

Blanford Mere Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103792
Local Authority	Dudley
Inspection number	323897
Inspection date	13 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Melvyn Hemmings

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	255
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Allan Weaver
Headteacher	Nikki Miller
Date of previous school inspection	7 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	7 November 2005
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Mimosa Walk Kingswinford DY6 7EA
Telephone number	01384 818365
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors who investigated the overall effectiveness of the school and the following issues:

- the reasons for the decline in standards in mathematics in 2008
- the effectiveness of strategies introduced after the last inspection to improve pupils' writing skills and raise attendance
- the extent to which pupils are involved in evaluating for themselves how well they are doing and how they might improve.

Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation form, assessment and tracking records, observations of the school at work, discussions with staff, chair of governors and pupils. The parental questionnaire responses were analysed. Other aspects of the school were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors 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 the report.

Description of the school

The school is larger than average and has Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average, as is the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. Governors manage a breakfast club and an after school club that are popular and oversubscribed.

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. It has some outstanding features and provides pupils with a very friendly and stimulating environment in which to learn. The overwhelming majority of parents are rightly proud of the school and the wide range of exciting activities their children experience. One parental comment is typical of many, 'My child enjoys school and lessons are always looked forward to. There is always a wide variety of activities to take part in.'

Pupils' outstanding personal development means they behave in an exemplary manner and are very kind and considerate to others. They show a great deal of enjoyment in coming to school and lots of enthusiasm in all their activities. Their excellent spiritual development enables them to have an outstanding awareness of their own and others' beliefs and empathy for others. Pupils are keen to take on responsibilities, such as being a member of the school council, and in so doing they make an excellent contribution to the life of the school. They also contribute very well to the wider community through fundraising for local charities and taking part in local sporting, musical and art events. Pupils are very aware of the need to eat a healthy diet and take regular exercise and are adopting healthy lifestyles effectively. They also have a very good awareness of how to stay safe. Pupils are prepared well for their future lives.

Good leadership and management are central to the school's success. The headteacher has a perceptive understanding of the needs of the school and provides focused educational direction. Other senior leaders ably support her and have a clear vision for school improvement that is shared by all involved in the school. Leaders check the school's performance carefully and are adept at identifying and prioritising areas for development. They then take decisive action to bring about improvement, as is seen in the way the issues from the last inspection have been tackled robustly. A variety of strategies has been introduced to improve pupils' writing skills. These include a stronger emphasis on pupils constructing sentences that are more complex with accurate punctuation and spelling. Teachers set challenging targets for pupils to achieve and use marking more effectively to guide them to improve the quality of their writing. These strategies have proved successful and standards in writing have improved and are above average. Leaders have worked successfully with parents and the educational welfare officer to improve pupils' rate of attendance and this is now above the national average. Community cohesion is promoted well, particularly regarding the school and local community. The school is very inclusive and equality of opportunity is excellent. Governors support the school well and effectively hold leaders to account for its performance. The school's recent track record of promoting improvement shows the capacity to make any necessary changes in the future is good.

Children make good progress in the EYFS and this continues throughout the school. As a result, in recent years, pupils have attained standards at the end of Year 2 that have been above average in reading, writing and mathematics, and in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 6. This represents good achievement from their starting point on entering Reception. Pupils attained similar standards in 2008, apart from mathematics, in which standards were broadly average. The reasons for this decline in standards in mathematics are twofold. First, pupils do not show appropriate quick mental recall skills to answer number questions. Second, they lack sufficient ability in using their existing knowledge and understanding of mathematical ideas to help them solve problems when faced with new situations. Leaders acknowledge that improvement in these aspects of pupils' numeracy skills is a priority area for development. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of the well targeted extra support they receive.

Good teaching and learning are the main reasons pupils make good progress. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are able to explain ideas and demonstrate new techniques effectively. As a result, pupils are clear about what they are to learn and how to set about their work. Lesson planning is good and effectively challenges pupils of different abilities. Pupils have positive attitudes to their learning, maintaining their concentration for lengthy periods and having a good work rate. Teachers do not place sufficient emphasis on promoting pupils' mental recall skills in mathematics. A notable feature of teaching and learning is the way pupils are involved effectively in assessing for themselves how well they are doing. Teachers encourage pupils to reflect upon what they have learned and what they need to do next to improve further. As a result, pupils have a good understanding of how they are doing and how they could do better. Teaching assistants provide valuable support for all pupils, especially those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Parents appreciate greatly the excellent care and support provided for pupils, which underpins their outstanding personal development. The well-being of pupils is central to the school's ethos, with each pupil being cherished as a unique individual. Rigorous safeguarding arrangements are in place to ensure pupils' safety in and around school and on visits. The breakfast and after school clubs provide a safe and secure environment for pupils and make a positive contribution to their personal and social development. Excellent links with outside agencies ensure extra support is readily available for individual pupils when required. A wide range of enrichment activities extends the good curriculum effectively. Of particular note is the opportunity for all pupils to learn how to play a variety of musical instruments, including violin, cornet and clarinet. All children in Year 3 experience playing the recorder as part of the school's Wider Opportunities Programme. Pupils say they really enjoy the extra-curricular activities available, particularly those involving sport.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Good provision enables children to achieve well. Children enter Reception with levels of skill and abilities that are as expected for their age. They make good progress and, by the time they enter Year 1, attain above average standards across all areas of learning. Children behave very well and cooperate well with others, sharing resources fairly. They are very keen to learn and show a lot of enjoyment in all their activities. Adults work effectively as a team and have a good understanding of the needs of children of this age. For example, they provide activities that closely link to children's own experiences and so capture and maintain their interest. The excellent pastoral care and support for children leads to them being confident, articulate and happy to discuss what they are doing. Thoughtful curriculum planning ensures a good balance between activities children choose for themselves and those that adults lead. This effectively supports children's independent learning skills. Good leadership has rightly identified that assessment of individual children's attainment on entry, to aid judging children's progress, is not measured accurately enough. Parents are very pleased about the way their children are looked after while in the EYFS. Induction arrangements are successful in enabling children to settle quickly into everyday school routines when they first start school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' mental recall skills and their ability to use their mathematical knowledge to raise their confidence in solving problems in new situations.

- Thoroughly check children's attainment when starting school, so their progress can be tracked more accurately.

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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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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

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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

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

14 November 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Blanford Mere Primary School, Kingswinford, DY6 7EA.

Thank you for the really friendly welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you and seeing the things you do. Yours is a good school that has some excellent features. It helps you make good progress and reach standards in English, mathematics and science that are usually above average by the end of Year 6.

What we found out about your school

- You show a great deal of enjoyment in coming to school and are keen to learn.
- It is a very friendly place in which to work and play.
- You are leading healthy lifestyles and show an excellent awareness of how to stay safe.
- The many after school clubs and opportunity to learn to play a variety of musical instruments effectively widen your learning experiences.
- Your behaviour is exemplary and you work very effectively with others in pairs and small groups.
- Adults look after you really well and make sure you are safe in and around school and on visits.
- You make an outstanding contribution to the school and local community.
- Leaders of the school are working hard to make improvements and help you do even better.

What we have asked your school to do now

- Improve your quick mental recall skills and ability to use what you already know in mathematics to solve problems in new situations.
- Make sure adults are clear about what you know when you start school so they can check how well you make progress.

You can help your school improve further by continuing to try your best in all you do. All of you are a credit to your school.

All my best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Melvyn Hemmings

Lead inspector