

Balsall Common Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104059
Local Authority	Solihull
Inspection number	323951
Inspection dates	4–9 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Graeme Bassett

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	658
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	John Denness
Headteacher	Susan Davies
Date of previous school inspection	14 March 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Balsall Street East Balsall Common Coventry CV7 7FS
Telephone number	01676 532254
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors. The school was closed by the Local Authority because of the bad weather on the second day of inspection and it was agreed with the school that the inspection should be completed on 9 February 2009.

Description of the school

This is a very large primary school. It is a three form entry school and it draws most of its pupils from the village but there is an increase in the number of pupils coming from further away. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is about average. There are a small number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds in most year groups throughout the school. There is a Nursery and three Reception classes in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Currently, there is an acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher. Children enter school with levels of skills broadly in line with expected levels for their age. There is on-site child care provision called Pathways which is managed by a private company.

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. There are many outstanding features including the curriculum and the care, guidance and support given to pupils throughout the school. The pupils' personal development and well-being and the provision made for the Early Years Foundation Stage are also excellent.

Nevertheless, the school has experienced some recent major changes in leadership and management because the long-serving headteacher and another senior member of staff recently left. Governors are very supportive and show dedication towards the school. As a result of delays in appointing a new headteacher there are still some concerns amongst the staff and some parents. Despite these difficulties, all staff and most parents have responded very well to the exceptionally good leadership and management of the acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher. As a result, the morale of staff and pupils is being successfully maintained. Nearly all parents support the school wholeheartedly. There are lots of positive signs to show that throughout many elements of the school's current leadership, the capacity for future improvement is good.

Working in partnership with the staff and governors, the leadership and management team has instigated several initiatives. The main thrust of these is the introduction of a classroom system for recording pupils' progress and the establishment of a whole-school system for tracking each pupil's achievement from term to term. These successfully build upon previous systems. Although improvements in pupils' achievement are already noted, there has not yet been enough time for these new procedures to be fully embedded. This means that teachers have been unable to make full use of the data when planning what each pupil needs to learn next.

Teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. Marking is very good and this has a good impact on raising standards. Nearly all children make outstanding progress by the time they enter Year 1. Currently, standards in Year 6 are significantly above average and pupils' progress is good. This shows an improvement upon the satisfactory achievement made over the past two years. The proportion reaching the higher Level 5 in English, mathematics and science is much higher than average and improves on the school's performance of last year. Pupils gain a wide range of high-level and mature skills and consequently their preparation for their next school and for their economic well-being is outstanding.

The curriculum inspires pupils, who become engrossed in their learning. Consequently, they speak enthusiastically about their visits, workshops and their residential experiences. Themes taught across different subjects, such as the Victorian day, are reported by pupils to be really good fun. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) is exceptionally good, enhancing the meaningful links between different subjects.

Because of the exceptional care, guidance and support, pupils' personal development and well-being are excellent. Pupils readily demonstrate exceptional caring attitudes towards each other and willingly offer help to the younger ones. Pupils make strong contributions to the local community, and by taking an active part in many village functions, the school is seen as the 'heart' of the local community. Pupils fully support the out-of-school activities. Through sporting activities they develop an excellent understanding of the need to adopt a healthy lifestyle and understand how to stay safe.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The provision for the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding and the phase director for this aspect of the school provides excellent leadership and management that ensures all children achieve exceptionally well. When children start in the Nursery, the level of skills of most of them is broadly as expected for their age. Throughout the Nursery and Reception classes, all staff demonstrate high expectations, which have a good influence upon children's attitudes. Consequently, they settle quickly to the routines of school and because of the excellent care, support and guidance they receive, their social development is a strength. With the use of excellent monitoring routines, all children are known well and as a result of clearly planned lessons within a stimulating learning environment nearly all make exceptionally good progress. Outstanding teaching and care by all teachers and teaching assistants have a very positive impact. The outdoor provision for children is particularly good, and with carefully planned indoor and outdoor activities, children quickly take responsibility for what they do and learn. Consequently, most children enter Year 1 with skills above the expected levels in all areas of learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the assessment systems recently established consistently contain sufficient detail to enable teachers to plan more precisely what each pupil needs to learn next to improve progress and thus reach higher standards.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards at the end of Year 6 over the past two years have been significantly above average in English, mathematics and science. However, pupils' progress has only been satisfactory over the past two years. The school's leaders took quick actions to raise achievement, with the introduction of new assessment procedures. As a result, standards at the end of Year 6 are currently significantly above average and pupils make good progress. The proportion reaching the higher Level 5 in all subjects is very high.

The school's performance last year showed that although standards at the end of Year 2 were above average in reading and mathematics they had declined, especially in writing where results were broadly average. These results were the lowest results for several years. The proportion of pupils reaching the higher Level 3 was lower than previously seen. Because of quick actions to halt this fall, pupils' progress in Years 1 and 2 is currently satisfactory and standards in Year 2 are once again above average in all three subjects. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of the good support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is excellent. Pupils have an exceptional understanding of global religions, customs and traditions of other people in our society. Pupils enjoy school with many saying learning is fun and exciting, especially when themes are used across different subjects. Attendance is excellent. Pupils get on well together and most pupils behave extremely well. However, some younger pupils talk amongst themselves during assemblies and lessons, causing some disruption.

The school council is an effective pupils' voice and pupils enjoy taking responsibility. Those in Year 6 particularly value the opportunities to help others around the school especially with reading buddy groups and with the younger children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. As they mature, pupils develop a confidence and poise which, together with good communication and social skills, allow them to communicate readily with others.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy their learning and are stimulated by the good teaching overall. When lessons are interesting and pupils are actively engaged in practical activities, they enjoy their learning more and there is a buzz of activity. Teachers have good subject knowledge but sometimes they tend to dominate activities by repeating instructions too often. Consequently, this slows the pace of the lesson and some pupils become restless because they are not involved enough. Teachers' comments both written and verbal offer very clear guidance and many pupils are beginning to respond confidently to these comments. Pupils are aware of their targets and what they need to do to improve their work. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language are supported well so that they do equally as well as others.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Very good links are made across different subjects so that the basic skills of English, mathematics, science and ICT can be practised through themes. For example, pupils found the role-play Victorian school day most enjoyable with pupils dressed up and boys proudly wearing flat caps. There is a richness in the wide variety of stimulating and exciting activities provided for pupils. There is an extensive range of opportunities that broaden pupils' understanding of their ever-changing world and that particularly contribute to the excellent personal development and well-being of pupils. Opportunities such as running their own radio station to broadcast weekly and making pod casts are most successful. French and Latin clubs are supported well and good use is made of the on-site indoor swimming pool. There is a broad range of creative, musical and sporting activities, including visits to Symphony Hall and Westminster. Displays of many paintings in the style of Jackson Pollack are stunning. The pupils have many opportunities to understand cultures of other countries through their singing and art work. Excellent links are also forged with the global community, particularly through the Comenius Project.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school demonstrates excellent levels of care, support and guidance in all aspects of its work. All pupils are fully involved in all that the school does and all reasonable measures are taken to ensure pupils' safety and protection. There are plenty of opportunities for pupils to take part in sporting activities and the school has been awarded the Healthy School award and Activemark. The school works extremely effectively with outside agencies to support whole families as well as pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Recent changes in assessment procedures are beginning to be used well to plot pupils' progress. However, the changes are not yet sufficiently established to show the full impact anticipated.

Nevertheless, very good use is made of individual target setting to help pupils know what they need to do next.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Initiatives to raise standards and to improve achievement are established effectively by the acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher. Under their guidance the school's self-evaluation is good and leadership and management have compiled a strong and purposeful school improvement plan. The priorities identified in the school improvement plan are the right ones for the school at this time. Middle management staff and subject leaders provide very clear direction for improvement as they monitor and evaluate the work for which they have responsibility. The school's community cohesion is outstanding with extremely good links within the village and with the wider national and global communities through its links in the Arts. The governing body fulfils its statutory responsibilities effectively and shows good support for the school.

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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?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
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?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
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	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	2
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	1

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?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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	1
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?	1
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**

9 February 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Balsall Common Primary School, Coventry CV7 7FS

Thank you for helping us when we recently visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you and finding out about your school. We found that your school provides you with a good education. You do some very exciting things and we were extremely impressed by the themes you study, especially the Victorian Day. There is a good team spirit in your school and it is a happy place. Well done!

- These are the things that are particularly good in your school
- The leadership and management of your school are good. Your acting headteacher provides exceptionally good leadership and management and the teachers and other staff in your school work well as a team to support your headteacher.
- Throughout the school, staff have a clear understanding of how to make your work interesting and raise the standards of your work.
- The teaching is good, especially when teachers plan links between different subjects for you.
- Your teachers mark your work well to give you good encouragement to do even better. As a result, most of your standards are well above average and you all make good progress.
- The Nursery and Reception classes are managed outstandingly to give these children an excellent quality of education.
- You are all developing exceptional attitudes towards your work and towards each other.
- You have an outstanding understanding about how to remain healthy and you know how to keep safe.
- You are very polite and the behaviour of most of you is extremely good. However, some of you become restless in assemblies and sometimes in class and begin to talk amongst yourselves.
- Staff look after and care for you well.
- There are still some ways in which your school could be better. We have asked your headteacher and governors to:
 - ensure that the new records to plot your progress are used more effectively by your teachers to plan even more precisely what each one of you needs to learn next.

Once again, thank you for your help. You can help by asking your teachers how you can make your work better.

Yours sincerely

Graeme Bassett

Lead inspector