

Grange Valley Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104774
Local Authority	St Helens
Inspection number	324100
Inspection dates	8–9 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Derek Aitken

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)	205
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 Bruce Deakin
Headteacher	Mr Ian Hardman
Date of previous school inspection	10 July 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Heyes Avenue Haydock St Helens Merseyside WA11 0XQ
Telephone number	01744 678300
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This slightly smaller than average sized school is situated to the south of the town centre. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is a little above average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. Almost all pupils are White British. In January 2008 the school became part of a local authority Improving Schools Programme. The headteacher was confirmed in his post in October 2008, having previously worked as the acting headteacher. A new senior leadership team is currently being created. The school makes provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in Nursery and Reception classes. The school holds the Healthy Schools Award, the Activemark Award and the Local Authority Quality Mark for its EYFS provision.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school where pupils, by the end of Year 6, attain broadly average standards and achieve satisfactorily. Their personal development is good. Parents are supportive of the school and very many comments in the replies to the parental questionnaires were eloquent in their praise of the work of the headteacher and new colleagues in successfully laying the foundations for a transformation of the fortunes of the school. Grange Valley was designated by the local authority in December 2007 as a school causing concern. A rigorous evaluation of the school's weaknesses, effective monitoring by representatives of the local authority and firm action to eradicate weak teaching have enabled the school to lay foundations for further improvement. More than half of the staff in Years 1 to 6 are new, talented colleagues but inexperienced in exercising their roles of subject responsibility, which have yet to be precisely defined. At this transitional stage, the quality of leadership and management is satisfactory, as is the value the school provides for money and its capacity for further improvement.

Children make good progress in the EYFS and their skills and knowledge broadly match national expectations when they begin Year 1. The most recent national assessments of Year 2 pupils confirmed that standards were well below average in Key Stage 1 overall, and especially so in writing. Initiatives to improve standards in all skills have been impeded by weaknesses in teaching in both key stages. A legacy of some underachievement persists in Years 3 and 4, although this is progressively being eliminated by good teaching. Currently, standards in Year 2 are below average, but steadily improving, while Year 6 pupils, in response to good teaching, are on track to reach average standards. This represents satisfactory achievement for all pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, from their starting points.

Pupils' personal development is good and reflects the good pastoral care provided by the staff. The school has strengthened its incentives to reward positive behaviour and expanded its personal and social curriculum to incorporate elements of the Social and Emotional Aspects to Learning (SEAL) programme. Pupils have a good understanding of how to be healthy, as reflected in the school's awards, and how to stay safe. They say, 'We are like one happy family here' and demonstrate this in their concern for each other and their willingness to carry out effectively and without fuss a wide range of monitor duties to help teachers organise their lessons.

The curriculum satisfactorily promotes pupils' all-round development. Its strengths lie mainly in its contribution to pupils' personal development and the good range of extra-curricular activities, including after-school clubs, which are enjoyed by the pupils. At present, it is focused on improving basic skills in literacy and numeracy and in helping pupils fill gaps in their factual knowledge, rather than on developing independent enquiry and investigative skills, for example in science.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, but there is a steadily increasing proportion of good teaching. Importantly, the new teachers have quickly established themselves with pupils, ensuring an improving rate of progress. New systems to ensure greater uniformity of approach, for example in marking and in teaching mental calculations, are having a positive impact on learning, but these are yet to become established features of the work of the school. Similarly, the school's systems for tracking the academic progress of pupils, while satisfactory overall, are at various stages of development and do not fully support pupils' achievement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The EYFS is well led and managed and provides a good education for the younger children. Children join the Nursery with skills that generally match those expected for their age, although some children have lower levels of literacy skills. They make good progress to reach levels that are at least in line with those expected when they join Year 1. A good quality of pastoral care enables children to settle quickly and become receptive learners. Relationships are positive and children behave well. Teaching is of a consistently good quality and is supported by very effective teamwork. Children's learning is regularly reviewed and their progress is carefully assessed to inform what they need to learn next. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are sensitively supported to enable them to make good progress. The curriculum is imaginatively planned to overcome some limitations in the size of the interior accommodation and is well matched to children's needs. Children's enjoyment in their learning was very well reflected when they were given novel opportunities to investigate and explore an ice balloon melting. The EYFS staff work well both with parents and the other provider of afternoon services to the Nursery in supporting children's progress and well-being.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement in Years 1 to 6, especially in writing.
- Build on very recent improvements in teaching and learning to ensure that it is of a consistently good quality.
- Ensure that academic guidance makes a significant contribution to pupils' achievement.
- Ensure that subject leaders and other colleagues with management responsibilities acquire the skills to enable them to play a full role in the future development of the school.

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

Pupils join Year 1 with standards that are broadly in line with those typically expected. Standards, as reflected in published assessments, have declined markedly in Key Stage 1 in recent years and achievement in Year 2 in 2008, particularly in writing, was inadequate. As a result of an improved quality of teaching, the school's raising attainment plan (RAP) has started to impact more productively and Key Stage 1 pupils are now on track to reach standards closer to the national average. Results at the end of Year 6 in recent years have been variable. In 2007 they were below average but both the unvalidated results for 2008 and inspection evidence of the work of the current Year 6 cohort reflect an improved picture with Year 6 pupils working at broadly average standards. In Key Stage 2 also, improvements in teaching are enabling pupils to make satisfactory progress overall but their writing skills remain below average. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good. Pupils relate well to each other and get on very well with adults and visitors. They are polite, self-disciplined and engaging.

They welcome the school's improved climate for learning, although this is not yet reflected in improvements in attendance, which remains satisfactory. Pupils respond particularly well to the school's increasing range of strategies to promote good behaviour and positive attitudes. Their cultural awareness is growing, promoted by an increasing range of visits. Pupils enjoy their lessons and after-school activities, especially sport. They make good use of opportunities to contribute to the life of the school, for example as school councillors or buddies, while a few Year 6 pupils have shown enterprise in recently setting up a school newspaper to raise funds. Pupils' average command of basic skills sets them up satisfactorily for later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory with a growing number of good features. Very good relationships between staff and pupils ensure that pupils have positive attitudes to learning. Classroom routines are well established, which enables lessons to start promptly. Pupils concentrate fully, participate well and enjoy their learning. Increasingly, pupils are being given opportunities to assess their own progress, which reinforces their engagement in lessons. Teachers are enthusiastic and conscientious. Pupils are clear about what they are to learn, tasks are closely linked to them and pupils' learning is regularly reviewed in relation to learning objectives. There are, however, some inconsistencies in methods and teachers do not yet make full use of assessment information to plan to meet the needs of all groups of pupils most effectively. These weaknesses sometimes reduce the pace of learning. Marking is generally clear and instructive, but is not tightly linked to pupils' personal targets, some of which are not updated frequently enough.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Personal and social education lessons make a good contribution to pupils' development, for example in enabling pupils to devise strategies to overcome barriers to learning. Teachers are making good use of the new interactive whiteboards to promote pupils' enthusiasm for learning. The good enrichment includes a range of popular sporting activities, and a growing number of competitive fixtures with other schools. The curriculum is necessarily focused both on building up pupils' skills in relation to national programmes in English and mathematics and on RAP requirements. Less attention has been paid to developing the curriculum in other subjects. The curriculum has been recently remapped to expand the opportunities pupils have to develop links in their learning across subjects and improve their writing skills. It is, however, too early to see the impact of these and other initiatives on standards.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Systems and arrangements to ensure pupils' welfare and health and safety are well documented and clearly managed. Pupils feel safe and respected and are content and happy in the calm, well organised environment provided by the school. Appropriate child protection systems are in place and meet current government guidelines. New tracking systems have been put in place to assess pupils' progress in English and mathematics. These have proved effective in directing pupils towards appropriate support programmes and have provided food for thought for school

leaders on pupils' performance, but they have not yet become firmly established in the work of the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The new headteacher's drive and determination have been key factors in the recent improvements. He has quickly won the respect and confidence of staff, pupils and parents alike and successfully created a common sense of purpose and teamwork. Together with representatives from the local authority he has undertaken the bulk of the recent monitoring work of the school. The school development plan, which is regularly annotated with updated information, is closely aligned to the RAP and offers a succinct, well focused template for the school's next steps. A cycle of lesson observations and scrutinies of pupils' work and teachers' planning has been implemented, with evidence of useful follow-up actions. Most other senior and subject leadership roles are currently not firmly established, largely as a consequence of the recent arrival of new staff. The school makes a satisfactory contribution to community cohesion. Very recent improvements to the budgetary position, permitting a return to single-age classes, have contributed to emerging signs of a rise in standards. The targets set by the school for pupils' performance are realistic in the light of recent weaknesses in achievement. Governors are making determined efforts to improve the levels of support and challenge they provide to senior staff.

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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

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?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

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	2
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	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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**

My colleague and I really enjoyed our visit to your school. Thank you for being so kind and helpful. By the end of our visit, we could well understand why you told us you were now happier with the way things were going. Your school gives you a satisfactory education.

These are the main good things we found out about your school.

- The Nursery and Reception children get off to a good start at your school.
- The staff make sure you are well cared for. Because of this everyone gets on well, and adults and pupils are very ready to help each other out. You enjoy school and have positive attitudes to your learning and after-school activities. You behave well and value the growing numbers of ways the school is trying to reward you for good work and effort.
- The headteacher has worked very hard and well to make recent improvements.

This is what we have asked the headteacher and staff to do now and why.

- Improve the standards and progress of pupils in Years 1 to 6, especially in writing. Although by the end of Year 6 you reach average standards overall, your levels in writing are below average, and your progress in all subjects has been uneven in the past.
- Make sure that you are taught really well. The new teachers have settled in well. You enjoy their lessons and are starting to make better progress. This needs to be kept up and improved even further.
- Check more widely how well you are doing in your subjects and help you make faster progress in your learning, for example by updating your personal targets more often.
- Make sure that the teachers who are now taking on more responsible roles in school are well trained to do their jobs as best they can.

You can help by keeping up your good attitudes and attending as regularly as you can.