

Highfield Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105182
Local Authority	Bolton
Inspection number	324175
Inspection dates	8–9 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Colin Smith

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	306
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 C Dennis
Headteacher	Mrs M Parrish
Date of previous school inspection	17 October 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Marsh Lane Farnworth Bolton Lancashire BL4 0AP
Telephone number	01204 571749
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is above average in size. It serves a mixed community but one leaning towards disadvantaged rather than privileged. The proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals, and the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are above average. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. A small number are Pakistani, Indian, African or from mixed heritage backgrounds. Very few of these pupils are at an early stage of learning English. Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision is made for children aged from four to five.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Highfield Primary has enjoyed much past success, which peaked in 2005 when standards were at their highest. Since then, academic standards have fluctuated with some decline, but provisional data indicate that they fell sharply to their lowest point in 2008. Alarmed by the trend, the school has taken decisive action to reverse it. There are clear signs of recovery, particularly in the way pupils' progress is tracked. Standards are broadly average and progress is satisfactory overall, with prompt action being taken to prevent any pupil's progress from falling below the levels expected. This illustrates that the school has satisfactory capacity to improve and is working hard to maintain its long-standing good reputation. Parents have always thought highly of the school and still do. Comments such as, 'Children are safe and happy and enjoy the many additional activities,' typify parents' views. Pupils feel exactly the same. This is because the school has real strengths in the way pupils are cared for, supported and guided, and a good curriculum that stimulates their desire to learn. These factors are the bedrock of pupils' good personal development, including their excellent awareness of safe and healthy lifestyles.

Children make good progress in the EYFS. In response to good teaching and the very caring and stimulating atmosphere, most children reach the level of attainment expected for their age as they enter Year 1. From Year 1 to Year 6, pupils' achievement is satisfactory but it is not consistent, particularly in relation to more able pupils. Although teaching is satisfactory overall, there are differences between classes which impact upon pupils' learning. Teachers use assessment purposefully to inform pupils of how well they are learning. However, assessment is not always used as well as it could be to adjust the pace of the lesson and to provide work at exactly the right level to match pupils' different learning needs. As a result, the more able pupils are not always challenged sufficiently to enable them to extend their learning. Standards in English, mathematics and science are currently broadly average in Year 6 and more typical of where they were in 2006 and 2007.

The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory. Leaders are highly successful in providing a caring, happy and well disciplined atmosphere. School organisation is impeccable. The headteacher checks teaching and standards conscientiously and uses the information well to focus attention on specific areas. This strategy helped to drive up standards in writing in 2007. However, whilst this is happening, standards sometimes fall in other areas and the gains are lost. For some time now the headteacher has been trying to strengthen the skills of other leaders. New and effective leaders are emerging but are not yet established in all of the key areas to ensure that standards can be improved and then sustained. The school's self-evaluation is satisfactory and largely accurate. Leaders know the school's strengths and weaknesses well enough but have been too generous in their judgements, particularly with regard to achievement, and teaching and leadership, which are not as good as the school believes. That said, the school's effectiveness and value for money it provides are satisfactory and strengthening.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Although many children enter school with knowledge and skills below those expected for their age, consistently good teaching enables them to achieve well and reach the goals expected by the end of the Reception year. The Reception classes offer a lively and stimulating environment.

Activities, such as making pizzas and building a model Coliseum, fire children's curiosity and interest in learning. Focused activities, led by the teacher, enable children to learn important early reading and number skills. Children have good opportunities to choose their own activities, such as pretending to be travel agents. These activities improve their social and reasoning skills but there is not always an adult available to extend children's learning further. In both Reception classes, children's responses are carefully observed and recorded. The information is used well to plan the next learning steps, which underpin their good achievement. The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory. Whilst provision is good, training on the new EYFS framework is yet to be completed. This is partly why learning in the outdoor area is not exploited to the full.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning.
- Improve the achievement of the more able pupils.
- Ensure subject leaders contribute to improving and maintaining standards, particularly when the school is focusing attention on other priorities.

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' achievement is satisfactory in Key Stage 1, although the progress of Year 2 pupils accelerates because of particularly good teaching in some classes. By the end of Year 2, standards are broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils achieve satisfactorily in Key Stage 2 but progress is not consistent. By the end of Year 6, standards in mathematics and science have been close to national averages over recent years and were higher in English in 2007. Unvalidated data from the 2008 assessments indicate a marked dip in English and science. However, the current Year 6 pupils are working at the levels expected for their age in all core subjects. Pupils who receive learning support achieve equally as well as their peers. However, the more able pupils are not always challenged sufficiently, which is why a proportion of them do not reach the higher levels of which they are capable. The achievement of boys and girls is similar over time. Those pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds who require additional language support often achieve well because of the effective support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils describe their school as 'a happy family' with justification. Their particularly good moral and social development creates a harmonious atmosphere in school. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school. This is reflected in good attendance. Pupils say that bullying is extremely rare. Behaviour is good and often exemplary in lessons. The school has gained the Activemark and Healthy Schools awards, in recognition of pupils' excellent understanding of the importance of safe and healthy lifestyles. Opportunities for pupils to reflect, for example, in assemblies, or to consider cultural diversity, are more limited. Pupils are intensely proud of their school and relish opportunities to participate in activities such as becoming eco-warriors and school council members. However, there is scope to broaden their contribution to the school community, to

give them real ownership and greater responsibility for shaping the school's future. Pupils' secure basic skills mean that they are adequately prepared for the next stage in their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are good in the EYFS and satisfactory throughout the rest of the school. In all lessons, pupils are well managed, made fully aware of what they are expected to learn and benefit from a good range of varied and interesting teaching methods. Their work is marked constructively and meaningful targets are set to help them improve. A fair proportion of teaching is good. In these lessons, the challenge is high, the pace is brisk and the work provided is very closely matched to pupils' different learning needs. This enables pupils of all abilities to learn successfully. Occasionally, where teaching is outstanding, pupils are inspired, for example, to write with flourish about their 'super heroes'. Where teaching is satisfactory, the work provided is not as precisely tailored to pupils' different learning needs. In such lessons, staff do not always check how well pupils are learning in order to know when to move the lesson on quickly or pause to ensure that all pupils have fully understood. These factors restrict pupils' achievement, particularly that of the more able ones.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a rich and diverse curriculum. It takes account of pupils' interests by including many first-hand experiences, which make learning fun and develops pupils' skills of enquiry effectively. A plethora of additional activities, such as cookery and fencing, are provided and topics often involve visits and visitors. Pupils talk animatedly, for example, about their excursion to an air raid shelter that was 'pitch black inside'. These activities make school enjoyable and cultivate pupils' talents well. A good programme of personal, social and health education contributes significantly to pupils' personal development. The curriculum is increasingly being adapted to meet the needs of pupils who require learning support, although it is not always adjusted sufficiently to cater for the needs of able and gifted pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

High levels of care are provided. School staff cooperate extremely well with parents and health professionals to ensure that all pupils are safeguarded and the most vulnerable ones are helped to overcome any barriers to learning. Secure health and safety measures are in place and risks are minimised. The school has developed a commendable tracking system to ensure that pupils' progress is kept under review and meaningful targets are set to show pupils what they need to do to improve. However, these procedures have only recently been implemented and have not yet had sufficient time to ensure that all pupils achieve as well as they can in every class.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and staff have been very successful in creating a school in which every child is valued and included, and pupils' well-being and personal development are paramount. Administration and financial management are highly effective. However, the school's success in improving standards has stalled a little over recent years. Lessons, pupils' work and assessments are all examined by school managers and plans are drawn up. Improvements, for example, in mathematics and writing, have resulted but have not then been maintained. The decision to invest in stronger leadership in all key areas is beginning to pay dividends in the curriculum, assessment and special needs, for example. Nevertheless, more needs to be done to ensure that subject leaders are sufficiently involved in raising standards and achievement in their key areas. The school's success in promoting community cohesion is satisfactory. Strong and trusting relationships have been established with the local community. The school is currently developing its strategy to strengthen links with the wider community. Governance is satisfactory. Governors have specialist skills and provide good support but they do not have a full understanding of achievement and standards, which makes it harder for them to hold the school to account.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	3
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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?	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?	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?	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**

Inspection of Highfield Primary School, Bolton, BL4 0AP

Thank you for making me so welcome and answering my questions so politely. I thoroughly enjoyed my visit. After two days inspecting your school, I would like to explain my findings.

There are many good things about your school. Young children make a good start in Reception. The way children with learning difficulties in all classes are helped and supported is getting better all the time. Your behaviour is good and you are eager to learn. I noticed how much you enjoy school, especially all of those extra activities. You know how to keep healthy and stay safe. Your school is very caring. Teachers and support staff go out of their way to make sure that you are content and happy. It's good to see that you follow their example by helping each other.

Your school is judged to be satisfactory at the moment and there are many good features. Standards are rising again after a dip in 2008, and are broadly average in English, mathematics and science. The information from the tests you have done and lessons observed show that you are making satisfactory progress. Those of you who do not find it easy to learn are well supported. This is helping you to reach your targets. However, the more able ones amongst you do not always achieve as well as you could, especially when the work provided does not challenge you enough.

To help your school to be even better, we want your teachers to:

- make sure that all the lessons are as good as the very best, throughout the school
- set work at exactly the right level for each one of you, so you learn as much as you can. You can help by trying to reach your targets.
- check that standards in the subjects they are responsible for continue to rise.