

Dovedale Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104533
Local Authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	324068
Inspection dates	29–30 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Ian Thompson

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	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	334
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Bedford
Headteacher	Mr Nick Smith
Date of previous school inspection	17 October 2005
School address	Herondale Road Liverpool Merseyside L18 1JX
Telephone number	0151 733 2713
Fax number	0151 735 0941

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This larger than average sized school serves an urban area. Pupils come from the full range of social and economic backgrounds including some areas of disadvantage. Almost one quarter of pupils are from a number of minority ethnic backgrounds many of whom have home languages other than English but very few are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is close to average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The school is a Centre of Excellence for German and holds the Inclusion, Eco Schools and Healthy Schools Awards in addition to having Dyslexia Friendly and Investors in People status. The school has gone through a period of considerable staffing changes in the last two years, including the appointment of the headteacher and deputy headteacher.

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 in which pupils achieve well and reach above average standards. Consequently, the school has gained the support of the great majority of parents. This is well illustrated by a typical comment from the many letters to inspectors, 'We have watched our child blossom'.

Pupils enter the school with broadly average standards. By the end of Year 6, standards are above average in English, mathematics and science. Results in national tests at the end of Key Stage 2 showed a rising trend over the three years to 2007. School data show that the trend of improvement is continuing and that there are no significant differences in the achievement of different groups.

Pupils' enjoyment of their education and their improving performance are the results of a combination of factors, the most important of which is the headteacher's leadership. He has quickly developed an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Together with the senior management team, he has implemented a well designed development programme. Parents, governors and pupils acknowledge that this is already having a positive impact, for example, improvements in the teaching of mathematics. Consequently, there has been good improvement since the last inspection. The school has a good capacity for further improvement because of the changes in the management structure, linked to staff development and training, which have helped spread responsibility and accountability for pupils' progress.

Pupils' good personal development underpins their good progress. They enjoy coming to school because, 'lessons are fun – we don't just sit there and listen, we actually do things'. Pupils have a very strong awareness and appreciation of other cultures because of the way that the school celebrates the diversity of pupils' own backgrounds. They show that they have an excellent understanding of how to live healthy lifestyles and stay safe. The curriculum is well designed to promote progress and to develop pupils' understanding of the world. Pupils have many opportunities for reflection and expression of thoughts and feelings. These contribute much to their spiritual development and help create a sense of community through the development of trusting relationships.

Teachers plan lively and interesting lessons that build on pupils' experience and provide enjoyable ways to learn. In the best lessons, teachers use expert questioning to check pupils' understanding and to make them think about what they are learning. However, it is here that, occasionally, opportunities are missed to build upon pupils' answers in order to reinforce learning and to stretch their thinking.

Care, guidance and support are good with particular strengths in pastoral support. Parents comment on their appreciation of the school's care for whole families in times of crisis. Although pupils generally know their targets, there are inconsistencies between and within subjects in the clarity of academic guidance given to pupils.

There is some exemplary practice but too much marking does not tell pupils clearly enough how to improve. Where there is useful commentary, there is sometimes little evidence that suggestions have been followed by pupils or compliance checked by teachers.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all teachers consistently use questioning that stretches pupils and makes them think.
- Ensure that marking consistently pinpoints what pupils need to do to improve their work and that suggestions for improvement are followed.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

In 2007, the overall progress made by pupils between the end of Key Stage 1 and the end of Key Stage 2 put the school in the top 20% of schools nationally. Much better progress was made in English than in mathematics and science. The school's analysis of results in national tests identified the areas in which pupils' did not reach the higher levels, for example, in writing and in mathematics generally. The school's tracking data show that action taken to secure improvement has been successful and the great majority of pupils are on course to meet their challenging targets. Writing is improving through the use of specially designed programmes; progress in mathematics has been increased by changing class groupings; and pupils' understanding of practical aspects of science has benefited from specialist expertise and resources provided by a partner high school. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similarly good progress to their classmates as a result of sensitive, targeted support provided by teachers and teaching assistants, both in class and through individual teaching. The few pupils who are at an early stage of learning English are enabled to participate fully in school life and make good progress because of the good support that they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils really enjoy school and are keen to do well; this is reflected in their above average levels of attendance. Their social, moral and spiritual development is good. As a result, pupils have a keen understanding of what is expected of them and a strong awareness of fair play and equality of opportunity. Relationships are open and trusting and pupils say that they always have someone they can turn to for help and advice. Very good links with schools abroad ensure pupils have an extremely good understanding of cultural diversity and global citizenship. Consequently, respect for themselves and each other is high. These factors contribute very well to pupils' readiness to learn and work together and help to ensure that pupils from minority heritages have equal opportunities and do as well as others. Pupils are friendly and polite and behaviour is good. Just occasionally in lessons a few pupils become restless, particularly when teachers' introductions are too long. Pupils' understanding of how to lead safe and healthy lifestyles is impressive. For example, in discussion they talk knowledgeably about healthy diets and in the dining room they make sensible choices for lunch. They make a good contribution to the school community through the school council and by taking on responsibilities such as house captains and monitors. Above average standards in the basic skills of literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology give them a good start to their next stage of education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Strong, friendly relationships are a consistent strength of lessons and form the basis of pupils' growing self-confidence and esteem. Teachers make good use of new technology and this contributes much to pupils' enjoyment of learning. Work is planned well and is matched to pupils' abilities and needs. Teaching assistants add a great deal to pupils' learning because they are well trained and deployed. They provide sensitive support for pupils who find learning more difficult and those who are at an early stage of learning English. As a result, these pupils are fully involved in lessons and make good progress. When practice is outstanding, a very wide range of imaginative activities and tasks capture pupils' attention. Here, expert questioning is particularly effective and makes pupils think more deeply and so builds rapidly on their prior knowledge and skills. This also ensures that all pupils participate fully in solving problems and arriving at conclusions.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The variety of practical activities provided by the good curriculum contributes much to pupils' enjoyment of learning and to their personal development. The school has always had creative curriculum weeks and recently it has begun to increase opportunities for creativity within the curriculum by linking lessons in different subjects under broad themes. With a good emphasis on literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology skills pupils are enabled to apply skills well to other subjects. This approach is at an early stage of development and has yet to have a full impact on learning. Good provision is made to prepare pupils for their future economic well-being through specific projects, such as the 'Wise Owl' and 'Going for Gold' programmes which teach the pupils to undertake various projects with a budget. There are many opportunities for enrichment with residential visits taking place in every year group, as well as visits and visitors linked to areas of learning. A wide variety of after-school clubs, including sports, caters for the needs of all pupils and enables them to discover interests and talents outside the formal curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care within the school is strong. This is recognised by parents as well as pupils. A typical comment sums up parents' positive views, 'Pastoral care is very important to the school. My child's confidence and self-esteem have improved year-on-year. The school has a real sense of community.' Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements. Pupils are encouraged to reach challenging targets using systems that they understand well. However, guidance in the form of marking is too variable. Pupils are not always clear about how they can improve and teachers do not check consistently that their advice has been followed. Pupils are identified early when they require further support. Their progress is tracked closely to ensure that they achieve well. The school's tracking system is effective and is the basis for the targeted deployment of teaching assistants. The school promotes community cohesion extremely well by involving the wider community and parents in its work. One particular good example of this is when some Muslim parents put on a 'Curry Night' for the other parents. The school works very well with parents

and seeks even closer partnership with parents in their children's education through a newly formed parents group.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The senior management team are providing strong leadership in the drive for improvement. The headteacher's analysis of all aspects of the school's performance is rigorous and accurate. Governors are well informed and play a full part in shaping the strategic direction of the school. They have shown an acute understanding of the school's needs in the appointment of the headteacher and their support for the changes he has put in place while asking the hard questions that hold the school to account for its performance. Clear goals have been set. With the support of senior staff, the headteacher has taken people with him in developing a detailed plan for school improvement. Analysis of tracking data has led to changes in organisation, for example, in mathematics. A few parents expressed concerns about the changes made to groupings for mathematics teaching. These were made because the school identified that pupils were not all doing as well as they should compared to their performance in other subjects. School data show that the revised system is leading to improved standards and progress. Changes in the management structure, linked to staff development and training, are intended to make best use of expertise and increase accountability for pupils' progress. These changes are in the early stages of implementation so that full impact has yet to be seen but clear cooperative plans have been drawn up to monitor, support and develop classroom performance. Exemplary aspects of leadership are the way that equality of opportunity is established at the heart of all the school's work and the school's success in promoting community cohesion among pupils from a wide range of backgrounds.

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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
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	2
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	1
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**

Inspection of Dovedale Junior School, Liverpool, L18 1JX

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us. We enjoyed being able to talk to so many of you and hearing how much you enjoy your school. Yours is a good school that is getting even better because of the way that the staff are working to improve it. Your achievement is good because the school is well run and everyone helps you to do your best. You told us that you enjoy learning because your teachers make lessons interesting and fun. When we visited classrooms, we could see that you are right. The school council told us how much you learn about other countries and people and lots of you showed how well you understand about living healthy lives and staying safe. Your care for other people and wanting to make a difference does you credit. It was good to see that you behave well and get on together. You do a lot to help make the school a bright, lively and friendly place.

Part of our job is to suggest things that will help to make the school an even better place to learn. We have asked your teachers to do two things. First, to make sure that they always ask questions that make you think hard and, second, to make sure that you know how to improve your work. You can help by giving good answers and making sure that you take notice of suggestions about how to make your work better.

Thank you again for helping us with our work. We wish you well for the future and hope that you will all continue to play your part in making your school a good place to learn.