

Smithdown Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131597
Local Authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	319249
Inspection dates	3–4 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Stephen Wall

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	209
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Norman Christian
Headteacher	Mrs Crowe
Date of previous school inspection	22 February 2007
School address	Chatsworth Drive Liverpool Merseyside L7 6LJ
Telephone number	0151 7096229
Fax number	0151 7096229

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This average size primary school serves an inner city area of very challenging social and economic circumstances. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is well above average. So, too, are the numbers of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, those who have English as an additional language and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The number of pupils who enter and leave the school at times other than the usual is also well above average. The school has gained the Healthy Schools Award and Sports Activemark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. The school is now providing a satisfactory and improving education for its pupils. Good progress has been made in tackling the issues for improvement identified at the last inspection, although the full impact of many actions has yet to be felt. For example, the quality of teaching has improved and is now good overall. It is taking time, however, for good teaching to overcome a lengthy legacy of persistent underachievement. As a result, progress is, as yet, only satisfactory. Pupils are adapting gradually to a higher level of challenge in lessons and are beginning to learn more effectively.

From well below average starting points, pupils are making satisfactory and improving progress as they move through the school. Recent improvements in the quality of teaching in Years 1 and 2 are starting to increase pupils' enjoyment and raise achievement. However, standards are not yet as high as they should be in reading, writing and mathematics. Attainment in the 2007, Year 6 national tests rose significantly in mathematics and science. Standards in English, however, remained exceptionally low because pupils' basic writing skills are not as high as they should be. No pupil attained the higher levels in English or mathematics in 2007 because the school is not fully meeting the needs of its higher attaining pupils. Improvements to the quality of teaching have been achieved largely by the introduction of more regular and rigorous checks on the quality. This has resulted in higher expectations and a shared understanding of what constitutes good teaching. Teaching and learning are well supported by the much improved curriculum, which is now good. It is much richer in giving pupils opportunities to practise their basic skills across a wider range of subjects.

Pupils' personal development and well-being and the level of care, guidance and support the school provides are strengths of the school; both of these aspects are good. They enable the school to overcome the personal, social and emotional challenges experienced by a significant minority. Pupils enjoy school. They behave well. They are polite and welcoming to visitors. They are particularly keen to help the many pupils who are new to the school or who enter the school with little or no English. These pupils settle happily into the school because induction procedures are highly effective. Good provision for pupils with English as an additional language enables them to make similar, and in some cases, even better progress compared to the other pupils. Racial harmony is strong, as is pupils' respect for other cultures. The school's hard work to improve its use of assessment to support and guide pupils' academic progress is starting to pay dividends; pupils say that they know much better how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management of the school are satisfactory and improving. Leaders and managers are now tackling previous deficiencies with determination. The local authority has been pivotal in supporting leaders and managers to tackle barriers to raising standards and achievement. The headteacher provides a clear vision for the future direction of the school. Improvements to the quality of teaching and pupils' better achievement indicate that the school has good capacity to improve further. The school is now giving satisfactory and improving value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The quality of education provided for children in the Foundation Stage is good. Children settle quickly into school routines, feel safe, grow in confidence and behave well. They show enthusiasm and enjoyment in their learning as a result of a stimulating and nurturing environment. Children work well together. They learn to share equipment and move smoothly and safely from one activity to the next. In all areas of their learning, a good balance is maintained between teaching children new skills and encouraging them to explore and learn independently. Outdoor provision is used well to extend children's learning. Teaching assistants provide good support to the many vulnerable children with additional needs. They help to promote a strong emphasis on valuing the different backgrounds and abilities of all children. The Foundation Stage leader provides good leadership and management. She is now developing closer curricular links with Year 1 to make the transition to a more academic curriculum more effective. Most children enter the Nursery with levels of attainment well below those usually expected, especially in their language and communication skills and in their social skills. In relation to their starting points children make good progress in all areas of their learning through this key stage.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics at Key Stage 1.
- Improve standards in English at Key Stage 2, especially in writing.
- Make sure that the needs of higher attaining pupils are met so that they achieve as well as they should.

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

Improved teaching and more rigorous checks on pupils' progress are reversing a long and persistent trend of declining standards. In the 2007, Year 6 national tests, standards rose significantly in mathematics and science. The school met its targets in these subjects. However, in English, pupils' weak writing skills depressed results; the target was missed by a considerable margin. The improving quality of teaching and the higher expectation of what pupils can achieve are leading to more demanding targets being set for the next two years in both Year 2 and Year 6. Assessment data and observations of pupils' work indicate that these more demanding targets are well founded and realistic. The school makes good provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for those who speak English as an additional language. This enables them to achieve as well as the other pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They have positive attitudes to school. Pupils report that they feel safe in school and know who they should turn to if they have any concerns. They have a good awareness of how to lead a fit and healthy lifestyle. Attendance is below average but rising year-on-year because the school does all it can to

promote the importance of regular attendance. Punctuality is improving because there are effective systems in place to motivate pupils. For example, there is an interesting wall display of rockets showing attendance and punctuality for each class. Pupils enjoy taking on a range of responsibilities, such as play leaders. They also take part in a number of events in the local community, including fund-raising. The school council makes an impressive contribution. It has helped playtimes to be an enjoyable experience for all by requesting and obtaining a great deal of new equipment. Pupils develop good cooperative skills and learn how to be independent. Overall, the basic skills they acquire equip them satisfactorily for secondary school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching is improving rapidly. Several factors are serving to bring about this improvement. These include rigorous checks on its quality, more effective use of assessment data and good use of learning support assistants. Pupils say, 'teachers expect us to do a lot more now rather than just listening or copying things down or filling in gaps'. Many pupils have a limited concentration span, so sensibly teachers plan their lessons to include a wide variety of activities to keep pupils motivated and interested. The introduction of 'learning walls' to help reinforce what pupils have been learning and to remind them of the skills to use in their work has proved both popular and effective as a teaching and learning tool. Teachers have good subject knowledge which they are using to good effect to pose demanding questions and make work more challenging for the majority of pupils. However, higher attaining pupils are not yet consistently challenged. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly. Their comments are useful in telling pupils what they need to do to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school has made good improvements to the curriculum since the time of the last inspection. Good features evident then have been maintained, such as the way the curriculum supports pupils' personal development through lessons in personal, social, health and citizenship education. In addition, the curriculum helps pupils to be fit and healthy. There is a good range of activities outside lessons and plenty of valuable visits and visitors to school. Where the curriculum has improved is in relation to the way it is planned. Opportunities to develop basic skills of literacy and numeracy in other subjects are now planned for and senior staff check on how well they are implemented. Teachers are developing a curriculum that recognises the links between subjects and this enhances pupils' enjoyment. The curriculum also reflects well the rich diversity of cultures in school and celebrates them. This contributes very well to pupils' self-esteem and confidence.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The guidance the school provides for pupils has improved since the last inspection. The staff now assess pupils' progress in English and mathematics rigorously. They use the information to track pupils' progress and plan appropriate work for them. Pupils have a good grasp on how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. The good levels of care and support provided by staff have been maintained. All aspects of child protection, health and safety and

the safe recruitment of staff are in place. Staff know pupils well. There is good support from trained learning assistants, a learning mentor and outside specialists. This effective support helps pupils newly arrived in school, those learning English as an additional language and the more vulnerable to settle in and make progress. A wide range of intervention programmes for groups of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities as well as one-to-one support help these pupils to make satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leaders and managers are growing in confidence as they see the results of their efforts to raise standards and achievement starting to pay off. Leaders and managers are discovering that the more rigorous they are in tackling deficiencies, the more rewarding their work becomes and the more prepared staff are to help bring about necessary improvement. This also applies to governors whose newly formed 'monitoring committee' is starting to hold the school to account by checking more rigorously on the school's performance. The school's procedures for self-evaluation are thorough. They give the school a clear understanding of what needs to be tackled. The school improvement plan provides a good foundation for actions, with clear criteria to evaluate their impact and success. Subject managers are now clearer in their roles and have started to play their part in checking on performance in their curriculum areas in order to help raise standards further. Leaders and managers are setting much more demanding targets which reflect the recent improvements in pupils' achievements brought about by better teaching and learning.

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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	2

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	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?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
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	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	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 for making both inspectors so welcome when we came to visit your school recently. We enjoyed talking to many of you. What you told us helped us judge how well your school is doing.

We think that your school is providing you with a satisfactory standard of education. Many of you told us that you thought the school was getting better and better and we agree. I think your teachers are working very hard to make sure your lessons are interesting. You told us that your teachers are expecting more of you and making work a bit harder and we agree. Because of this we think the progress you are making is gradually getting better and better.

We were impressed with how well you behave and with how well you all get along together regardless of background. It was really good to see how well you all helped the pupils who arrive in school from other countries unable to speak much English. They settle in very quickly thanks to your concern and help.

We have asked your school to do three things to make your school even better.

- We want standards in reading, writing and mathematics to be higher in Years 1 and 2.
- We want your teachers to work hard with Years 3 to 6 pupils to help them to improve in English, especially in their writing.
- We want your teachers to make sure that those of you who are fast learners achieve as well as you should.

We are sure that you will continue to work hard and do your best to help your teachers keep up the improvements that have already been achieved and help your school go from strength to strength in future.