Year 2 to Year 6 promote pupils' independence, confidence and self-esteem. They show

respect for other cultures and ways of life. Pupils enjoy taking on responsibilities within the school such as becoming school councillors and 'playground friends', and participate enthusiastically in the many extra-curricular activities on offer. All this adds to their enjoyment of learning. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe through Road Safety and Stranger Awareness teaching and have a good awareness of Internet safety and the dangers of drug abuse. They say that there are few incidents of bullying and, on the rare occasions it occurs, adults deal with it effectively. The school encourages pupils to contribute to the wider community through fundraising for local and national charities and taking part in local events. Pupils acquire satisfactory skills in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) to support them in their future education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching is satisfactory with some good features. Teachers know their pupils well and use skilful questioning to ensure they can all engage in class discussions. Classrooms provide stimulating learning environments. They are well-organised and this means that pupils are able to become independent learners and treat resources and materials with respect.

Pupils' written work is marked regularly, and they are encouraged to assess their own progress. However, teachers' comments on their work do not always indicate the next steps in their learning and how to achieve them. As a result, progress is less rapid than it should be. Teachers work hard to make lessons interesting and relevant to the experiences of their pupils in the world beyond the school. They do not always select tasks and activities which are sufficiently challenging for more able pupils, and this means they sometimes mark time and do not achieve as much as they could. Teaching assistants are well-deployed in meeting the needs of pupils identified as having learning difficulties, and, due to their skilled and sensitive support strategies, these pupils make good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school's provision for the curriculum and other activities is satisfactory and has some good features. Good provision is made for pupils with learning difficulties, but more able pupils are not always provided with well planned activities to extend their learning. The curriculum supports the development of healthy lifestyle choices and personal safety well. The curriculum is enriched through a range of visits and visitors to the school and a variety of after-school clubs. For example, pupils appreciated a visit from a historian who engaged them in a study of their local area during the first day of the inspection. Themed weeks, such as the annual 'multi-cultural week' enhance the creativity of the curriculum through effectively linking subjects and giving a relevant context for learning. A visiting specialist teaches German to all pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2. The school's provision for ICT is satisfactory. Pupils have regular access to the computer suite, but have few opportunities to use ICT in their classrooms to support their learning in other subject areas.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. This is a very caring school where staff work hard to build pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Strong teamwork ensures that the needs of vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are met and they are fully involved in the life of the school. Effective partnership working and good links with outside agencies provide good support for pupils and their families. It is the academic guidance aspect that prevents this section being good overall. Pupils are not steered well enough in how to improve their work and this affects their progress. Procedures to safeguard children, including child protection, risk assessments, health and safety and safe recruitment of staff, meet current statutory requirements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher and senior leaders have the interests of the pupils very much at heart and work tirelessly to secure the best of provision for them. Apart from the headteacher, all school leaders are new to their roles and bring fresh ideas and a broad range of experience to help the school build on its strengths and continue to improve. However, due to their relatively short time in post, their impact is limited in terms of raising standards and achievement. The school's monitoring and self-evaluation procedures are not sufficiently rigorous to enable school leaders to make secure judgements on the school's performance. As a result, priorities for improvement are not clearly linked to measurable gains in terms of pupils' progress and this sometimes limits the effectiveness of actions taken to raise standards. Governors are supportive and involved in the life of the school, but do not always have sufficient information on progress and standards to be fully effective in challenging school leaders to account for the school's performance.

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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	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

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

We thoroughly enjoyed our recent visit to your school and would like to thank you for your welcome, and for being so polite and helpful. A special thank you to those of you who gave up your lunch break to chat with us and tell us how you enjoy coming to school where you feel safe and know how to keep yourselves fit and healthy.

We think your school is satisfactory. This means that there are many good things happening but some areas where we feel changes are needed to make sure you can all achieve as much as you can. We were particularly impressed with your artwork which teachers have displayed so beautifully around the school. Teachers are very friendly and kind, and they work incredibly hard to make learning exciting and fun. We also think you are very lucky to have so many chances to visit interesting places and have exciting visitors come into school to help you enjoy learning.

We are asking your teachers to help make things even better by:

- regularly checking how well you are doing so that they can quickly give you some extra support if you need it
- simplifying your targets so that you really understand them and know how to improve your work
- helping you to improve your writing
- making sure that the work you are given in lessons challenges each one of you to make the most of your abilities.

You can help your teachers by really listening to their instructions and always trying to do your very best.

Good luck for the future!