

Palfrey Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104160
Local Authority	Walsall
Inspection number	323979
Inspection dates	6–7 July 2009
Reporting inspector	David Driscoll

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	355
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mohammed Aszal
Headteacher	Robert Poyser
Date of previous school inspection	23 May 2006
School address	Milton Street Walsall WS1 4LA
Telephone number	01922 721092
Fax number	01922 641729

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This very large school serves an inner city area of Walsall. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well above average. Almost all pupils are from a minority ethnic background, either Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi, and speak English as an additional language. The school has a relatively large number of pupils who join partway through their education. These pupils are often newly arrived in England and speak no English at all. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average.

There is a privately run nursery onsite which is inspected separately.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Palfrey Junior provides a satisfactory education. Pupils' standards on joining the school are below average. Standards are below average in Year 6, which reflects satisfactory achievement. Pupils make steady progress in most subjects as a result of the satisfactory teaching and satisfactory curriculum. Progress in mathematics is a little slower than other subjects, because pupils are not given enough opportunities to use their mathematical skills to solve problems. Progress in information and communication technology (ICT) is good, because pupils make use of computers in many lessons. Pupils who are newly arrived in England make good progress. They receive intensive support to develop their language skills and are soon playing a full part in lessons. Throughout the school, however, there are individual middle and higher attaining pupils who are not making the progress they should. The school's systems for tracking pupils' progress are not being used well enough to identify such pupils, so the work they are given is not always sufficiently challenging.

Pupils' personal development is good. They much enjoy coming to school, where they have lots of friends. They get on well with their teachers and are keen to learn. Behaviour is good, both in and out of lessons. All pupils benefit from the rich cultural diversity which is celebrated so well in this school. The part pupils play in the community is outstanding. They have an excellent understanding of other cultures, and play an exceptional role in helping to tackle discrimination and misunderstanding in other schools. Much of this is a result of the school's excellent work in promoting community cohesion. Pupils are well looked after and feel safe in school. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Pastoral care is good and benefits from the strong links with a range of agencies that promote pupils' well-being. However pupils' academic guidance is satisfactory rather than good. Good guidance is given to help pupils improve their writing, but this is not the case in mathematics.

The school has made steady progress since last inspected, as a result of satisfactory leadership and management. The headteacher and governors set appropriate targets and have demonstrated satisfactory capacity for improvement. Parents are very happy with the school's work and hold the headteacher in high regard. Checks on teaching provide a clear picture of what works well, but do not always identify where teaching could be improved in order to raise the overall quality of teaching across the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide pupils with better guidance on how to improve their work in mathematics and give them more opportunities to use their mathematical skills to solve problems.
- Make better use of data on pupils' progress to identify those who are not making the progress they should, so that teachers can then target work more accurately to their needs.
- Increase the proportion of good teaching by clearly identifying areas for improvement when checking lessons.

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

The standards of those pupils joining the school in Year 3 are rising and are now slightly above average. However, the pupils who join the school in Years 4, 5 and 6 are often new to the country and speak no English. This lowers standards, overall, to below the national average. Most groups of pupils make satisfactory progress, with those joining late often doing well. However, there are individuals across the school who mark time rather than improving their standards. The school concentrates its efforts on improving the standards of the lowest attainers. There are, however, a few such pupils who fall behind because they do not attend regularly. The disadvantage of focusing on the lowest attainers is that some middle and higher attaining pupils get overlooked and so do not make the progress of which they are capable, especially in mathematics. Standards are improving, but standards in mathematics still lag behind those in English and science. Pupils have the basic skills of numeracy, but struggle to apply them when they are given problems to solve.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school is a happy and harmonious community where pupils from a wide range of cultural backgrounds get on well together. Pupils' good personal development stems from the supportive relationships that exist across the school. Pupils know that staff have their best interests at heart and that they are valued as individuals. Pupils generally concentrate well in lessons. Occasionally their concentration wanders if they have to sit and listen to their teachers for too long and are not actively involved in lessons. Pupils' spiritual and cultural development is especially strong. They are genuinely interested in other religions and are keen to draw parallels between their own and others' faiths. The school successfully encourages pupils not just to learn about and respect other cultures, but also to use their understanding to help others. Pupils visit faith schools, for example, to present information on how different religions differ in practice, but share the same values. They do not just visit places of worship but help there too, such as planting a garden for the Greek Orthodox Church. They 'twin' with schools in rural areas and those with socio-economic backgrounds very different from their own, as well as having links with other countries as diverse as Canada and India. The school council has played a strong role in the development of the new adventure playground, and older pupils are quick to volunteer as mentors for others.

The attendance rate, whilst satisfactory, is a little below average. It is restricted not by pupils' attitudes but by religious observance days and by parents who take their children on holiday in term time. The school is working closely with parents and as a result, attendance is improving. Pupils are safety conscious and show considerable care for the welfare of others. They enjoy a good range of physical activities and understand the importance of eating healthily. Pupils' ability to work constructively with others, and their satisfactory academic progress, help them to be soundly prepared for their future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Pupils enjoy their lessons. They love using ICT to help them learn, and get on very well with their teachers. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to provide clear explanations, so all pupils quickly understand the key points that are being taught. Questioning of pupils is managed well to ensure all are listening and are involved. It is less successful at checking pupils' understanding of what they have learnt, because pupils are often not asked to explain their answers. Pupils often work in groups according to their ability. Different tasks are usually given to each group, but within the higher and middle attaining groups, some pupils find the work too easy so do not make the progress of which they are capable.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school provides plenty of extras that enrich the basic curriculum, particularly in the arts and physical activities that improve pupils' cultural development and help them to lead a healthy lifestyle. The headteacher and governors pay great attention to the views of the local community and have adapted the curriculum to meet its needs. Clubs take place before school, for example, so Muslim pupils can attend mosque schools after the school day has ended. Many trips and visitors are used to extend pupils' knowledge of the world beyond the area in which they live. Activities are also targeted at helping specific groups to improve their progress, such as the lessons at the local secondary school for the most able scientists' and the hand-held computer games for lower attainers in mathematics. There are, however, weaknesses in the basic curriculum. Pupils do not do enough problem solving in mathematics, and as a result do not get to make sufficient use of their skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school successfully promotes a nurturing family atmosphere which contributes to pupils' sense of security. Pupils know that adults will listen and act if they have any problems at school. Child protection arrangements fully meet current regulations, and health and safety procedures are robust. The school works well with outside agencies when this is required. The transition from the infant school is smooth, and pupils who join later are helped to settle in quickly, often by other pupils who go out of their way to learn about the countries they come from. Good links with the local secondary school are used well to prepare pupils for Year 7. Attendance is improving as the school takes action on many fronts, especially in rewarding good attendance and raising parents' understanding of the importance of regular attendance. Academic support and guidance is less consistent, but satisfactory. Useful feedback is provided in English. Pupils' writing is marked accurately and then pupils are told what they need to do to improve in their next piece of work. In mathematics, marking is largely restricted to ticks and crosses, with little guidance on the next steps to be taken. Pupils have targets in English and mathematics, but their knowledge of them is limited and their involvement in evaluating their own progress is underdeveloped.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school's leaders, including governors, are highly effective at working with the local community and taking account of the views of parents. Responses to the parents' questionnaires were very positive indeed. They are particularly pleased with the welcome they receive in school, the response of the headteacher to any questions they have and how much their children enjoy coming to school. Leaders promote a strong moral code of tolerance and respect as part of their outstanding provision for community cohesion, so pupils understand how to act as responsible citizens and go the extra step in helping to overcome discrimination. The school's evaluation of its own performance is broadly accurate. The school is rich in data, but its analysis focuses more on standards attained by pupils, rather than on the progress they have made. So, while the school is outstanding in tackling discrimination there are some opportunities missed to promote equality in achievement. A good range of methods are used to check the quality of what is provided. These invariably indicate strengths in provision, but checks on teaching do not routinely point out what teachers need to do to lift the quality of teaching to the next level.

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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 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/or disabilities make progress	3

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?	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
The extent to which 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	1
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 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

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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
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**

8 July 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Palfrey Junior School, Walsall WS1 4LA

Many thanks for all your help when we visited your school. You made us feel very welcome, as you do with anybody who comes to your school. Your teachers, parents and carers can be very proud of the way you behave and how polite you are. Most of all, though, you are a shining example of how respectful and tolerant people can be. This is because the people who run the school help you to learn so much about how others live their lives in areas different from your own, and then give you the chance to tell others about how you live. You told us how much you enjoy school, because you have lots of friends and the teachers are really nice. They also take good care of you, so you feel safe.

Overall, we found you are getting a satisfactory education. You make as much progress as we would usually expect to see, although you could do better in your mathematics. So we have asked your teachers to give you more problems to solve, and to tell you what you need to do to improve like you do in English. Those of you who come straight to the school from different countries settle in quickly and make good progress in learning English. Your teachers know your test marks, but do not always spot some of you who are falling behind a bit. Because of this we have asked the people who run the school to check all the information they have on your progress and tell your teachers if they find anyone who is not doing as well as they could because they are finding the work too easy. Then the teachers will know who needs to be given harder work, and can do something about it. You can help by telling your teachers straight away if you finish your work before the others do.

The people who run the school are working hard to make it a better place in which to learn. They provide you with lots of extra clubs that you really enjoy. They check how good your lessons are, and write down what has worked well. We have asked them to also note down what things did not work so well, so they can be put right and the teaching can be even better.

Yours faithfully

David Driscoll

Lead inspector