

Alsager Highfields Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111032
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	325278
Inspection date	21 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Kevin Johnson

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)	272
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 Spall
Headteacher	Mr J Girbow
Date of previous school inspection	21 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Fairview Avenue Alsager Stoke-on-Trent Staffordshire ST7 2NW

Age group	4–11
Inspection date	21 October 2008
Inspection number	325278

Telephone number

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: standards reached by pupils and the progress they make, provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), and the leadership and management of the school. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation, national published assessment data and the school's own assessments, policies and minutes, observation of the school at work, discussions with senior members of staff and with pupils, and parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

This is an average sized school. Almost all pupils who attend are White British. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average. Slightly fewer pupils than average have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school has achieved the Healthy Schools status and has also been awarded the Artsmark and Activemark for its work on curriculum development. There is also pre-school provision for children prior to entering their Reception year. This was inspected separately at the same time as the school inspection and receives a separate report.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Alsager Highfields is an outstanding school. Highly effective leadership and management promote exceptional quality of care and support for pupils. As a result pupils' personal development thrives and their all-round achievement is excellent.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Their attitudes to learning and their behaviour in lessons and around the school are exemplary. Pupils take great pride in their work, and delight in the opportunities they have to show their creative talents through art, drama, and information and communication technology (ICT). Pupils have very good awareness of the art and music of different cultures and have developed excellent links with schools locally and in Africa whereby they gain very good insights into cultural diversity. Relationships are excellent. There is mutual trust and respect between pupils and adults. Playtimes are safe and enjoyable because pupils are very mindful of one another. During the inspection the Friendship Stop, where pupils wait if they have no one to play with, was not used. Pupils' above average attendance is a clear indication of how much they enjoy school. Some, according to parents, are 'mortified' at the idea of being absent while others simply state 'I love school.' Pupils are fully aware of the importance of looking after their health and how this can be done. For example, they stick to the agreed rules about snacks and are very active at playtimes and in after-school activities.

Pupils show excellent community spirit in the way they tackle their responsibilities. The school council has a very strong voice in school improvements and because of their efforts playground equipment is significantly more challenging and playtimes are more fun. Others volunteer to help keep the school grounds litter-free or fulfil a caring role in looking out for others. Pupils frequently put on musical performances in the community hall and take part in community projects and annual festivals where they have opportunities to develop enterprise skills by helping to run stalls or take part in charitable fundraising events. By the time pupils leave the school they are sensible and self-assured young people who are extremely well prepared to face future challenges.

When children join the Reception class their skills are generally below expectations for their age. Pupils make outstanding progress as they move through the school because of excellent teaching and the thorough and systematic tracking of their progress. Standards at the end of Year 2 improved greatly in 2008 with virtually all pupils reaching at least the expected level for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion of pupils who reached the higher level in writing was double that of the previous year.

School assessment data and inspection evidence show that standards at the end of Year 6 are well above average, representing outstanding achievement from when pupils start school. Current standards are an improvement even on the high standards maintained over previous years. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make excellent progress in relation to their personal targets. Provision for that group has improved and pupils benefit greatly from the support given by the recently appointed, highly skilled support staff.

Pupils' rapid progress is due to the outstanding quality of teaching and learning. They say that lessons are 'great fun because there is lots to do'. From Reception onwards pupils have opportunities to contribute ideas about the topics they wish to study. Lessons challenge pupils' all-round skills making tasks purposeful and exciting. Such outstanding learning was seen in a lesson where Year 6 pupils were required to use their newly acquired knowledge of the Victorians

to prepare an animated PowerPoint slide show suitable for younger pupils. This provided a strong test of their literacy skills, as well as their skills in history and ICT, because they had to ensure that the text in the slides was pitched at the right level for the younger audience. The use of ICT is one of the main reasons why pupils enjoy learning so much – not least because there are systems in place which allow them to email their homework to teachers and to contact their school friends from home. The curriculum provides pupils with exciting challenges and enables their outstanding achievement. An excellent range of additional activities nurtures pupils' varying skills and interests, enriches their learning and promotes their personal development.

The school has won the overwhelming support of parents because of the way children are cared for. Parents express their strong appreciation for the support given to vulnerable pupils in order to help them make their best progress. Pupils are given very clear guidance about how best to secure their personal safety and about the importance of responsible and secure relationships. Safeguarding procedures meet current requirements. Academic support and guidance for pupils are excellent and contribute significantly to their outstanding achievement. Systems for tracking progress and setting targets are rigorous. Pupils know their targets and have opportunities to review them with their teachers. They appreciate the help they receive in class and the guidance, given through marking, about what they need to do to improve

Outstanding leadership and management of the school have been maintained since the previous inspection. There has been no complacency. Indeed, leaders have continually sought improvement. This is reflected in such areas as improving standards, provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and in the overall quality of care, guidance and support. Leaders have established very productive links with a local cluster of schools as part of an Education Improvement Partnership. This has opened up many learning opportunities the benefits of which are shared, for example, by gifted and talented pupils through their visits to the high school to improve science skills. All staff members are clear about their role in school improvement and fully share, through their performance management, accountability for achievement and standards throughout the school. Senior leaders carry out a crucial role in helping to monitor the school's performance and contribute to the school's accurate evaluation of its work. Leaders promote community cohesion extremely well. The school is fully inclusive in that all pupils receive the support they need to achieve their best. There are ample opportunities for pupils to work alongside others in the community as well as opportunities for pupils to recognise more global aspects of cultural diversity. Highfields pupils visit a primary school in a neighbouring town where they work with pupils from many minority ethnic backgrounds. Pupils have further links with a school in Namibia and one in Ethiopia for which they raised half of the cost of a school building. Governors provide outstanding support and challenge for the school. They hold the school to account for its quality and standards, manage the school's finances extremely well and overall ensure excellent value for money. Given the current strengths in leadership the school has outstanding capacity to maintain its current quality.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children in the EYFS make rapid progress because management of their learning and development is outstanding. By the end of Reception almost all are working securely within the early learning goals, and a significant number exceed them. Children's personal, social and emotional development is excellent. They very quickly settle into daily routines and become

confident enough to make choices about what they want to learn. Teachers quickly capitalise on children's interests. For example, an exciting class topic, involving all areas of learning, evolved from a child bringing a sunflower into school to show her friends. EYFS staff promote language development expertly through daily lessons on letters and sounds, and by the way they punctuate activities with questions and ideas in order to stimulate children's language and imagination. Planning is highly effective. It provides for continuous learning, both indoors and in the outside area, through a balanced and exciting selection of activities some of which are adult led and others that children choose for themselves. For example, children were able to investigate the effects of pouring coloured water onto a very large balloon-shaped ice cube because a child asked the question, 'What happens if you put a balloon filled with water in the freezer?' Systems for assessing and monitoring children's learning are excellent. All staff gather daily to evaluate individual children's progress and plan the next steps of their learning and development. Records of progress are readily available to parents so that they can share in the process. A progress diary for every child gives parents the opportunity to add their own observations. Children's welfare is given paramount importance. Staff know the children assigned to their care extremely well. Excellent relationships are often forged before Reception because of outstanding liaison with staff that manage the pre-school.

What the school should do to improve further

- There are no significant areas for improvement which are not already identified in the school's own plans for development.

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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?	1
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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1

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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
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	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
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	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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 Alsager Highfields Community Primary School, Stoke-on-Trent, ST7 2NW

Thank you all very much for making me feel so welcome when I came to inspect your school recently. It was a delight for me to meet such well behaved and well mannered pupils. I can easily see why you are so happy to come to school. I was also delighted to see how good your attendance is. Well done for that!

Your school is outstanding. There are many exciting ways for you to learn and because of that you achieve high standards in your work. You are, quite rightly, proud of your school. You told me how much fun your lessons are and I agree with you. Your teachers are outstanding, and so is your headteacher in the way he leads the school. In fact all of the grown-ups in school take extremely good care of you all and help you to achieve as well as you do.

Your parents, teachers and school governors love your school as much as you do and they all want to continue to do their best for you. By continuing to be as happy and hard-working as you already are, you can make sure that you don't let them down.

I am not suggesting any particular improvements for your school because it has its own very well produced plans for development.