

Lower Park Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111023
Local authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	310483
Inspection dates	17 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Sarah Drake

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	279
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Vicki Miller
Headteacher	Mr Ian Coulson
Date of previous school inspection	January 2005
School address	Hazelbadge Road Poynton Stockport Cheshire SK12 1HE
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: pupils' progress, achievement and personal development; the quality of teaching and learning and aspects of care, guidance and support; and the effectiveness of the leadership. Evidence was gathered from: national published assessment data; the school's self-evaluation, assessment records, policies and minutes; observation of the school at work, including lessons; discussions with members of staff, pupils, two governors; and the questionnaires returned by parents. 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 its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This larger than average school serves a community that is mostly advantaged both socially and economically. The great majority of pupils are White British but a small number speak English as an additional language. Very few pupils are eligible to receive free school meals. Below average numbers have learning difficulties and/or disabilities but the proportion that has a statement of special educational need is average. The school has achieved many awards including, in 2007, Activemark Gold for the second time, Healthy School Award and the Inclusion Quality Mark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This outstanding school offers its pupils a rich, all-round education that enables them to achieve highly, academically and personally. It provides excellent value for money. Parents greatly appreciate the dedication and professionalism of all staff who, as they say, 'ensure that children are not just educated but valued, nurtured and encouraged'.

Pupils throughout the school are enthusiastic learners who enjoy working hard and discovering new things. This is because teaching and learning are outstanding. Teachers organise exciting, relevant activities that fire pupils' imaginations and are exceptionally well adapted to their different needs. In literacy lessons for pupils in Years 5 and 6, excellent use of drama led to some impressive journalistic work based on the floods at Boscastle and The Pied Piper of Hamelin. Lessons are brisk so there is no time for pupils' concentration to wander. Teachers use interactive whiteboards well to generate interest, confirm vital information and record ideas. Their questioning requires pupils to think hard. For example, in a mathematics lesson, Year 3 and 4 pupils had two minutes to 'get their brains whizzing' thinking of how many multiplications they knew with the answer 24. Teachers' very good knowledge of and sensitivity to individuals' strengths and weaker areas mean that nobody feels disheartened if their efforts leave some room for improvement. As a result, a teacher gently helped a pupil to understand that to use 'distance' rather than 'the area round the outside' of a rectangle would be less confusing when describing the meaning of 'perimeter'. Parents' close involvement in their children's learning in school and at home aids pupils' progress well.

Through helpful adult support, the use of individual targets and regular evaluation of their own and others' efforts, pupils are very clear about how much progress they make in their learning and how they can improve their work. From broadly average skills on entry, standards by the end of Year 6 are consistently above average and sometimes higher. In 2007 over half the Year 6 pupils attained the highest levels in English and science. In mathematics the proportion attaining this level was above the national average. Currently pupils' progress is also impressive, and standards are broadly in line with those of 2007 as shown in their work and through the school's thorough assessment systems. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make excellent progress alongside their classmates because the work and support is extremely well planned to cater for their needs.

The school's determination to develop pupils' skills in all areas is demonstrated in its outstanding curriculum which places much emphasis on first-hand learning. Pupils' high quality artwork enhances the environment. The large swing band and choir perform at a range of venues which broadens the school's links with the community and adds much to pupils' enjoyment. Pupils are very successful in a range of sports. Key Stage 2 pupils greatly enjoy their weekly community hour, led by the headteacher, when they have the chance to interview members of the community and learn about the world of work. Once a year, pupils in Year 6 organise all the other pupils to meet a carefully crafted design challenge within one week, which in 2007 culminated in the achievement of the Healthy School Award. Pupils have many opportunities to use their initiative and contribute to charity.

With such a wealth of stimuli and the exceptional care, guidance and support offered by staff, it is unsurprising that pupils' personal development is outstanding. They are friendly, respectful of others and are confident without being smug. Older pupils lead lunchtime games with infectious enthusiasm that entices younger pupils to enjoy their play. Pupils of all ages behave exceptionally well because they know the boundaries of acceptability and staff are very effective at nipping any potential problems in the bud. Pupils feel safe in school, understand about decision making and avoiding hazards, and are also very aware of the importance of adopting healthy lifestyles. Their zest for learning, demonstrated by very high attendance levels, and above average skills in many areas, prepare them extremely well for the future.

The school's success is directly attributable to the outstanding quality of its leadership and management. As parents note, 'We are extremely fortunate to have such a dedicated headteacher and all staff at the school follow his example.' While providing a very clear lead, the headteacher deftly develops the skills of others and confidently delegates responsibility. Excellent monitoring and analysis of pupils' progress and standards, together with the audited opinions of pupils and parents, underpin the annual review day. This is when staff and governors agree the priorities that determine the school strategy plan for the coming three years and action plans for the immediate year. This becomes the working document that guides school improvement and provides clear criteria by which to judge success. The process works very well because all members of the school make a contribution and are clear about their responsibilities. Systems are in place to promote child protection, health and safety. Governors use their very good knowledge of the school, including pupils' views, to provide it with unusually high levels of support and challenge. A strong programme of training ensures that all staff have the confidence and competence to carry out their roles highly effectively. Such thoughtful and highly professional leadership creates a school with, in parents' words, 'a warm atmosphere where the needs of the children come first, and each week there is something to look forward to'. The school has excellent capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Outstanding leadership of the Foundation Stage results in exciting, supportive and well organised provision. This ensures that children make excellent progress in all areas of learning. Their skills on entry to school are broadly as expected for their age but, within one year, over a third are working beyond the expected goals for their age and the rest are usually working very securely within them. The effort devoted to the pre-summer programme prior to children's admission pays off. It means that, when they start school, children are familiar with the environment, well prepared and settle swiftly. Skilled staff foster children's curiosity and enjoyment of learning exceptionally well. They make good use of their observations and monitoring of progress to adapt the activities and their questioning according to individuals' needs. Staff use the outdoor areas as well as possible, for example, for children to practise writing with water, or to go on a 'bear hunt' through 'water', 'mud' and 'snow', or on 'Welly Wednesdays' when children use the outside areas to focus on particular topics. However, as acknowledged by the school, the two areas are not ideal since one is cramped and the other is shared with older pupils. This restricts the opportunities for children to pursue their learning outside.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the outdoor provision for the Foundation Stage.

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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?	1
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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of boarding provision	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is 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
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
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?	1
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

¹ Grade 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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed, including the adequacy of staff, to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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



18 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Lower Park Primary School, Stockport, SK12 1HE

I greatly enjoyed my recent visit to your school and would like to thank you for your warm welcome. Particular thanks should go to those of you who gave up some of your lunchtime to talk with me, and to others who explained to me what they were doing in lessons.

You rightly describe your school as interesting, enthusiastic and special; my judgement is that it offers you an outstanding education. The main reason for this is the excellent leadership and management of your headteacher and other senior leaders. They use the information that they collect about your progress really well to help guide their decision making. They also take into account everyone's ideas about how to improve things. I'm most impressed that governors have a pupils' committee for you to air your views. I'm also impressed by the amount of progress that you all make in your learning and the standards you achieve in lots of different subjects.

Other things that make your school so good are the huge variety of interesting activities that you have to do and the way that staff know you so well and support you as individuals. This means that there really is something for everyone to shine at. A real highlight of my visit was the Eggs and Flowers service which meant I could get a good feel of your school as a community. You are certainly generous with your gifts for charity. You also behave extremely well and understand how to stay safe and healthy. Older pupils are really good at organising games for the younger ones. Your attendance is much higher than in most schools, which shows how much you enjoy school and are happy to work hard – well done!

The children in Reception have equally as good a time as older pupils but, as the school council has already pointed out, their outside areas aren't ideal so I have asked the leadership to find ways to improve this.

With my very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Drake
Lead inspector