

Lowfield Community Primary School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 106997 |
| Local Authority | Sheffield |
| Inspection number | 324505 |
| Inspection dates | 16–17 September 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Susan Bowles HMI |

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.

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 5–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 181 |
| 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 Richard O'Neill |
| Headteacher | Mrs Christine Robinson |
| Date of previous school inspection | 19 October 2005 |
| Date of previous funded early education inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Date of previous childcare inspection | Not previously inspected |
| School address | London Road Sheffield South Yorkshire S2 4NJ |

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|--------------------------|----------------------|
| Age group | 5–11 |
| Inspection dates | 16–17 September 2008 |
| Inspection number | 324505 |

Telephone number
Fax number

0114 255 2501
0114 250 9530

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|--------------------------|----------------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

More pupils than usual enter and leave this inner city school during term time. A very high proportion of pupils come from a wide range of minority ethnic groups (84%), most of whom speak English as an additional language. The disadvantage in the local community is twice the national average. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is very high. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. Skills on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) are well below those typical for children of this age. The number of pupils at the school has increased recently. It has been awarded the Healthy Schools Award and the Activemark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Lowfield School is a satisfactory school where pupils from many cultures are warmly welcomed, supported and cared for. From very low starting points children get off to a good start in the EYFS because the provision is well adapted to their needs. Their achievement by the end of this stage is satisfactory and improving. The benefits of this improvement in their achievements have yet to work their way up through the school and in addition many pupils leave or arrive at a later stage part way through their education. These are among the reasons why standards by the end of Year 6 are well below the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. Many pupils arrive with little or no English at all and with lower starting points; consequently they have much ground to make up. Nevertheless, pupils make satisfactory progress overall.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Work is sensibly planned to match pupils' different needs, but teaching is not consistently good enough to accelerate pupils' progress in order to raise standards. The curriculum is also sound and improving in the way it matches pupils' needs and interests, for example, in the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to develop pupils' skills and help them learn more effectively. Good relationships are a strength of the school, a factor that many parents appreciate and have a positive effect on pupils' progress and personal development. The school works well with partners to promote pupils' well-being.

Staff share the headteacher's strong commitment to raising standards. With the help of the local authority, a realistic but challenging plan for improvement has been put into action. Staff are implementing this plan well with a determined effort to raise standards. Inroads have been made on crucial areas such as improving attendance and refining the way in which teachers plan lessons to make sure that learning builds more securely on what different pupils can do. This demonstrates the school's satisfactory capacity to improve. Self-evaluation is satisfactory and in the main identifies the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, the monitoring and evaluation of all aspects of the school's work by leaders at all levels is not rigorous enough to identify precisely where improvements can be made. For example, to ensure teaching and learning are consistently challenging enough to raise standards to the expected levels.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make satisfactory progress in their learning and enjoy their time in school. They enter the EYFS with levels of achievement that are far below those typical for their age. Most are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. Children's progress has improved markedly over the past two years, because of good teaching and support and it continues to do so. Even so, when compared with children in similar contexts, about three-quarters do not achieve at a good level, because by the end of the EYFS their skills remain below average in communication, language and literacy.

Good arrangements are in place to keep children safe, healthy and well cared for in a secure environment. Children have opportunities to mix with the community, within the school and beyond. Strong efforts are made to involve parents, including those who are learning English. There are productive links with other providers, such as nurseries and agencies which help meet learning and welfare needs. The very evident strength of the EYFS lies in how well adults work with the children. The children get actively involved in the interesting opportunities offered,

because there is very skilful planning to meet the range of needs and staff are prepared well to act on them. Simple but rich experiences – such as cutting up a variety of fruit – are well used to encourage children to talk, be curious, become independent and take responsibility. Staff build on these experiences to foster children's enjoyment of hearing and making stories. In only their second week at school, children from different backgrounds are beginning to work with each other and, responding to gentle but effective guidance, to sustain concentration. Staff have a good understanding of how to assess children's progress, as a result of good leadership and external support. The leadership has a clear grasp of strengths and weaknesses in the EYFS and has taken productive steps to improve provision, resulting in rapid improvement in outcomes, particularly in personal and social development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in order to accelerate pupils' progress.
- Ensure leaders and managers at all levels monitor and evaluate all aspects of the school to identify clearly where improvements can be made.

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' levels of achievement at the start of Year 1 have until this year been far below the expected level, though recent improvements in the EYFS mean that levels are rising. The school's tracking of pupils' progress shows that most make the expected rate of progress or better from this point. Indeed, in 2007, national test results for Year 2 pupils were in line with the national average in mathematics, though they fell below this in 2008. There have been recent improvements in reading and writing standards, but these remain well below average by the end of Year 2. Many pupils are at the early stages of speaking English which limits their progress, and their achievement is satisfactory overall. However, there are differences between groups of pupils: for example, boys' performance lags far behind expectations when compared to girls', especially in writing.

Taking account of the school's increasingly challenging context, pupils' achievement in Years 3 to 6 remains satisfactory. By Year 6, standards are overall well below average, but considerably less so than they were for the same pupils who were in school at the start of Year 3. Many pupils, including those who arrive in school only a year or two before the Year 6 tests, do not speak or write English fluently. This is reflected in the high proportion of those from minority ethnic backgrounds who do not reach the nationally expected levels in English. Most pupils who stay in school from Year 3 to Year 6 meet their individual challenging targets and the rate of progress improved in the most recent year. The differences in achievement between groups of pupils in Year 2 are less evident by the end of Year 6. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress. More pupils have reached the higher levels in national tests recently, though the progress of higher attaining pupils is not as strong as their peers. Efforts to improve outcomes in Year 6 have had patchy success. Standards in English, mathematics and science declined in 2007. Progress in English was very poor. Steps to improve literacy have had a positive effect in the past year, but standards in mathematics declined, and this is now being given priority by the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development is satisfactory with some good features. Their understanding of other cultures develops well because the school sincerely celebrates the diversity of its community. Pupils from a wide range of backgrounds mix freely in work and play and are proud of the different traditions and languages they represent. They know how to welcome newcomers who feel unfamiliar with an English school. Pupils respond well to encouragement to make a positive difference in the wider world, for instance, by writing letters and raising funds for victims of the earthquake in China. They also have confidence that, through their active school council and young play leader scheme, they can make a positive difference to the school. They make the most of the many opportunities to extend their interests and adopt healthy and safe lifestyles: school clubs are well attended and include opportunities to keep fit, cook healthily or sing in Sheffield's Cathedral. In other respects, outcomes are satisfactory rather than good. Attendance is broadly average with overall figures affected by religious leave. The skills needed for future economic well-being, particularly in communication, are satisfactory. Pupils say they really like their school and parents are overwhelmingly positive too. However, both have some concerns about some unkind behaviour and occasional bullying among pupils. Behaviour is satisfactory overall; in lessons it is good, because staff set clear expectations and reinforce these with calm and fair treatment. Some pupils, however, do not treat each other with due care and consideration in the dining room or playground and need close supervision and guidance to ensure their behaviour is acceptable.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Inspectors agree with the school that the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. The quality is variable and this has an impact on the progress pupils make in lessons. Lessons are consistently planned to meet the different needs of pupils in the class and teaching assistants play a full part in supporting learning. Teachers know how well their pupils are doing in literacy, numeracy and science, although pupils are not always aware of their targets or how to move forward. Teachers usually make the learning objectives for the lesson clear to the pupils; they make learning fun with challenges and games and recognise progress with praise. Occasionally, teachers do too much talking, leaving pupils passive for too long and do not make sure pupils have consolidated their learning. Where lessons are good or better, teachers base their detailed plans on good understanding of what pupils are ready to learn next and how to move them forward. Some teachers make good use of technology for visual demonstration and independent learning, as an excellent lesson about the planets illustrated. Some are good at including pupils who are learning English as an additional language. Stimulating tasks, clever questioning, time for pupils to think independently and to articulate their thoughts or to practise new skills, move them quickly towards the learning objectives, as the effective reviews of learning demonstrated. Too much teaching is satisfactory and lacks these positive features to enable all pupils to learn at a fast enough pace.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is kept under review to make sure it meets the needs of its culturally diverse pupils. There is a strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy and staff have expertise in modifying the curriculum to make it accessible to pupils at an early stage of learning English. The high profile given to reading has boosted pupils' confidence and enjoyment of independent reading, so that Year 4, for example, had no difficulty in identifying their favourite books. This year lively mental and oral mathematics are encouraging pupils to practise their skills and think more nimbly. Links between the EYFS and Key Stage 1 are being developed to ensure a greater continuity in children's learning. The personal, social, emotional and citizenship programme is giving pupils a clear awareness of their actions. French is popular and pupils benefit from the good range of visits, visitors, rich experiences and extra learning opportunities. These are helped by good community links, for example, with the city's theatre and community police officer. The school has found some ways to make productive links between some subjects, but this is at an early stage of development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care and support for pupils are strong. School staff and other specialists linked with the school work well as a team to support the inclusion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Support for those at an early stage of learning English has improved with the deployment of more bilingual teaching assistants. The very good work by the learning mentor is instrumental in removing barriers to pupils' learning and making links with parents. For example, swift contact with parents, a school attendance panel which deals with absence and punctuality and imaginative incentives have improved attendance. Behaviour is well monitored and consistently managed, with a positive effect reflected in few disruptions to learning, though some unacceptable behaviour in free time persists. Child protection and safeguarding arrangements meet requirements. The school guides pupils to deal with strangers and the safe use of the Internet and there are sound systems to track concerns about individual pupils' development and well-being. Academic guidance is satisfactory: parents have good opportunities to meet teachers and discuss their children's progress, which is regularly reviewed and leads to interventions where necessary. The school is currently working to improve pupils' understanding of how to reach their targets, for example, through clear and helpful marking.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

After an unsettled period, the school has a stable senior leadership team, which has recently been expanded to increase capacity and distribute responsibility for improvement further. The school has united well behind this lead. The headteacher, ably supported by the deputy headteacher, understands the school's strengths and weaknesses clearly and has been proactive in addressing weaknesses and working with local authority support. Everyone is clear about their responsibilities for reaching the challenging but realistic targets and for reducing inequalities, and there is no lack of commitment.

Leaders have shown their capacity for improving the school by increasing attendance, the fabric of the school and facilities for learning such as ICT. They have built on good local partnerships

to develop well targeted extended services. The school runs smoothly and suitable arrangements for pupils' safety and well-being are in place. It has a good foundation of experience in contributing to community cohesion, as pupils' and parents' views show. It is well placed to evaluate and develop this contribution in the light of current national requirements, for example, by reviewing how well it engages the local community, not least in its governing body. However, although pupils' progress has remained satisfactory, no clear trend of improvement in standards has been achieved. Monitoring and evaluation at all levels of leadership lacks the clarity and depth which would help staff understand how exactly they can contribute to school improvement.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | School Overall |
|---|----------------|

Overall effectiveness

| | |
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| 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? | 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? | 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 | 4 |
| 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? | 3 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 3 |
| 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 | 3 |
| 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? | 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 | 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**

Thank you for your friendly welcome when my colleague and I inspected your school. We really enjoyed meeting so many of you around the school and you were all interesting to listen to. You can do remarkable things – like say hello in lots of different languages!

We could see why you like your school. You clearly trust the adults who look after you so well. We think you grow up to be sensible and thoughtful people who like helping others. You behave well in lessons because teachers make them interesting and treat you fairly. We agree with you and your parents that school life would be even better if some children stopped themselves from using unkind words or rough behaviour when at play, but we could see why you mostly feel it is a safe and happy place.

Your school provides you with a satisfactory education. You could learn more quickly and that is why we have asked your headteacher to:

- make sure you do better at reading, writing and mathematics
- make more lessons so good that you can feel you are learning faster
- make sure that all staff check that the school is doing the best it possibly can.

I would like to wish you all the very best for the future.