

Astmoor Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111217
Local Authority	Halton
Inspection number	325315
Inspection date	16 October 2008
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)	134
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	Mrs K Tudor
Headteacher	Mrs L Aldridge
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	Kingshead Close Castlefields Runcorn Cheshire WA7 2JE
Telephone number	01928 565053
Fax number	01928 574627

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school, including its improvement since the last inspection and its capacity to improve further, and investigated the following issues: pupils' overall achievement and standards, especially whether they are doing well enough in reading and writing; the quality of teaching throughout the school; how well the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils who are taught in mixed-age classes; and the quality of leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from the school's judgements about attainment on entry to Reception, test results and teachers' assessments and records, observations of teaching, the analysis of pupils' work and responses within parents' questionnaires, and discussions with senior leaders, staff, pupils and governors.

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 the self-evaluation, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

The area served by this smaller than average-sized school has significant social disadvantage. Over half the pupils are entitled to a free school meal. Most pupils are from a White British heritage. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average.

Nursery children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) are taught as a separate class. Children in Reception are taught together with some Year 1 pupils.

The school has received a number of awards in recognition of its provision for the arts and its promotion of sport and has Healthy School status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school provides its pupils with a good education. Some of its work is outstanding. The school has a very able headteacher who is well supported by a forward-thinking and energetic senior leadership team, which includes a most capable business manager. The exceptionally good care and support provided, including for the much higher than average proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged or vulnerable, contributes significantly to pupils' outstanding personal development and well-being. The excellent way in which teachers promote pupils' self-esteem and the many 'extras' that the effective curriculum provides also help most pupils to develop into confident, responsible young citizens, who care well for others, respect their environment and are not afraid to voice their opinions.

Good quality teaching promotes effective learning and enables pupils to achieve well. From starting points in the Nursery that are well below national expectations, pupils leave Year 6 attaining broadly average standards. Leaders and managers have in place strategies to raise further pupils' standards in reading and writing, the weakest aspects of their learning. The recent strong emphasis on more effective teaching of letter sounds has resulted in improvements in Key Stage 1 pupils' standards in reading. However, the same strategies have only just been implemented in Key Stage 2 where reading and writing standards still lag behind those in other subjects. Standards in science in Key Stage 2 are higher than in other subjects.

Pupils' personal development is excellent. They talk enthusiastically about school, stating that teachers, 'help them learn in lots of fun ways,' and 'that they feel very safe'. The sterling work of the local authority, support staff and the the headteacher and governors has resulted in attendance now matching the national average for the first time in many years. Members of the school council act as a fine example to other pupils. They are well organised as a committee, draw up their own agenda, take their own minutes and are involved in key appointments in the school. An example of the school's effective governance is the regular link an individual governor has with the school council. Pupils take on lots of responsibilities by helping in assembly, leading younger ones in play at break and lunchtime and in representing pupils' views throughout the school. Pupils' awareness of the benefits of a balanced diet and in their participation in sport and exercise clubs provide ample evidence of why the school has the Healthy School award and the Activemark.

The school promotes the arts well and this contributes to pupils' excellent social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. Many pupils join and thrive in the school choir, which performs often in the local community with great success. Pupils learn to play musical instruments and some of their vibrant art work is displayed attractively around the school. This all reflects why the school has an Artsmark award. Pupils also have a keen awareness of those societies around the world which are considerably different from their own. They understand and practise principles of fair trade, and respect the different cultures and faiths that they learn about. They are well prepared to move to secondary school and to take their place in modern British society. They do not forget the local community: for example, after a moving harvest festival assembly, pupils took a fine array of fruit and vegetables that they had collected to a local hospice.

Leaders and managers ensure that by rigorously checking on pupils' progress and the quality of teaching that pupils achieve well and have equality of opportunity. This is especially commendable given the challenges posed by mixed-age classes. These classes are effectively organised by teachers who help pupils to learn well. They set work that closely matches pupils'

needs, teach energetically, accurately assess pupils' work and set them appropriate targets for improvement. Teaching assistants are effectively deployed and are skilled in helping those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, emotional difficulties or who use English as an additional language, to achieve well.

Leaders are not afraid to take action to eliminate relative weaknesses in teaching. Appropriate advice and professional training have improved the quality of teaching over time so that it is much improved since the last inspection. Together with governors being more effective in their role, this indicates the school's effective overall improvement since the last inspection and its good capacity to improve further. The school has forged excellent links with a range of partners. These enhance pupils' learning through, for example, the use of specialist teachers from high schools and a native French speaker. In addition, links with external agencies and with local services and organisations contribute extremely well to pupils' excellent personal development and to the high quality of the care and support they receive.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

A substantial majority of children enter the Nursery with personal skills and knowledge of the world around them that are well below those typical for their age. The communication and language skills of many are very low. Parents are made to feel very welcome when their children start school. The extremely good care and support that adults in the EYFS provide contributes significantly to how well children settle into routines, develop independence and begin to take responsibility. Effective leadership and management ensure that children are given a wide range of stimulating activities which meet their needs well. For example, Nursery children were fully involved in whisking different liquids and powders into water to see which generated the most bubbles. They were also encouraged to use their senses to decide which felt or smelt the nicest. During this activity it was also evident that adults have taught children to take turns amicably and to celebrate the achievements of others.

In both Nursery and Reception, adults' astute observations of how children are getting on, and their careful use of the information gained from these assessments, enable them to tailor well the activities they organise for the children. Children have many opportunities to develop their language through role play and to direct their own learning. For example, in Reception, some children 'ran a shop' and another group who 'served a meal' decided that they would like to move outside to have a picnic. While Nursery children have immediate access to an outside area, a minor weakness in the EYFS provision is the lack of similar access for Reception children, limiting their ability to work and play as they wish inside or outside.

Because of the overall good provision, children progress well over the two years and many enter Year 1 with broadly expected skill levels in many areas of their learning. They make particularly good progress in their personal, social and emotional development and in their physical development. However, despite making good progress in communication, language and literacy many still enter Year 1 with well below expected skills in this area of their learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in reading and writing, especially in Key Stage 2.

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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?	2
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	2

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?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

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	3
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
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?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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**

I very much enjoyed my day when I inspected your school recently. Many thanks to you all for the warm welcome I received. Your school gives you a good education and is excellent at caring for all of you, including those of you who find it more difficult to cope with school.

Your teachers are particularly good at helping you to feel good about yourselves and to appreciate when your friends do well. This is an important part of why you keep getting better with your work as you move through the school and how well you get on with each other. Your behaviour is excellent and many of you told me how much you enjoy learning because there are so many interesting things to do in lessons and after school. I could see that when I visited your classrooms and saw the 'Healthy Heroes' at work. I am impressed with how well organised your school council is and the way that they stick up for you and your opinions.

The school is run well, and your headteacher and the other teachers who help to organise things know what still needs improving. It is part of my job to help them with this and so I have asked them to make sure that all of you improve your reading and writing, especially those of you in Years 3 to 6. You can help with this by taking every opportunity you can to read and to practise your writing.

Thank you again for making my day so enjoyable.