

Medlock Valley Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133710
Local Authority	Oldham
Inspection number	316206
Inspection dates	23–24 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Sarah Drake

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	274
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cllr G Ball
Headteacher	Mrs Michelle Lee
Date of previous school inspection	13 October 2003
School address	Deanshut Road Fitton Hill Oldham Lancashire OL8 2PN
Telephone number	0161 770 8199
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school was opened in 2002 as the result of an amalgamation of an infant and junior school. The school is larger than average and is growing rapidly. It serves a significantly disadvantaged area where many families move into and out of their accommodation over short periods of time. The proportion of pupils eligible to receive a free school meal is three times the national average. The majority of pupils are White British. Over the past two years the proportion of pupils belonging to a wide range of minority ethnic groups has increased significantly to 20%. Broadly average numbers speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average and growing. The school moved into newly built accommodation in January 2006 and is participating in the local authority's Intensive Support Programme. During the summer term of 2007 the deputy headteacher took on the role of acting headteacher. The executive headteacher took up her post in September 2007.

The on-site children's day-care provider, Families First, was inspected in March 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

After a period of considerable upheaval, this school is now providing its pupils with a satisfactory standard of education. It shows many signs of improvement. Despite standards in English and mathematics in Key Stage 2 being well below average, for the first time in the school's history, pupils' overall achievement is satisfactory and broadly in line with expectations.

Children enter the Nursery with very low skills and make good progress in the exciting, well organised Foundation Stage unit. This good progress continues through Key Stage 1 but slows in Key Stage 2. The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Although at each key stage some high quality teaching stimulates pupils to work hard and make good progress, it is not yet of this consistently good quality throughout school. This, together with a satisfactory curriculum, leads to pupils making satisfactory progress overall.

Good quality care, guidance and support help pupils to grow in self-esteem and understanding of their own and others' special qualities. They enjoy school and contribute well to the strong sense of community that makes Medlock Valley a happy place to work. Rising attendance levels, satisfactory behaviour and pupils' ability to work cooperatively demonstrate their growing readiness to secure their future economic well-being. Their good understanding of how to stay safe and healthy has been recognised by the school's achievement of the Activemark and Gold Tooth Friendly award. Pupils' personal development is good.

Satisfactory leadership and management have guided the school through a difficult period and helped improve pupils' achievement. Strong support from the local authority has helped to identify specific areas for improvement and hone staff's skills so that they can focus their hard work effectively in order to improve the quality of pupils' learning. Since the arrival of the executive headteacher in September 2007 the pace of change has greatly increased. Staff morale is high, all are aware of what needs to be done and they are growing increasingly confident about taking on responsibility. New methods of working and clear criteria for measuring success are understood and accepted by all but have not yet had time to become a consistent part of daily practice. Consequently, the leadership has not yet been able to evaluate the effectiveness of these recent developments on improving pupils' progress. Pupils say that the school 'is getting better'; parents and carers are very supportive and becoming increasingly involved in both fund-raising and their children's education; partnerships with the local high school and children's daycare provider are strong. The school has satisfactory capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children get a flying start to their education in the Foundation Stage. When joining the Nursery they show confidence and fearlessness but have very weak skills in all other areas of learning. In the busy, bright, happy environment they make good progress but their skills are still below those expected for their age by the time they enter Year 1. Their creative development and ability to communicate and calculate are particularly weak. Teamwork among staff and children features strongly in the Foundation Stage unit, under the leadership of a strong manager. Consistent expectations, positive reminders and much use of praise provide the stability and warmth that allow the children to flourish. Their thoughts and contributions are encouraged and greatly valued. They evaluate their own learning and help to decide when it is time to move

on to the next target. Staff combine careful recording of children's achievements with lots of fun. For example, a small group of children was entranced when creating magic spells from 'bats' breath' and 'witches' cackles' while their teacher skilfully encouraged them to extend their vocabulary and counting skills as well as their cooperation and imagination. All areas of the unit are well planned with a clear focus for learning and accessible, good quality resources. Staff are currently working to ensure that the impressive outdoor provision is used to as good effect as the indoors to promote all areas of learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English and mathematics, especially at Key Stage 2.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning through the school so that it is at least good.
- Ensure that the new methods of working are implemented consistently and evaluate their effectiveness on improving pupils' 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

Up until 2007, standards at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 had been on a rising trend. In 2007 the test results at the end of both key stages fell. Standards in writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6 were particularly low. Both the Year 2 and Year 6 classes included high proportions of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and of pupils who arrived at the school during the key stage, some of whom were at an early stage of learning English. This affected the overall results. Nonetheless, the great majority of the Year 6 pupils who had been at the school throughout Key Stage 2 achieved or exceeded the suitably challenging targets set for them. Current work in lessons and books shows that pupils are making satisfactory progress but in Key Stage 2 this is not yet strong enough to raise standards further. The introduction of a new reading scheme is helping to raise boys' interest and achievement in this area. There are signs in pupils' recent work that the close focus on subtraction in mathematics and sentence construction in writing is beginning to have an impact.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development mean that the school operates as an orderly community in which good quality relationships create a supportive atmosphere. Pupils of different abilities and ethnicity respond well to staff's strong focus on promoting their social and emotional development. They work and play together harmoniously and even in the Foundation Stage see difference as a positive aspect of life. Displays of artwork relating to harvest and Eid demonstrate pupils' appreciation of the similarities between different cultures' celebrations. For much of the time behaviour is good because it is well managed, but inspectors judge it to be satisfactory, overall as too many pupils still find self-discipline hard to achieve. Satisfactory and improving attendance levels confirm pupils' enjoyment of school and willingness to join in. They proudly and competently take on responsibilities such as the roles of lunchtime helpers, playground buddies and school councillors. When pupils were asked by the new leadership team to identify their requirements for 'Our ideal school' they made sensible

contributions that have found their way into the development plan. A sense of community and belonging is palpable throughout the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers plan interesting activities which are usually well matched to pupils' different abilities. They consistently use their evaluations of the lesson's success when planning future work. Teaching assistants generally provide strong support; on occasions, as seen in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, teamwork between the teacher and assistant adds real dynamism to the lesson so pupils' learning moves forward at a good pace. Teachers confidently use interactive whiteboards to clarify the point of the lesson and outline what pupils are expected to do, but sometimes talk for too long and provide too much information. This means pupils have to sit passively and listen, their concentration wavers and the pace flags. Occasionally in Key Stage 2, some pupils' behaviour disrupts their own and others' learning. Where teachers involve pupils actively in sharing their thoughts with talking partners, doing practical activities or demonstrating and explaining their methods of working, learning comes to life and progresses well. Attractive classroom displays provide good guidance material for pupils, but these are seldom referred to in lessons. Teachers' marking helps pupils understand their success in relation to the learning objectives; firm plans are in place to develop this so that it relates to specific targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is currently under review with links beginning to be made between subjects that are making learning more purposeful and enjoyable for pupils. Currently it places suitable emphasis on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, including the provision of a range of extra support for those who find learning more difficult or who are at an early stage of learning English. It does not yet enthuse them to a love of learning. Pupils' personal and emotional development are well catered for with assembly themes carried through effectively into the rest of the day's learning. Visits, such as that from the fire brigade during the inspection, help to bring to life important messages, for example the need to act safely and sensibly. Good quality resources and staff's competence help pupils to develop sufficient skills in information and communication technology lessons to be able to use them as a tool for learning across a range of subjects. Specialist provision means that one whole year group has the opportunity to learn a brass instrument during the school day.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and are confident that they can seek help from any member of staff. They also state that bullying or other unpleasant incidents are rare and swiftly dealt with. Arrangements are in place for protecting and safeguarding pupils. The learning mentors provide listening ears for pupils' problems, a calming lunchtime games club and more intensive support for some individuals. Their input is having a positive impact on pupils' attendance, behaviour and self-confidence. Good procedures help pupils to enter, move through and leave the school well prepared for each stage of education. Pupils' individual needs, whether because they find learning difficult or because they are gifted and talented, are becoming

increasingly well catered for although the success criteria on individual education plans are not always sufficiently sharply focused. Pupils appreciate the challenge presented by the newly introduced bronze, silver and gold curriculum targets and are keen to move to the next level. Teachers provide them with helpful oral and written guidance about how to do so.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The senior leadership team, well supported by the local authority, has carried the school through a difficult period, with three headteachers in six months and a significant amount of staff absence and change. With some longstanding members and some newer to their roles, the school now has stability and clear direction with all staff working together in a positive manner in the pupils' best interest. It has increasingly strong systems in place but many of these are too new to be fully embedded into practice, for example the new Key Stage 2 leader has begun to model and coach less experienced staff to raise standards of teaching and learning, but this has not yet had time to have a measurable impact.

Since the previous inspection, attendance levels, the management of pupils' behaviour and partnerships with parents and outside agencies such as Families First have all improved significantly. The arrival of the inspirational executive headteacher has galvanised the whole school community into further, well focused action. Staff are now being given the time and opportunity to develop their skills so they have the confidence to carry out their roles effectively. All members of the school have contributed to its new development plan, which is firmly founded on ensuring the best outcomes for pupils' personal and academic well-being. Open communication ensures that all staff are very clear where efforts should be focused and how success can be achieved. A system is now in place to assess and monitor pupils' progress that all teachers understand and can use to highlight where extra support or challenge is needed. Governors are supportive of the school and have been instrumental in procuring its high quality new accommodation. They have a strong handle on finance, ensuring that the school provides satisfactory value for money, but are at an early stage of challenging the school about pupils' achievement.

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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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
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	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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?	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?	3
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	3
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	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**

Thank you all for the warm welcome that you gave the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you and finding out what it is like to be a pupil at Medlock Valley. We were very impressed by your lovely new building and by how well you all help to look after it.

I am pleased to tell you that yours is a satisfactory school which is showing many signs of improvement. Your attendance and punctuality have got better over the past few years - well done! Your behaviour is usually good but we have judged it to be satisfactory because a small number of pupils still spoil lessons for everyone even though they are old enough to think about others, not just themselves. Most of you are considerate of others and it was good to see so many of you helping each other in lessons and at break and lunch times.

Children have great fun in the Foundation Stage unit and learn lots of new things. All your teachers organise interesting things for you to do and they generally explain them clearly. They also help you to understand how to improve your work. We were pleased to hear that you like your new targets and find them helpful. Adults in school look after you well so that you feel confident that you can share any concerns that you have and increase your understanding of how to stay safe.

Your senior teachers have an accurate view of what is good about your school and what needs to improve - it is great that you helped them to decide what needs to be done first. We have confirmed that they need to make sure that all the teaching is of good quality to help you raise the standards of your work. This is especially the case for pupils in Years 3 to 6 in English and mathematics. Also, the school has had a lot of changes recently and it now needs to make sure that everyone consistently puts the new ways of working into practice and that these help you to do better with your work.

Your jobs are to continue to enjoy school and remember how important it is to attend regularly so you don't miss out on learning interesting new things.