

Victoria Road Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110992
Local Authority	Halton
Inspection number	337607
Inspection dates	1–2 December 2009
Reporting inspector	Jennifer Platt

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	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	233
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr E Owen
Headteacher	Mrs Kate Brown
Date of previous school inspection	9 November 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 18 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff, groups of pupils and met parents informally. They observed the school's work, and looked at teachers' planning, documentation for safeguarding pupils, the school's assessment records and test results, future plans and several policies. In addition, inspectors analysed 42 questionnaires returned by parents and carers, 15 from school staff and 44 from pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- current progress in Key Stage 1, especially in reading and writing and for boys throughout the school
- the quality of teaching and use of assessment when planning lessons and tracking pupils' progress
- the opportunities pupils have to learn about other cultures
- the involvement of staff and governors in the self-evaluation process.

Information about the school

This is an average size school. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is broadly average as is the number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Very few pupils are from minority ethnic groups. There is Early Years Foundation Stage provision in two Reception classes. There have been considerable staffing changes since the last inspection, including a new headteacher and senior management team. The school holds several awards including Healthy Schools, Basic Skills Award, Artsmark, Activemark and is a member of the Thinking Schools' Network. A before- and after-school club is available and this has been inspected separately. A report is available on the Ofsted website.

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 caring school that supports pupils well. The close partnership with parents works well to involve them in their children's learning and to keep them aware of how well their child is doing in school. Similarly, the school works closely with many external agents seeking out additional advice and support for the more vulnerable pupils. As a result, the school has a warm and friendly atmosphere and pupils say they are happy and enjoy school.

Pupils make satisfactory progress in lessons and leave school with broadly average standards in English, mathematics and science. Although attainment in English overall is satisfactory, writing is the weaker aspect and is below average, especially for the number of pupils reaching the higher levels. Pupils' work shows a weakness in spelling, handwriting and there is limited evidence of writing longer pieces of work in different subjects. A contributory factor to this is the lack of challenge in lessons where teachers are not always targeting work at the correct level, especially for the more-able pupils. To resolve this, the school is introducing more rigorous assessment procedures to ensure teachers have more detailed information about pupils' progress. This system is not yet sufficiently embedded to have an impact on standards. Teachers plan well, but are not always making it clear what they want pupils to learn and this makes it difficult to assess their understanding at the end of lessons. A strength in teaching is the warm relationships between pupils and staff and this leads to pupils' good behaviour. During the inspection, behaviour and singing were exemplary when pupils came together rehearsing their songs for the imminent Christmas performance.

The school links subjects together to make learning more interesting. Key Stage 2 pupils have enjoyed learning about India this term and were especially interested in patterns and colours in the art of that culture. The curriculum meets the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities very well.

The headteacher and senior management are very new and just starting to gel as a team. Monitoring roles are expanding, but as yet staff and governors are not fully involved in the school's self-evaluation. Nevertheless, the school has correctly identified the need to raise standards in writing and to improve assessment. As yet, these changes have not led to sustained improvement, especially in writing and in the quality of teaching, which were concerns raised in the previous inspection. The capacity to improve is satisfactory.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in writing throughout the school especially for the more-able

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pupils by:

- having higher expectations, especially of pupils' spelling and handwriting
- providing more opportunities for pupils to write longer pieces of work in literacy lessons and other subjects.
- Improve the quality of teaching throughout the school by:
 - ensuring all lessons are sufficiently challenging
 - making sure pupils are clear what they are expected to learn in lessons
 - embedding the new assessment procedures and using the information gained when tracking progress and planning lessons.
- Increase the monitoring role of managers and widen the self-evaluation process to include more staff and governors.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged to be satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

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

Pupils' progress is satisfactory and in some lessons good, especially in Key Stage 2. Older pupils are attentive in lessons and enjoy working with a partner or in a group. They are especially responsive in mathematics, enjoying the challenge to explain their methods of calculation and share their ideas. Lesson observations and the school's monitoring data show that the school has successfully addressed the previously different progress of boys and girls. Boys enjoy the practical activities and the choice of texts that are seen to be more boy-friendly. Overall, achievement is satisfactory and improving. A rising trend in Key Stage 1 over the last three years means that attainment at the end of both key stages is now broadly average. However, throughout the school, writing has received too little attention. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress overall. Those with very specific needs make good progress because their needs are met by well trained support staff who ensure resources are available, which enable these pupils to fully contribute in lessons.

Pupils' good social and moral development leads to them being polite to each other and visitors. Firm friendships are established and the atmosphere in the dining room is one of friendly banter and good manners. They enjoy learning about life in other countries but are less well informed about life in a multicultural society. The energetic play on the small playground reflects the pupils' ability to control their behaviour and consider others. Older pupils are very caring as they carry out monitoring roles, including shepherding the younger ones in after break. Although a concern about bullying was raised, pupils said they had no worries about it and knew how to seek help if needed. Pupils appreciate the good range of clubs, especially in sport, which contributes to their eagerness to keep fit and healthy. Taking into consideration broadly average attendance and pupils' basic skills, they are soundly prepared for the future.

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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	3
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?

Lessons are well managed and run smoothly. The focus in Key Stage 1 on learning through practical activity ensures pupils enjoy learning and parents appreciate the smooth transition from the Reception classes to Year 1. However, expectations for Year 2, who are mixed with Year 1 pupils, are not always high enough and the tasks identified in planning are not always rigorously carried through in practice. Many teachers use the interactive whiteboard well to make lessons interesting. In Year 5, pupils enjoyed using computers to prepare power point presentations for their peers. Pace increases when teachers give pupils a set time to complete a task, but too often the pace in lessons is not brisk enough because teachers spend too much time talking. Detailed planning of the curriculum provides a good balance of activities over time and is organised effectively so that pupils in mixed-age classes do not miss or repeat aspects of the National Curriculum. The arrangement of the timetable is not as effective, leading to some very lengthy numeracy lessons which make it difficult for pupils to sustain their concentration.

Staff are very aware of the personal needs of their pupils and go that extra step to

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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support them. For example, the headteacher has a working lunch with older pupils so that they can discuss how they are managing their behaviour and coping in school.

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?

Changes in management since the last inspection have to some extent led to a hiatus in the school's momentum to raise standards. Stability has returned and the new management team are working together to make up for lost time. Changes are at an early stage, but the current focus on improving tracking shows the school is aware of what is most needed to raise standards. Monitoring roles are developing but lack rigour, so that teachers are unclear about how to improve their practice. Supportive governors ensure all safeguarding procedures are in place. Clear steps are taken to ensure that the school is a safe and healthy environment. The school's policies and procedures for ensuring equality of opportunity are satisfactory. The school has successfully closed the gap between the achievement of boys and girls and is aware of the need to ensure the more-able pupils make as much progress as possible.

The school has carried out an audit of its promotion of community cohesion. It uses the local community as a good resource for learning and is looking for ways to extend pupils' knowledge of the wider world. The extent to which this work has been formally evaluated is as yet at an early stage.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

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	
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
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 Reception with skills that vary and appear to be declining in writing and knowledge of the wider world, but overall are typical for this age. Induction procedures are good and children settle happily. They enjoy learning and benefit from a good variety of activities. Teaching is satisfactory, with strengths in diligent planning that ensures a good balance between free choice and adult-led activities. Staff have a friendly and welcoming manner with the children so they feel safe and happy and all welfare requirements are met. Behaviour is good and at snack time they help themselves to food and drink and chat happily to their friends. Occasionally, it is unclear what children are expected to learn and the use of assessment information is patchy so that expectations are not always high enough. The team is new and are starting to work together well. However, monitoring is not yet fully developed to ensure that the good practice seen is shared amongst all staff.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

The response to the pre-inspection questionnaire was low in number and was mostly positive. The vast majority of parents and carers regard the teaching as good and appreciate that their children enjoy school. There were no significant trends in the small number of criticisms offered in the questionnaires. The concern about the management of behaviour was evaluated during the inspection and was seen to be unfounded and behaviour seen was good.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Victoria Road 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 44 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 233 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	32	73	10	23	2	5	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	36	82	8	18	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	22	50	20	45	2	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	25	57	17	39	2	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	25	57	18	41	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	24	55	18	41	1	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	24	55	20	45	0	0	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)	17	39	17	39	2	5	1	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	26	59	18	41	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	21	48	16	36	6	14	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	20	45	22	50	1	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	26	59	18	41	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	26	59	18	41	0	0	0	0

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.



3 December 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Victoria Road Primary School, Runcorn, WA7 5BN

Thank you all so much for your friendly welcome when the inspectors visited your school. We enjoyed our visit and were grateful for the guidance you gave us especially when we got lost. Many of you told us in the questionnaires that you kindly returned, that you enjoy school and learn a lot. We agree that staff care for you and you learn in a safe environment. You behave well and this helps you to make satisfactory progress and to reach the level expected of you by the time you leave school.

To improve your school, I have asked your headteacher and governors to:

- raise your attainment in writing by ensuring that you have more opportunities to write at greater length
- make more of your lessons good by checking that you understand what you are going to learn and that your work is set just at the right level of difficulty
- involve the managers and governors of your school more fully in assessing how well your school is doing.

You can help by ensuring your writing is always as neat as possible and by listening closely to your teachers. I hope your Christmas production was good and I am sure your parents appreciated your excellent singing. I still have the Christmas tree ornament I bought from your school and it will help me to remember your happy school. I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Jennie Platt

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