

Highfield Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119204
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	326969
Inspection dates	3–4 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Peter McKay

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)	214
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	Miss Gill McGuigan
Headteacher	Mrs Sue Cornall
Date of previous school inspection	12 December 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Wright Street Chorley Lancashire PR6 0SP
Telephone number	01257 262783
Fax number	01257 231819

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school serves an urban area of some social and economic deprivation and the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. Despite a slight fall in the numbers on roll, the school has a relatively stable population. About 70% of pupils are White British, with the remainder mainly of Pakistani, Indian or Bangladeshi origin. About a quarter of pupils, well above the national average, do not speak English as a first language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average, but can be much higher in some groups. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need is well above average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good and improving school. Parents are overwhelmingly of the view that their children enjoy school and are making good academic and social progress. 'The school is second to none' is a typical comment. It is an inclusive school which values all pupils equally, gives the highest priority to their care and welfare and ensures their particular needs are met. The school is an extremely welcoming, calm and harmonious community because relationships are good and pupils behave well and have positive attitudes to learning.

Children start school with understanding and skills that are below those typical of their age. They make good progress and achieve well so that when they leave school in Year 6, their standards are broadly average. A recent fall in standards and achievement in Key Stage 2, partly attributable to staffing difficulties, has been reversed. Current pupils make good progress towards challenging targets. Pupils with learning, language or emotional difficulties achieve well because support is well matched to their needs.

Good teaching ensures that pupils' learning is effective and enjoyable. Lessons are planned with interesting and practical activities, and there plenty of opportunities for pupils to work independently and in groups. Pupils often learn from each other: in a Year 2 lesson some of the Muslim pupils took the lead in teaching about the importance of prayer in Islam. A good curriculum puts an increasing emphasis on skills which can be developed and applied across all subjects. However, in mathematics the more able pupils do not always receive the level of challenge which would allow them to reach the higher test levels. Pupils know how well they are progressing towards their targets but marking is inconsistent in giving helpful advice and guidance.

The headteacher's vision and sense of purpose is outstanding. She has led the school through a period of instability caused by many changes of staff and has worked in close partnership with the local authority in taking essential and decisive action to remove barriers to the school's progress. At the same time, the school has successfully gained the trust and support of the local community by convincing them that this is a school in which children can thrive and flourish. Links with an Islamic academy, involvement with intergenerational events through Age Concern and consultations with Jehovah's Witness families indicate the school's commitment to promoting community cohesion. The headteacher has been able to rely on the support of a dedicated, hardworking and enthusiastic team of teachers and support staff. Governors know the school well and have ensured that resources have been well targeted at securing improvement and that the school provides good value for money. The school is well placed to build on its strengths and improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children enter the reception class with skills and abilities below those typical for their age in all areas of learning except for reading and writing, where they are well below. They make good progress in most areas of learning. They enter Year 1 broadly in line with the expected levels for all areas of learning except for writing, where they are below. This represents good achievement in relation to low starting points.

Teaching is consistently good. Low levels of literacy are addressed through the 'Letters and Sounds' programme, which has proved to be very effective in accelerating children's progress

in reading, though less so in writing. Adults place a strong emphasis on developing children's personal and social skills and plan exciting activities that capture and maintain their interest and encourage them to learn. Good management ensures the free flow use of the indoor and outdoor areas. However, resources and activities for the outdoor area are not sufficiently well developed to support and promote children's learning throughout the day. Children respond positively, behave well and clearly enjoy learning. They work well in pairs and small groups, taking turns and sharing equipment fairly. The balance between teacher directed and child-initiated work is good. It develops children's skills effectively, raises their level of confidence and self-esteem whilst providing them with exciting opportunities to practise their skills and blossom into independent learners.

Good systems for assessing and tracking provide a clear and accurate indication of each child's progress. Teachers use this information well to identify vulnerable groups and to plan effective intervention strategies designed to meet their individual needs.

Leadership and management are good. The highest priority is given to children's welfare and safety. The carefully planned induction arrangements for children when they start school help them to settle happily into everyday routines and thrive in a warm and supportive environment.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the planned activities and the equipment provided. for outdoor learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage area.
- Provide greater challenge for more able pupils in mathematics to enable them to reach the higher national curriculum levels.
- Ensure that marking consistently provides clear explanation of what has been done well and offers guidance on how to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' achievement is good across the school. From starting points below those typical of children of their age, pupils make good progress to reach average standards by Year 6. This represents good achievement, especially for those groups of pupils with learning or language difficulties, each of whom may form up to a quarter of each cohort.

Since the previous inspection pupils' progress in Key Stage 2 has been adversely affected by serious staffing difficulties, which have now been resolved. Results in Year 6 national tests declined to below average. However, the provisional 2008 results in Year 6 indicated a return to average standards and the school is meeting its targets. The number of pupils reaching the higher level went up in all subjects but in mathematics fewer pupils reached those levels than in English and science. Improved results in English reflect the success of strategies to tackle the weaknesses in writing across the school. The school's rigorous tracking systems show that the majority of pupils are making good progress towards challenging targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. Good relationships create a calm, caring and harmonious atmosphere in which pupils feel safe and secure and learn well. Behaviour is good in class and around the school. The great majority of pupils understand and accept the clear code of conduct. Serious

incidents are extremely rare and the challenging behaviour of a very small minority of pupils is managed well.

Pupils say they thoroughly enjoy coming to school. They find lessons fun, enjoy the many additional activities on offer and relish the friendly atmosphere. Attendance, although below average, is improving and the number of persistent absentees is falling rapidly.

The diversity of the school and local communities helps foster understanding and respect in relation to different cultures and faiths. Pupils have good opportunities to take on responsibility and exercise leadership skills, for example as school councillors, prefects, librarians, eco kids and playground pals. As befits eco-school status, pupils show concern for the school environment and are active in recycling. The school has the Healthy Schools Award and pupils are knowledgeable about the importance of sensible eating and regular exercise. They are well informed about road and internet safety. Average basic skills and well developed personal and social skills provide a satisfactory preparation for the next stage of learning.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning promote good achievement for all pupils. Teachers plan varied and engaging activities which are closely matched to individual needs. Explanations are clear and questioning is used effectively to extend knowledge and understanding. Pace and challenge are a feature of most lessons, though pupils say that sometimes teachers talk for too long in whole class sessions. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively to enrich learning, especially through use of the interactive whiteboards. Pupils are encouraged to learn independently and they work co-operatively in pairs and groups. They have good opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills, but teachers also maintain a sharp focus on the need to improve writing. Pupils are enthusiastic learners who enjoy the challenge of trying to achieve their targets. Increasingly they are assessing their own work to give them a better understanding of how well they are doing. Faster learners are given extra work to help them to aim higher but these tasks are not always sufficiently demanding in mathematics. Teaching assistants are well trained to provide individual and small group activities that successfully support the class teachers' work. This enables those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who require language support to participate fully in lessons and to achieve well. Marking makes good use of encouragement and praise. Its impact on learning varies because of inconsistency in explaining what is good and setting out the next steps for improvement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum supports pupils' good personal development and academic progress. There is a strong emphasis on developing skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT. The development of exciting cross-curricular themes provides many opportunities for pupils to develop and transfer these skills across a range of subjects. Planning for numeracy does not always ensure enough challenge to allow the more able pupils to reach the higher levels. A strong focus on the social and emotional aspects of learning, with carefully planned opportunities for pupils to talk about their experiences and feelings, has been very effective in improving behaviour. Pupils say they really enjoy the good range of after school clubs and sports. Visits and visitors to school help

to enrich learning and include a Year 6 residential visit for outdoor activities. Specialist support for pupils at the early stages of learning English or those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities allows them to access the whole curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school knows its pupils well and provides very strong pastoral care. Staff are committed to ensuring pupils are safe, happy and healthy. Pupils say adults are very approachable and always ready to help with problems or worries. Risk assessments, child protection procedures and safeguarding checks meet requirements. Pupils who need additional help receive good support, drawing if necessary on close links with specialist external agencies. Strategies to raise attendance have been very successful in reducing the number of unauthorised absence. Systems for tracking pupils' progress are now firmly established. Pupils who are not making the expected progress are identified and given extra support. Teachers' oral feedback to pupils keeps them informed of how well they are progressing towards challenging but realistic curriculum targets. Their marking of work is not always as helpful.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides inspirational leadership and she has been instrumental in driving improvement. Decisive action has been taken to eliminate barriers to the school's progress. Teaching and learning have improved, challenging behaviour has been reduced significantly and attendance has improved. Good appointments have been made in key areas. At the same time standards have risen after a period of decline. This work has been founded on rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance which has guided appropriate and successful action. This would not have been possible without the enthusiasm, dedication and commitment to teamwork of the whole staff. Other senior leaders and middle managers are well trained and are both empowered and trusted to carry out their responsibilities. Governors are very supportive but prepared to challenge the school. Efforts to change perceptions of the school and engage the support of parents and the local community have been successful. Strong links now exist and are used well to develop pupils' awareness of their place within the local and wider community. The partnership with the local authority has been very fruitful in securing additional resources and in improving many aspects of the school's work. There is no complacency. The school acknowledges that there is more to do to achieve better outcomes and has a good capacity to improve further.

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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?	2
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?	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?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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?	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	3
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?	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?	2

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	2
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**

5 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Highfield Primary School, Lancashire, PR6 0SP

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school. We were pleased to find out how much you enjoy coming to school. We agree with you and your parents in thinking that the school is a very friendly and caring community.

Yours is a good and improving school. Your headteacher provides excellent leadership and is determined to make it even better. We like many things about the school.

Good teaching and your own enthusiasm help you to learn well and make good progress. Your behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Most of you attend regularly. We like the way you help others both in and out of school, particularly through your fundraising for charity. We were very impressed with how keen you are to be involved in so many different activities in and out of school. All the recycling you do shows how much you care about the environment

The headteacher, governors and other staff are working very hard to improve the school even more. However, we think your school could do some things better.

- Improve the Early Learning Foundation Stage area for outdoor learning.
- Give the faster learners in maths harder work so that they can reach the higher levels in tests.
- Make sure the marking of your work gives you more guidance on how to improve.

Thank you once again for being so polite and helpful. I wish every one of you well for the future and hope that you will always work hard and enjoy school.

Yours sincerely,

Peter McKay

Lead inspector