

Royal Cross Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133688
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	328726
Inspection date	27 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Alastair Younger

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	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	31
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	3
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jenny Lynch
Headteacher	Mrs Ruth Nottingham
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Elswick Road Ashton-on-Ribble Preston Lancashire PR2 1NT
Telephone number	01772 729705
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a small special school. It is Lancashire's only community special school for deaf children. All pupils have a statement of special educational need covering a wide range of communication needs. Most pupils are hearing impaired but a significant minority have autistic spectrum disorders or speech, language and communication difficulties. Boys outnumber girls by about four to one. About a half of all pupils live in homes where English is not the first language. Many pupils come from areas of above average social and economic deprivation. The school includes provision for children at the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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, happy school. It has many outstanding features, including the way in which it works so effectively in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being. The school works extensively with mainstream and special schools across the county, sharing the considerable expertise of staff to enable many other hearing impaired pupils to remain in their mainstream schools. This work also paves the way for most pupils to transfer successfully to mainstream schools at the end of Year 6. There is particularly effective liaison with Asian families. The work of the school contributes enormously to pupils' awareness of others from different backgrounds or cultures, strongly promoting the importance of developing an understanding of what they can contribute to the mixed community in which they live.

Parents are hugely appreciative of the many ways in which the school is helping their children to thrive and secure better futures for themselves by improving their communication skills. These improvements contribute enormously to pupils' outstanding personal development and their enjoyment of life. Outstanding care, guidance and support further contribute to the picture of improvement. Close attention to detail helps pupils to develop a strong awareness of personal safety, for instance by learning about the ways in which deafness poses additional risks, especially on the road. One of the many improvements since the last inspection has been the way in which pupils are now extensively involved in contributing to the community of the school and its ongoing development. Excellent attention is paid to promoting pupils' emotional well-being alongside their physical health.

The nature of pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities prevents most from being able to meet the standards expected of pupils in mainstream schools. Nevertheless, helped by good teaching and an excellent curriculum, pupils achieve well, making good progress from what are usually very low starting points. Academic progress tends to speed up in Key Stage 2 as pupils develop their communication and personal skills. Nearly all pupils meet, or almost meet, challenging personal targets set by teachers after negotiation with parents and informed by the contributions of therapists and the many other agencies and professionals with which the school works closely and effectively. When targets are not met it is often as a result of changes in pupils' conditions or circumstances.

Leadership, management and governance are good. The headteacher provides excellent leadership and the strength of management is evident in the way that significant changes in staffing over the past year have been handled to prevent any slippage in pupils' learning or well-being. Staff changes have, however, delayed the school's desire to distribute subject leadership duties more equably. All staff are well qualified and hold a relevant qualification for the teaching of deaf children. An excellent programme of staff development ensures that staff continually develop their skills. There is extensive informal monitoring of teaching but more formal procedures are less well developed, with the result that they do not contribute sufficiently to self-evaluation or school improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

A very small number of pupils form the Early Years Foundation Stage. Most children entering the Early Years Foundation Stage do so at the very earliest stages of learning and personal development, exhibiting the effects of their considerable learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Good teaching quickly starts to help them to address their communication problems and in turn this contributes to good improvements in their learning and outstanding progress in their personal development. Achievement, measured against personal targets, is good but the nature of their learning difficulties and/or disabilities means that the expectation of attaining national goals is unrealistic. Although the Early Years Foundation Stage is very small, great care has been taken to make sure that it has followed recent legislation and that provision reflects national initiatives. The indoor environment in which children are taught is bright and stimulating, offering children the opportunity to learn and develop through play and experimentation as well as through being taught. The outdoor area is less stimulating and tends to be used as an outdoor classroom rather than an environment for exploration and discovery. Carefully planned activities develop children's interests and skills, whilst promoting their enjoyment of learning. Pupils are strongly encouraged to work together to solve problems and also to relate to one another, thus helping them to overcome some of their difficulties. The Early Years Foundation Stage is well led and managed with great care being taken to ensure the safety and happiness of the children within it. This is of great reassurance to parents.

What the school should do to improve further

- Establish better formal procedures for the monitoring and evaluation of teaching.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Every parent who responded to a questionnaire sent out before the inspection felt that good teaching was helping their child to make good progress. The evidence of inspection supports this. The nature of pupils' learning difficulties and/or disabilities means that most join and leave the school at a standard well below that expected of pupils in mainstream schools. Nevertheless, the gap does significantly close. Taking into account all the difficulties that pupils face in their learning, nearly all make good progress and achieve well in relation to challenging individual targets that are agreed by parents. By the time they leave at the end of Year 6, most pupils have moved on from a barely recognisable level of attainment to one which is approaching expectations for Year 2 mainstream pupils, except in English. This is a good achievement.

Achievement is good across the school and for all groups of pupils. In the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 much of the measurable progress made by pupils is in gains in personal, social and communication skills. As these develop, pupils become more able to focus upon new learning, helped by good teaching and an outstanding curriculum. Pupils are greatly helped to achieve through the flexibility of the school's organisation. Many pupils have a complex range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities, with varying degrees of autism, deafness and communication disorders. The relative influence of these fluctuates but the perceptiveness of staff ensures that pupils are always placed in the setting that best meets their needs and enables them to make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their well-being are outstanding. A sense of happiness and fulfilment pervades the school. Pupils are polite, inquisitive and very well behaved. A few indiscretions are on record but nearly all relate to the frustrating difficulties faced by children with autism. There is no record of any degree of racism in recent years. This amply demonstrates the school's total commitment to developing in pupils a sense of

understanding and tolerance of others of different race, belief or disadvantage and its contribution to building a better society. The main barrier to new pupils' personal development and well-being is often their limited ability to communicate and thus make their feelings and frustrations known. By systematically breaking down this hurdle, pupils are helped to become much more sociable, enjoy life more and vastly improve their prospects of success in later life. Many pupils endure long journeys to and from school. The provision of a healthy breakfast in school each morning gets the day off to a good start and the promotion of healthy lifestyles is excellent. Emotional well-being is strongly promoted alongside that of physical health. Pupils' excellent behaviour and their awareness and consideration of others demonstrate their awareness of how their actions can contribute to the safety of themselves and the school community. Despite transport issues, prolonged family visits to places of origin and hospitalisations, most students attend whenever they can. Attendance is improving and is above average

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. All teachers hold a qualification for the teaching of deaf pupils and an excellent programme of professional development ensures that they also develop enhanced skills for the teaching and management of pupils with other difficulties. Lessons are well planned, with careful attention being paid to pupils' prior learning and the approaches that best suit the different ways in which pupils learn. Skilled use is made of equipment which helps pupils to hear and communicate. This includes imaginative use of computer technology. On occasion, good classroom assistants are not deployed to the greatest effect because instructions given to them are not sufficiently explicit. On other occasions not enough attention is paid to pupils who are working quietly but could be doing more. Classrooms are exceptionally well managed to limit the impact of any misbehaviour or other interruptions to concentration and learning. Pupils are presented with tasks well matched to their ability, made possible by teachers' comprehensive understanding of each pupil's ability and the barriers to learning that each individual faces. Daily communication with parents greatly helps to ensure that their wishes are being met and this sharing of information helps them to contribute to their children's progress

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum and the ways in which it is enriched are outstanding. As a result pupils thoroughly enjoy coming to school, buoyed up by the knowledge that each day is going to be packed with activities and challenges that excite them. Especially important is the way that the curriculum is tailored to the different ways in which pupils learn and thrive. An example of this is a more practically orientated approach to the teaching of a group of pupils who can become easily distracted. The placing of pupils in different classes is carefully considered on grounds of personal benefit and learning need, rather than being dictated by age or ability. As a result, it is not uncommon for Year 1 pupils to be taught alongside Early Years Foundation Stage children or for Key Stage 2 pupils to transfer to a different class if their overriding difficulties change. Every aspect of the curriculum focuses very strongly on promoting communication including the use of computers to aid it. Personal, social and health education is central to the timetable and includes many opportunities for pupils to express their views as to how the school could develop, improve and contribute to the community. The curriculum is greatly enhanced by

opportunities for all pupils to engage in activities in mainstream schools on a regular basis and in the way the school involves pupils from those schools in its own activities, such as the delightful Sing-Up musical event, hosted by Royal Cross on the day of inspection.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Exceptional attention is given to ensuring that pupils are safe and well cared for. For this, parents express considerable gratitude. Great care is taken to ensure that only suitable staff, governors and helpers are recruited. The assessment of potential risk in every activity is meticulous and extends, for instance, to cover road safety implications for deaf children on trips away from school. High prominence is given to the health and safety of pupils and staff alike. All statutory procedures for the protection and safeguarding of pupils are followed.

Staff show an exceptional understanding of the pupils in their care. This is based not only on thorough and accurate assessment of their progress but also on regular communication with parents and the many other professionals and agencies involved in the well-being of pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership, management and governance are good. The headteacher has displayed an outstanding level of leadership over the past year, ensuring that significant changes in the teaching staff have had minimal impact on pupils' progress and development, the ethos of the school, or the common sense of purpose among staff. Staff turnover, all of it for good reasons, has created inequality in subject leadership and temporarily restricted the school's drive for wider distribution of management duties. There are no inadequacies, however, because of the desire of all staff to help ensure the best possible outcomes for pupils. This is what makes the school special and bodes well for further good improvement.

Senior staff have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and how it compares to others. There is daily informal monitoring of teaching but more formal arrangements are less well developed and do not sufficiently highlight what needs to be done to convert consistently good teaching into that which is more often outstanding.

The school makes an excellent contribution to promoting community cohesion given its context. It does so by helping the community to understand the problems faced by deaf people. It shares its expertise freely with other schools to the benefit of the hearing impaired pupils attending them. The supportive links the school has built up with the families of Asian pupils are exceptional and contribute enormously to cementing trust and confidence in the community at large.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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	4
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	2
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?	2
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?	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?	1
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

28 January 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Royal Cross Primary School, Lancashire, PR2 1NT

It was a joy to visit your school the other day. Thank you for making me so welcome and sharing your views with me. Well done to the Head Girl and Head Boy for your fully justified praise of the school and what it does to help you.

I visit lots of schools like yours and can confidently say that Royal Cross is a good school. You get a good deal. You are well taught and achieve well. You are given exceptional help to allow you to express your feelings, convey your needs and to develop as valued members of society. Your timetable is packed with fabulous opportunities for learning and having fun. The joy in your faces as you joined in with Sing - Up, alongside pupils from other schools, was uplifting; especially the giggles every time 'bum' was mentioned in the song you were rehearsing.

There is very little need to change what is already happening in school but it did cross my mind that by observing more lessons and recording what was working and what was not, senior staff would be in a better position to work out how to make teaching outstanding, rather than good. You deserve it.

All the best and good luck for the future.

Alastair Younger

Lead inspector