

St Mark's CofE Primary School, Newtown, Wigan

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106452
Local Authority	Wigan
Inspection number	324403
Inspection dates	21–22 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Jim Crouch

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	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	177
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 D Ashcroft
Headteacher	Mr Glen Robinson
Date of previous school inspection	27 September 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Alexandra Street Wigan Lancashire WN5 9DS
Telephone number	01942 748618

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	21–22 October 2008
Inspection number	324403

Fax number

01942 748619

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average school with Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision in the form of a Reception class. It is situated in an urban area of Wigan which experiences high levels of social disadvantage. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage, but the proportion from minority ethnic backgrounds is increasing, as is the proportion who are at an early stage of learning English. The percentage of pupils who are entitled to free school meals is well above average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average. The proportion with a statement of special educational need is average. The number of pupils who join or leave the school at other than the usual times is higher than average. The school holds the Healthy School and Activemark Gold awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory standard of education. It promotes the personal development of its pupils well in a calm and purposeful atmosphere. The pupils are a credit to the school. They attend well, behave well and welcome visitors with interest and enthusiasm. Pupils enjoy school and parents value its warm, friendly ethos and the sense of community that is created by the staff. Pastoral care is good and a particular strength is the way in which the significant numbers of pupils who join at times other than the start of the Reception year are made to feel welcome. Pupils contribute to the running of the school through, for example, being members of the school council. Play leaders take their responsibilities seriously so that pupils have someone to play with and are happy at break and lunchtime. Pupils also contribute to the local community through close links with the church and by supporting charities and good causes.

Achievement is satisfactory. Children enter the Reception class with skills and abilities that are below those expected for their age. Most groups of learners make satisfactory progress through the school. As a result, standards, particularly in mathematics and science, are still below average when pupils leave school at the end of Year 6. The progress of less able boys lags behind that of others. School leaders and managers set targets for pupils. However, the systems used until recently did not lead to the setting of appropriately challenging targets. A more reliable tracking system to set targets is now in place, but is only just beginning to be used to inform teaching and learning. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The school has taken some effective actions to improve the quality of lessons. Lessons are planned in detail with clearly identified learning objectives which are shared with pupils and a good range of strategies is used to engage and encourage pupils. However, in too many lessons the teaching does not take sufficient account of the ability of different groups of learners. Consequently, some work is too easy and pupils do not progress as well as they might. The curriculum is satisfactory. The school has taken steps to improve the provision for English and mathematics, particularly with the regard to supporting pupils with learning difficulties and these actions are beginning to lead to improvement. A topic-based approach to teaching some subjects is successful in making learning more meaningful and enjoyable for pupils and contributes well to their personal development. Visiting speakers and visits enrich pupils' learning and a number of clubs provide opportunities to improve pupils' health and fitness.

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory and the systems, policies and processes to maintain health, safety and welfare are in place. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe and live a healthy lifestyle. The take-up of healthy school meals and healthy snacks is rising and pupils make good use of opportunities to be active at break-times, many using the playground equipment available.

Overall, leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher and senior leaders are aware of the barriers to learning that many of their pupils face and show a determination to address individual pupils' needs and raise their aspirations. The school has successfully tackled the issues identified at the last inspection. Leaders and managers have identified the main areas of weakness and strength in the school and have started to tackle the weaker areas of its provision. Consequently, the capacity to improve is satisfactory.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children make satisfactory progress in the EYFS. Their skills on entry are below those typical for their age, especially with regard to speech and language. Good links with parents and other Early Years providers help the children to settle in quickly. Parents and carers are welcomed into the classroom to share experiences with staff. Children behave well and enjoy learning. They respond well to the warm welcome provided by the staff. They arrive keen to play: they select an activity of their choice and quickly become engaged in experimenting and learning. There is an appropriate balance of adult and child-led activities, but planning sometimes lacks sufficient focus to enable pupils to progress as well as they might. For example, opportunities to develop the language of comparison were missed during activities in the sand, water and art areas because the teaching assistants were not directed to focus on specific aspects of learning and development. Children have access to a safe outside area. However, because of the limitations of the building, they are not able to move freely between the indoor and outdoor provision. Children learn well about keeping safe. Samples of their work show how well they learn about safety and health through a variety of experiences, including visits from the road crossing supervisor, fire officers, a police officer and a postal worker. They use computers to collect information about healthy eating and in art to draw and paint posters or pictures of firework displays and the firework code. Observations and assessments are routinely carried out by the teacher and teaching assistant, but the procedures for measuring the skills of children are not robust enough to provide an accurate measure of the progress each child makes in the EYFS.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards, particularly in mathematics and science.
- Accelerate the progress of less able boys.
- Ensure that teaching provides an appropriate level of challenge so that all pupils progress as well as they can.
- Ensure that the school has an accurate measure of the progress all children make, including those in the EYFS.

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 start Year 1 with skills and abilities that are lower than those expected for their age. Most groups of learners, including those for whom English is not their first language, make satisfactory progress through both Key Stages 1 and 2. However, the progress of lower ability boys remains a cause for concern. Pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 has shown an overall decline since 2004 and is now below average, particularly in mathematics and science. In 2007, the school did not meet its targets for the proportion of pupils achieving Levels 4 and 5 in English and mathematics. However, the number of pupils who join and leave the school during Key Stage 2 is significantly higher than the national average. Information from the school indicates that pupils who had been in school for the whole of Key Stage 2 were closer to meeting their targets, particularly in English. The school has introduced a number of strategies

to raise standards, including a new system for monitoring pupil progress. As a result, pupils are beginning to make better progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils really enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in their good attendance. Pupils say that 'Because of the school atmosphere, most of the children are joyful'. They willingly accept responsibility as play leaders, water monitors and school council members and express the view that 'By doing a good job you earn respect from your teachers and people in your class.' They make a positive contribution to the wider community through the school's links with the church and the money they raise for their chosen charities, including Water Aid and the Wigan Hospice. Pupils show good awareness of how to stay safe, for example, by wearing high visibility vests when outside school and using the Internet safely. They are increasingly selecting healthier options at lunchtime and younger children choose to eat fruit at playtime. The good provision for physical education, including swimming lessons, contributes to pupils' fitness, as does joining in organised activities at break, lunchtime and after-school sports clubs. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The good provision for personal development in the curriculum means that children know about other cultures and beliefs and are well prepared for life in a multicultural society. This is further enhanced by their links with children from Belarus who are hosted by the school on an annual basis. Pupils work well together in class and listen to each other's opinions. They are developing satisfactory literacy, numerical and technical skills and as a result, are making satisfactory progress in preparing for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, but varies between classes and subjects. Teachers have good relationships with pupils. They make good use of praise and rewards and pupils are confident to contribute their ideas because they know they will be listened to. Lessons generally build on previous learning, but too often focus on reinforcement rather than taking learning forward. Teachers use a range of strategies to interest and motivate different groups of learners. Pupils generally respond with enthusiasm and clearly enjoy giving the right answer. Teaching assistants usually contribute well both in the classroom and with individuals and small groups of learners. Pupils' work is marked regularly, but marking is not used consistently to tell pupils what they have achieved and how to improve. Systems are in place to set pupils' targets and monitor their progress. However, weaknesses in the data used by teachers have led to pupils' targets not being sufficiently high and some lessons that are not sufficiently challenging or appropriately matched to their abilities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school has developed a curriculum which takes account of pupils' backgrounds and the environment in which they live. An appropriate amount of time is devoted to developing literacy, numeracy and other basic skills and there is additional and improving provision for those who need extra help. However, it is too early to see the effect of this on standards in mathematics.

The curriculum contributes well to pupils' personal development, particularly through its project-based approach to the teaching of some subjects. For example, a project on 'Where things live' led to pupils making model human communities which became overpopulated and polluted. They then go on to take actions to ensure that the community is self-sustaining through recycling and using alternative sources of energy. Trips, residential visits and theme days enliven the curriculum and increase pupils' awareness of the world in which they live. However, there are fewer enrichment opportunities for more able pupils. A variety of extra-curricular activities, including dance, wrestling, cheer leading and football improve health and fitness and add to pupils' enjoyment of school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Parents say that this is a very caring school. A large majority are fulsome in their praise of staff who, in their words, 'know their pupils well' and help them become more mature. The provision of a breakfast club reflects this good pastoral care. Systems to safeguard pupils are in place and pupils are confident to talk to staff about issues that concern them. Pupils are aware of their targets, but do not receive consistently clear guidance on their progress and how to improve. The procedures for identifying and supporting vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are efficient and well managed. These pupils are actively involved in producing their own individual education plans, but targets tend to be too general and do not sufficiently focus on progress that can be easily identified and measured. Parental involvement is encouraged by the organisation of coffee mornings and library visits. Parents are informed about their child's progress through annual reports and parents meetings. However, some of the written reports are overlong and do not provide the information in a form that is helpful to parents.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and governing body have a clear vision for the school. Their commitment to community cohesion is evident in their support for parents and the parish and in their links with a school in Belarus. Recent improvements in self-evaluation mean that the school now has a clear view of its strengths and the key aspects that need to be improved. The school is working well with the local authority and a partner school to address these weaker areas. However, this is only just beginning to lead to improved progress and attainment. A programme of staff development means that staff are confident in their roles and well prepared to take on responsibilities. Subject leaders generally manage their areas effectively and contribute to whole-school improvement. However, their monitoring does not always have a sufficient impact on teaching and learning. Governance is satisfactory overall. Governors provide good support for the school and its pupils and are increasing their level of challenge and their contribution to school improvement, for example through the recently introduced raising achievement committee.

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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?	3
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?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
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?	3
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	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
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	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**

Inspection of St Mark's C of E Primary School, Newtown, Wigan, WN5 9DS

As you know, two inspectors came to your school recently, to find out how well you are learning. Everyone made us feel welcome and helped us to find out about your school. It was good to see so many of you using the playground equipment at break-times and it was good to speak to members of the school council and Year 6. You are all a credit to the school, are polite and sensible.

We found that your school gives you a satisfactory education. We were impressed by your good behaviour and your keenness to do well in lessons. You show good awareness of the needs of others through your charity work and the way in which pupils new to the school are welcomed by you all. We found that the curriculum contributes well to your personal development, especially through the projects you complete. Your teachers look after you well, although they could give you better advice on how to improve your work. We found that you make satisfactory progress because, while some of your lessons are good, teaching overall is satisfactory.

There are four important things we think could be better. I have asked the school to make sure that your teachers know exactly how well you are doing, that lessons build on what you already know and can do and give you the best chance to learn even more, that you reach higher standards, particularly in mathematics and science, and that lower ability boys, in particular, make much better progress.

Of course, you also have an important part to play in helping your school to carry on improving. You can do this by continuing to be as positive about learning as you are now and keep trying to improve all aspects of your work.

Thanks again for making us feel so welcome.