

The Sylvester Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104419
Local Authority	Knowsley
Inspection number	324041
Inspection date	13 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Clare Henderson

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)	236
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	Mr G Brown
Headteacher	Mr J Manning
Date of previous school inspection	16 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	St John's Road Huyton Liverpool Merseyside L36 0UX
Telephone number	0151 477 8320
Fax number	0151 477 8321

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the achievement of boys and more able pupils in writing, the effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and the quality of leadership and management in the school. Evidence was collected from the observation of lessons, the scrutiny of pupils' work and records of their progress, and examination of other documentation, including completed parents' questionnaires. Discussions were held with pupils, staff and the chairperson of the governing body. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

This is a large school. It serves an area of social disadvantage. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is much higher than average. An above average percentage of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Almost all pupils speak English as their first language. A small proportion of pupils is from a minority ethnic group. None of these pupils is at an early stage of learning English. Children begin school in the EYFS Nursery class. Before and after-school care, provided by an external group, is available within the school and is the subject of a separate inspection. The school has gained a raft of awards including Activemark, National Clean Air, Healthy Schools and Investors in People.

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 with many outstanding features. Pivotal in its success is the outstanding leadership of the headteacher who, together with dedicated, caring staff and governors, ensures the individual social and emotional needs of pupils and their families are well attended to. Consequently, the school motto, 'Dream, believe and achieve', is lived out well by all members of the school community. Parents agree and unanimously appreciate what the school provides. Typical comments are, 'the school offers great learning along with fun for all', 'children are taught how to be part of a team' and, 'behaviour is managed in an innovative way'. Inspection findings agree with parental views.

Achievement is good. The majority of pupils are working at levels expected for their age when they begin Year 1. However, these judgements are not always secure because the school does not have a clear enough overview of children's attainment on entry to the EYFS and of the progress children make through Nursery and Reception. Despite this, observations carried out during the inspection show that, as a result of good teaching and very good support for children's welfare, learning and development in the EYFS are good. Standards achieved in Years 1 and 2 are generally within the broadly average range in reading, writing and mathematics. Progress is seen to accelerate as pupils move through Year 3 to Year 6 and standards have been consistently above the national average in English, mathematics and science since the last inspection. However, pupils' progress in writing is less consistent. The school recognises this and has put in place strategies to improve pupils' performance. For example, topics have been introduced which will interest boys and stimulate them to extend their writing skills further. However, the full impact of these in raising standards in writing is not yet evident.

Pupils' personal development and their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development are outstanding. Enjoyment of school is reflected in good behaviour, above average attendance rates and enthusiasm for learning; the words of one pupil sum up the views of many: 'there is always something exciting for us to do.' Pupils say they feel safe and know there is someone to talk to if they have a problem. They greatly value opportunities to express their views as school councillors, playground buddies or prefects. For instance, as playground buddies, they listen and support younger pupils at lunchtime. Pupils have an excellent awareness of the need to lead a healthy lifestyle and they understand the reasons why it is important to keep fit. This is reflected in their achievement of many health based awards including, for instance, the National Clean Air award. The school takes every opportunity to involve pupils in the community through, for example, the eco project which involves building a shelter in the school grounds made of recycled plastic bottles. This extends pupils' knowledge and involvement in environmental issues successfully. Through sponsoring the education of 40 children in Africa, pupils' understanding of worldwide issues is promoted effectively. They are learning very effectively about the diversity of traditions and beliefs within our society. Such roles are one part of the good preparation of pupils for the next stage of their education.

The good progress pupils make is the result of good quality teaching. Major strengths include recognising and teaching to meet pupils' differing learning styles and interests. An example of this is using pictures and music as stimuli to make writing more imaginative and exciting. There is effective use of personal target-setting to involve pupils and their parents in their learning and to promote a culture of high expectations. Very good use is made of learning support assistants to ensure that those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress.

In spite of these strengths, the impact of programmes introduced to raise standards in writing for all pupils has not been fully realised.

The curriculum is good with outstanding elements. A particular strength is the creative skills-based focus which is being used imaginatively to link subjects together and helps pupils to apply their skills and knowledge across a range of areas of learning. For example, pupils link information and communication technology, science and mathematical skills with literacy skills to create vibrant, engaging work which supports the enjoyment of learning and also their academic development. The school would be the first to say that some of its exciting developments have yet to pay full dividends in raising standards in writing. There are excellent extra-curricular and enrichment opportunities to support work in the arts, sport and humanities as well as the teaching of French and Spanish. The school does not miss an opportunity, through the excellent partnerships which it has established, to foster pupils' well-being, providing on site breakfast and after-school care provision, for example.

Staff promote an excellent 'can do' culture within the school. Consequently, care, guidance and support for pupils are outstanding. Procedures are in place to keep pupils safe and their general well-being is given high priority. For instance, opportunities to benefit from visits to the relaxation rooms or to meet with the highly skilled learning mentor are available for all pupils. Staff work very closely with outside agencies to ensure that specialist support is available to pupils when needed. Pupils' targets give them a clear focus for their learning. Self-assessment in lessons encourages them to be increasingly critical about the quality of their work and that of their classmates. Teachers' marking tells pupils what they have achieved in their work and what they need to do to improve effectively.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher sets an extremely clear direction for school improvement. He is well supported by a skilled, enthusiastic acting deputy headteacher and creative curriculum leader. Subject leaders are knowledgeable about their subject areas and feel their contributions to the general leadership and management of the school are really valued by governors and senior leaders. A robust system for tracking pupils' progress is in place and this is being used by staff to plot progress and plan future learning. A system of tracking pupils' social and emotional aspects of learning is exceptionally well developed by the learning mentor, supporting pupils' outstanding personal development, pastoral care and guidance. However, tracking and analysis of the academic progress pupils make towards set targets are not carried out frequently enough by subject leaders to ensure that all pupils reach their potential, particularly in writing. Governors are supportive, know the school well and help set and meet challenging targets. They have close links with subject leaders and are not afraid to ask challenging questions of the headteacher and staff. As such, the school has made good progress since the last inspection, provides good value for money and is well placed to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children begin Nursery with skills which are below those typical for their age and particularly so in their social and communication skills. Recently improved play-based Nursery and Reception provision ensures that children quickly develop a real interest and enjoyment in learning. As a result of good quality teaching and excellent support for children's welfare, children make good progress in all areas of learning. Staff plan many opportunities which help children learn to get along together, for example, sharing at snack time. Consequently, children grow in confidence and independence; as a result, their personal development is outstanding. Staff, following

recent EYFS guidance, give high priority to the use of exciting role play experiences, both within and outside the classroom which set children's imaginations alight. This is developed more successfully in the Nursery than Reception because there is a limited outdoor environment accessible to Reception. However, the school has plans in hand to remedy this. Staff work closely together and establish excellent links with parents who say they appreciate the excellent care their children receive. By the time they start Year 1, most children are working within the goals expected for their age. Leadership and management in the EYFS are satisfactory. This is because, although individual teachers carry out observations of children's progress on a regular basis, the management does not have a clear enough overview of children's attainment on entry or of the progress children make through the EYFS to ensure all achieve their potential.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards further in writing for all pupils.
- Develop a clearer picture of children's attainment on entry and of the progress they make through the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Increase the frequency of tracking and analysis of pupils' progress by subject leaders to ensure all pupils reach their potential.

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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?	3

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	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	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?	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	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	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	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**

Thank you very much for making us so welcome when we inspected your school last week. We really enjoyed our time with you. Because of the way you spoke, you showed us just how proud you are of your school. We enjoyed talking to you and hearing your comments. You say that you go to a good school and we agree with you.

You make good progress in your work and your results in the national tests in English, mathematics and science at Year 6 are generally higher than in many other schools. However, at times your writing skills are not as good as they should be. All of the adults take excellent care of you and this helps you to really enjoy school and feel safe there. You are very good at carrying out your jobs, eating healthily, and taking lots of exercise. You attend school regularly and behave well. These things help you grow into healthy, caring and confident young people. Your teachers make learning interesting and exciting and provide lots of opportunities to go on trips and join after-school clubs. Everyone works together well in your school and helps you to learn more about other communities across Britain and the world. The youngest children are given a good start to school life and they learn well both in their classroom and in their outdoor area. Your headteacher, teachers and governors are good at finding ways to improve your school.

To improve your school even more, I have asked your teachers to:

- help you to improve your writing skills further
- gain a clearer view of how well you are getting on with your learning when in the Nursery and Reception classes
- make sure they make more regular checks as to how you are progressing in reaching your targets.

You can help your teachers by always doing your best. I hope that you continue to enjoy being at school and keep working hard.