

Ashurst Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104771
Local Authority	St. Helens
Inspection number	336363
Inspection dates	20–21 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Stephen Rowland

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	271
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ian Bowling
Headteacher	Mr Brian Banks
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 19 lessons and held meetings with governors, staff, groups of pupils and parents. They observed the school's work and looked at the school's development plan, records of meetings, the school's monitoring records and analyses of pupils' attainment and progress. Inspectors analysed 111 questionnaires returned by parents, 89 questionnaires returned by pupils and 13 questionnaires returned by staff.

- how effectively the school ensures that all pupils are achieving their full potential
- the impact of the school's work in order to ensure consistently good teaching
- how well teachers use assessment information to plan for good learning
- the effectiveness of leaders at all levels in evaluating the work of the school and planning for improvement
- the effectiveness of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Information about the school

This is an average sized primary school serving the areas of Laffak and Blackbrook in St Helens. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is close to the national average. Nearly all pupils are of White British heritage.

Not all children who attend the part-time Nursery transfer into the Reception class and some of those who enter the Reception class have not attended the Nursery.

The school has the Basic Skills Award. It also has Investors in People status, the Active Mark Gold Award and the Healthy Schools Award.

The school provides an out of school club both before and after school from Monday to Friday and a play scheme during the school holiday.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

This is a satisfactory school which has a number of strengths. The headteacher and school leaders have a shared determination to challenge complacency and to improve standards. Following a period of staffing changes and a reorganisation of the school's staffing structure, there are clear signs of improvement. For example, standards in writing have improved throughout the school as a result of the school's 'big write' project. In mathematics, standards overall have improved but the more able pupils are not making the progress expected. The school is aware of this and has plans to address the deficiencies.

Teaching is satisfactory and the school's own monitoring records show a steady improvement over recent years. There are examples of good or outstanding practice and the school has much it can build upon. Some teaching is still not good enough though, particularly in mathematics.

Partnerships with parents are good and parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. One stated, 'A very happy and approachable school.' Pupils have a sense of loyalty and belonging at Ashurst and are very pleased to show visitors around and talk about their experiences in the, 'Family of Ashurst. Behaviour in and around the school is good. Pupils are invariably polite and considerate of others. Only at times when they are insufficiently challenged in their lessons does this high standard slip. Many pupils have roles of responsibility within the school, for example, as playground leaders. The work of the school council has contributed to decisions about various aspects of school life and pupils feel they are listened to and their views are respected. The school develops pupils' spiritual, moral and social understanding effectively and they demonstrate this through their actions as responsible and considerate citizens and by the involvement in their learning. However, the awareness that pupils develop of other cultures is not supported by direct engagement with these groups.

Self-evaluation is clear and focused and this is now having a demonstrable impact on standards. This impact is not yet consistent but there are sufficient positive signs to show that the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the more able pupils achieve their full potential in mathematics by:
 - making sure that teachers' planning provides learning experiences to match the needs of this group.
- Increase the proportion of good or better teaching by:

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- using searching and challenging questions which encourage pupils to extend their understanding
- ensuring that the pace of learning is brisk so that pupils remain engaged and enjoy their lessons
- ensuring that the best practice is shared.
- Ensure that pupils have a better understanding of Britain's multicultural society by:
 - allowing opportunities for active engagement with other ethnic, cultural and religious groups.
- About 40% of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged to be satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit from an Ofsted inspector before their next Section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Pupils' behaviour is good and in the best lessons they are fully engaged and make good progress. They respond well to challenging teaching and work together with enthusiasm to develop their understanding and skills. In some lessons, where teaching was not as well planned and lacked pace, pupils lacked confidence and did not make adequate progress.

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills which are below age related expectations and make good progress because of the stimulating experiences offered to them. Pupils make satisfactory progress throughout the rest of the school, reaching standards which are near to the national average by the end of Year 6. Standards improved in 2009 following a dip in 2008. This was particularly so in writing where the school's 'Big Write' project had a clear and positive impact. Standards in mathematics lag behind and the more able pupils do not do as well as other pupils. Evidence from lesson observations and pupils' work during the inspection show an improving picture. Most pupils are now making satisfactory and, frequently, good progress.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive good support and, as a consequence, make progress which is at least in line with their peers.

Pupils are keen to say how much they enjoy school. One typical comment was, 'It is a very, very good school to go to. I love it!' Attendance is improving and was close to the national average last year. Pupils say they feel very safe and value the good work of the school council. Healthy lifestyles are promoted successfully through high levels of participation in sporting and other fitness activities.

Pupils are confident users of information and communication technology. Through the activities, such as the careers enrichment days, they develop skills which will enable them to be effective adults. They demonstrate effective literacy skills but mathematical skills are not as well developed.

Pupils have a strong sense of right and wrong and are fully aware of their responsibilities as members of the school and the wider community. They are aware of other ethnic, cultural and religious groups within the United Kingdom but have few

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opportunities to meet these groups face to face and to share activities with them.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is satisfactory overall and there are examples of good and outstanding practice. A small proportion of the teaching observed was inadequate. In the best lessons, pupils make good progress because they are engaged fully in their learning. Planning is effective and teachers ask searching questions which enables all pupils, including the most able, to understand increasingly more difficult concepts. There is a brisk and businesslike pace, so there is no chance for pupils to lose interest. In less effective lessons, the pace is slower and pupils become disinterested. At times too long is spent on material which the pupils already understand and on activities which are not challenging or interesting enough. As a consequence, progress is only satisfactory.

An effective system for tracking pupils' academic progress is in place. This rigorous system enables pupils and teachers to see what has been learnt, understand the next steps of learning and where they need to intervene to provide more support.

The school curriculum offers much that is interesting and engaging. Work in information

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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and communication technology is developed well and is evident throughout the school. Pupils have the opportunity to learn a modern foreign language and they enjoy the opportunity to practise their skills. Music is a particular strength. Some pupils recently attended a workshop with musicians from the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. A wide range of extra-curricular activities help to enhance the pupils' experiences. Provision to develop mathematical skills is not as successful.

Pupils are cared for very well and arrangements to look after the most vulnerable are good. Safeguarding is managed effectively. The before and after school club, managed by the governing body offers excellent provision.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and other senior leaders challenge complacency and ensure that there is a shared determination to raise standards. The recent improvement in attainment in all subjects shows that actions taken are effective. Although this is not a consistent picture, the headteacher and other leaders are aware of what needs to be done and express a clear will to succeed. In this, they are supported fully by an experienced and committed governing body.

The areas from the previous inspection have been addressed successfully. In most areas there is a greater consistency in the quality of teaching, although there is still work to be done to improve the teaching of mathematics. Assessment is now widely used to help plan for learning and to help pupils see what they have to do to reach the next step. Equality of opportunity is promoted successfully and there is no discrimination. However, the more able pupils are not yet achieving their full potential in mathematics.

Partnerships with parents are strong. Parents say they feel included and are part of the school community. A variety of outside bodies and groups help the school effectively in its work with the more vulnerable pupils. Child protection procedures and safeguarding requirements are good. Community cohesion is satisfactory. A full audit of the school's work in this area has been undertaken but the impact on pupils has not been evaluated fully.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skill levels which are below expectations for their age. They make good progress especially in their personal development and are well prepared for their transition to Year 1. Relationships with others and with adults are good. Children are eager to learn and enjoy a broad range of activities both child-initiated and adult led. They know how to keep themselves safe and chat readily about themselves to their key worker.

The environment is stimulating and equipped well although there are limited opportunities for 'free flow' access to the outdoor area, resulting in children not always being able to choose where they prefer to learn. Activities are well planned and are based on accurate observations and assessments. Partnerships with parents are good with regular formal and informal meetings with parents and carers. Parents confirm that they feel involved with their child's learning. Leadership and management are good. Policies and procedures are good. Staff are suitably qualified and trained. Improvements in provision are based upon a robust process of self-evaluation in which the views of all groups are taken into account.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents are largely positive about the school. There were many complimentary comments during the inspection both orally and in writing which praised the school's many positive features. Many of these described how open and welcoming the school is and how most feel that it is like a family. Parents consider their children are kept safe and are offered a good variety of opportunities.

A very small minority of parents raised concerns over behaviour. Inspectors observed generally good behaviour around the school but did note some lack of attention and concentration in lessons when the pace of learning flagged. The school's behaviour policy seeks to address some of these issues.

A very small minority of parents also raised concern over the lack of progress and information on progress. Inspectors felt that in most lessons pupils made at least satisfactory or better progress. In a minority of lessons, particularly for the more able pupils in mathematics, progress was not good enough.

The school evaluates its work effectively and has the capacity to respond successfully to concerns.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ashurst Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 111 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 271 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	70	63	53	48	3	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	79	71	44	40	1	1	2	2
The school informs me about my child's progress	56	50	56	50	11	10	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	57	51	54	49	9	8	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	55	50	68	61	2	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	50	45	65	59	9	8	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	71	64	54	49	1	1	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	55	50	58	52	5	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	56	50	63	57	6	5	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	49	44	53	48	15	14	4	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	45	41	61	55	11	10	3	3
The school is led and managed effectively	50	45	62	56	8	7	4	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	61	55	58	52	6	5	1	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



22 October 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ashurst Primary School, St Helens WA11 9QJ

Thank you for making me and my colleagues so welcome during our recent visit to your school. I am particularly grateful to those pupils who agreed to meet us during your lunchtime. We enjoyed a lot of what we saw at Ashurst and was very impressed by the cross-training you do with staff from St Helens Rugby League Club and by the very high standards you reach in music.

Ashurst is a satisfactory school. There are many good things and you are rightly proud of Ashurst. The vast majority of responses we received in the pupil questionnaires were very positive. Your behaviour is mostly mature and sensible. You take part in a great variety of extra-curricular clubs and activities. Your school council works hard to represent your views.

We want the school to do three things so that it continues to improve:

- make sure that you all make good progress in mathematics, particularly the more-able pupils
- make sure that all of your lessons are at least good
- make sure that your school makes partnerships with other schools and organisations so that you get to know more about children with different ethnic or religious backgrounds.

You are very loyal to your school and I believe that you will continue to work hard to make it even better. This is how you can support your teachers and help them to make Ashurst a really great place.

Thank you once again for your help. My best wishes.

Yours sincerely

Mr Stephen Rowland

Lead inspector

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