

Darnhall Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111133
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	325297
Inspection dates	9–10 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Paul Bamber

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)	199
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 Strachan
Headteacher	Mr Simon Kidwell
Date of previous school inspection	15 January 2008
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Sandyhill Road Darnhall Winsford Cheshire CW7 1JL
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

When Darnhall Primary School was inspected in January 2008, it was given a notice to improve and asked to address issues related to pupils' standards and achievement, the quality of teaching and learning, and the management of the behaviour of pupils with learning or behavioural difficulties. It was subsequently visited in July 2008 when it was judged to be making good progress.

This inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Pupils in this average size school come from a wide range of social backgrounds and they are predominantly White British. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is nearly twice the national average and the school hosts a base resourced by the local authority which takes pupils with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. This means that the school has a much larger proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need than is the norm. The percentage who are entitled to a free school meal is much higher than average. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The school has a small number of children from Traveller families. The Early Years Foundation Stage provision consists of a Nursery class which children attend part time and a full-time Reception class.

The school offers extended services in the form of breakfast and holiday clubs, a full range of after-school clubs and a home-school mentor. Awards include the Artsmark Gold, Eco Bronze and the Inclusion Quality Mark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with Section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. The school is now providing a satisfactory standard of education.

The school has continued to move forward in addressing the issues identified at the time of the last inspection, particularly in raising achievement overall and in ensuring that pupils' behaviour is better. Standards remain low but they are gradually improving.

Key to this continued improvement has been the influence of the headteacher who sets a clear and ambitious vision for improvement. In this, he is ably supported by the newly appointed senior leadership team and governing body who share the headteacher's determination to raise standards and to improve provision. Effective actions have already enhanced the quality of teaching; provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage; and pupils' behaviour and self-esteem. This demonstrates the school's good capacity to improve further. The very good quality of the pastoral care provided for all pupils, but especially for the more vulnerable, contributes significantly to the positive ethos evident in the school community and to the better achievement of pupils with learning or behavioural difficulties.

Standards in English, mathematics and science remain low in both Key Stages 1 and 2 and are still a key priority for improvement. In particular, pupils' poor handwriting and spelling restrict their ability to attain higher standards in English. The provisional Year 6 national test results for 2008 show good improvements in the proportions of pupils gaining the expected Level 4 in mathematics and science, with less marked improvement in English. At both Key Stages more able pupils are not given sufficient challenge.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall with a greater proportion being good or outstanding than at the time of the last inspection. Pupils respond well where they have regular opportunities to learn actively, have clear objectives and targets set for their learning, and staff challenge them to work at a brisk pace. However, teachers do not always set work that matches pupils' needs closely enough. This impacts most on some pupils in Key Stage 1 and those who are more able. The organisation of children's learning and the relative lack of outdoor resources are weaknesses within the overall satisfactory provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The curriculum satisfactorily meets pupils' needs. Stronger elements include the programme to promote pupils' personal, social, health and citizenship education, the good range of activities available outside the classroom and the focus on helping pupils to produce good quality art work. Less effective is the promotion of pupils' basic academic skills in literacy and numeracy.

Parents are particularly appreciative of the way in which their children are looked after in school. Pupils enjoy coming to school and report that it has 'improved a lot over the last year'. Because the school does all it can to promote equality of opportunity and to eliminate discrimination, all pupils feel valued, safe and want to succeed. Pupils contribute to school decision making, for example, in helping to appoint staff and they contribute satisfactorily to the school community through membership of the school council and by helping midday supervisors.

The senior leadership team is realistic about the key areas for the school to improve and it works in particularly close partnership with the local authority as part of its intensive support programme. This partnership has been influential in bringing about the improvements evident since the last inspection. Senior leadership has not shied away from making difficult decisions

to improve the quality of teaching. Governors have played a significant role in stabilising the budget, through prudent financial management and have ensured that resources have been directed to areas of greatest need. Value for money is satisfactory.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

The Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory and provision is beginning to improve further because of good leadership and management. The leader has an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of provision. She has made significant changes to the way the curriculum is taught and how children's progress is monitored. Assessment systems are now good and adults' observations contribute to the overall picture of children's development and achievement. This ensures that planned activities are based on children's needs. As a result, there are clear signs that children's progress is starting to accelerate, particularly in their language and personal development. When the children enter Nursery, their skills are below those expected for their age. They make satisfactory progress but still enter Year 1 with skills below those typical for their age. Parents speak most favourably about the recent improvements, saying that they have added to their child's enjoyment of school and expressing comments such as, 'My child can't wait to come to school.'

Welfare requirements are met and adults provide a secure and safe environment in which children receive a good level of care. Teachers make good use of the resources at their disposal within the classroom, but the outdoor provision is underdeveloped, including a lack of up to date resources. This limits opportunities for children to practise and extend their experiences in all areas of their learning outdoors.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English, especially handwriting and spelling, and in mathematics and science.
- More consistently match work to the needs of pupils in Key Stage 1 and for those who are more able.
- Improve outdoor provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage to enhance children's development in all areas of their learning.

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

Since the last inspection standards have improved, in Key Stage 2, particularly. However, such is the legacy of previous underachievement and ineffective provision that they remain exceptionally low in both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Overall, pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Progress in Key Stage 2 is much improved. Some outstanding teaching in Year 6 over the last year has enabled pupils to progress very well and for a much higher proportion of pupils to reach the expected level than has been evident in the recent past. This has been most evident in mathematics and science. Progress has been slower in English with pupils' poor handwriting and spelling contributing to their weaker performance in writing. In Key Stage 1,

achievement is satisfactory overall but more patchy because expectations are sometimes too low and pupils' prior learning, due to weaker teaching, had been disrupted.

Effective support means that pupils with learning or behavioural difficulties make at least satisfactory and sometimes good progress. Lower attaining pupils and pupils who are at the early stages of speaking English make good progress in acquiring the language and also academically. However, the progress made by more able pupils has not always been good enough. Pupils' standards in art and design are above average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Although satisfactory overall, there are positive aspects of pupils' personal development. Their social and moral development is good. They relate well to each other and have a keen sense of fair play. They feel safe and report that instances of bullying are minimal and well handled. Pupils have positive attitudes to school. In indicating how much their learning has improved over the last year, they report that lessons are now 'interesting and fun'. The school council feels that it is listened to and influential. Pupils contribute well to the school and the nearby community, by taking on responsibilities and through their involvement in local events. Less strong is pupils' spiritual and cultural development. Beyond classroom learning, pupils have limited experiences of the faiths, cultures and traditions of other nations and ethnic groups.

Behaviour is satisfactory overall with mostly good behaviour in lessons. Some pupils still find it difficult to meet consistently the school's expectations of their conduct. Attendance is broadly average but with some persistent absentees disproportionately depressing the overall attendance figures. Pupils enjoy physical activity and participate enthusiastically in the good range of sports clubs and competitions the school organises. They understand well the benefits of regular exercise but are less sure about what constitutes a healthy diet. Pupils' preparation for their future economic well-being is satisfactory overall. They manage funds raised through selling produce and understand aspects of the world of work as a result of links with local businesses. However, they are still not as well equipped as they should be with basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The improvements in the quality of teaching reported in the Ofsted monitoring visit report have been maintained and in some respects further enhanced. Some outstanding teaching in Year 6 has helped pupils, whose previous experiences of learning led to their underachievement and some disenchantment, to progress at a much faster pace and to thoroughly enjoy their work. Lessons in the two Year 6 classes crack along and the work set is very well matched to pupils' needs and interests. This is because assessments and lesson plans reflect precise evaluations of what pupils already know and can do, and what they need to do next. Elsewhere in the school, in lessons that are good or better, teaching is well paced; pupils have opportunities to contribute to and assess their own learning; and teachers use interactive technology well to explain ideas visually and to hold pupils' attention. Where teaching is no better than satisfactory, particularly in Key Stage 1, the pace of learning is often slower and expectations of the quality and quantity of pupils' work are less rigorous. Relationships between pupils and adults are positive throughout the school and this is reflected in pupils' good attitudes to learning and

their keenness to improve their work. There are examples of high quality marking which both celebrates pupils' work and effort and is very clear about guiding pupils to further improvement. However, this is not evident in all teachers' practice.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum has strengths in the promotion of aspects of pupils' personal development and in the range of out-of-class clubs and activities. These contribute well to pupils' positive attitudes, good sense of responsibility and to their physical development. The award for three consecutive cycles of the Artsmark Gold Award reflects the school's good promotion of the arts. Currently, there is an appropriately strong focus on improving pupils' basic skills and while this is showing good signs of success, as yet, it is not fully effective in promoting expected standards in literacy and numeracy. Pupils talk enthusiastically about the visits they make, for example, residential experiences to North Wales, and they single out poets and drama groups who come into school as 'great'. The provision for the many pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for those who experience difficulties behaving consistently well, is satisfactory and improving. This is enabling these pupils to achieve increasingly well. The school's increased emphasis on teaching pupils the precise links between letters and sounds is helping to improve standards in reading and writing.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The pastoral care at the school allows pupils to feel valued and safe. They are confident that, when troubled, there is someone to turn to. Those who occasionally find it difficult coping with relationships or their work can seek refuge and reassurance, which enables them quickly to recover their composure. The effective work of the behaviour improvement team has enabled pupils who have the greatest difficulties conforming to the school's expectations to progress well academically. The satisfactory contribution of the teaching assistants who work alongside these pupils in classrooms has contributed to the successful integration into mainstream classes of those pupils who are part of the local authority resourced provision. Parents are complimentary about the quality of care provided for their children. The support from outside agencies is satisfactory and helps those more vulnerable pupils. Systems to track pupils' academic progress are rigorous, but they are not always used effectively to promote higher standards. The school closely checks on and satisfactorily promotes pupils' attendance amongst more persistent absentees. The procedures to safeguard pupils and for child protection meet current government guidelines. Internet safety is taken seriously and other risk assessments and safety checks are carried out appropriately and regularly.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher has a firm grasp of what the school has achieved since the last inspection and the issues it still faces. He sets high expectations and leads from the front, for example, in modelling good teaching practice. He has taken, in conjunction with the effective governing body, difficult and rigorous action to ensure that the quality of both teaching and management has improved. The newly created senior leadership team is enthusiastic and is working with some success to implement the school's clear vision for improving standards, achievement and

provision. The headteacher and senior leaders acknowledge that, despite improvements, their work has yet to fully impact on raising standards high enough in basic skills. Checks on the quality of provision are rigorous, accurate and have led to continued improvement in pupils' progress, the quality of teaching and aspects of provision, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The work of middle leaders has yet to be as effective. The school's award of the Inclusion Quality Mark reflects the school's commitment to equality of opportunity. While this is generally and increasingly successful, there are pupils who are less well served than others, for example, some in Key Stage 1 and a proportion of the more able pupils.

The school's promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory. It is very aware of the school and the local community and effectively embraces the different values and aspirations within them. However, the school is less successful in reaching out to wider United Kingdom and global communities. Governance is strong and led very well. The governors have secured the necessary changes in leadership and provision that have enabled the school to improve sufficiently so it no longer requires a notice to improve. They have monitored the school's work, challenged its performance and supported the headteacher well in taking effective action to eliminate weaker teaching and resistance to change. The school works satisfactorily with partners, especially the local authority to help pupils achieve better and to raise standards. Given the sustained improvement since the last inspection, and the proven determination to raise standards and achievement even further, there is a good capacity for further improvement.

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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	2

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?	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	3
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	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?	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	2
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 on behalf of the other inspector and myself for the welcome you gave us when we inspected your school recently. We enjoyed talking with you and being with you in your lessons.

You may know that when the school was last inspected it wasn't doing as well as it should and was given what is called a notice to improve. We judge that it has improved enough not to need this any more and that the school is now giving you a satisfactory standard of education. The things that it does well are:

- your art work is better than in many schools
- staff help you to feel safe by looking after you well
- you enjoy your lessons because the work you get is mostly what you need to help you to improve
- there are many trips and visitors and after-school activities which you enjoy and join in with well.

The adults who run the school know what needs to be done to make it even better. To help with this I have asked them to make sure that:

- you reach higher standards in your handwriting and spelling and in mathematics and science
- all the work you have to do suits what you need, especially some of you in Years 1 and 2 and those of you who find learning a bit easier than most
- the outside area that the children in Nursery and Reception use is improved.

Thank you all again for helping with the inspection and I wish you all well for the future.