



Charles Darwin Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 111053
LEA Cheshire
Inspection number 278583
Inspection dates 11 January 2006 to 12 January 2006
Reporting inspector Mr Paul Bamber CfBT Lead Inspector

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Darwin Street
School category	Community		Castle
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Northwich, Cheshire CW8 1BN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01606 75194
Number on roll	362	Fax number	01606 74143
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr W Wallace
Date of previous inspection	14 February 2000	Headteacher	Mrs A Moody

Age group 4 to 11	Inspection dates 11 January 2006 - 12 January 2006	Inspection number 278583
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors

Description of the school

This is a larger than average primary school with 362 children on roll, most of whom come from white British backgrounds. The proportion of children from a minority ethnic background, or who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities or English as an additional language, is below average. Children enter the school with broadly average skills. There are very few looked after children. The present Year 6 has experienced a higher than average turnover of children over the last two years even though the total mobility is average. There has been a relatively high turnover of staff over the last three years, including the appointment of a new headteacher and two senior managers. Since the last inspection, the school has been subject to detailed reviews by HMI and the local authority concerning aspects of its work.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is, therefore, given a Notice to Improve.

Although the school judges itself to be satisfactory in its effectiveness, some significant weaknesses in the school's provision lead inspectors to judge the school to be ineffective overall and to not give satisfactory value for money. In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is, therefore, given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the achievements of more able children and in the standards they reach in English and mathematics. There are also significant weaknesses in the way in which the school checks on children's progress, the way in which co-ordinators track children's performance and in aspects of governance.

Standards are broadly average throughout the school and achievement is just satisfactory. However, significant improvement is required in relation to the achievement of more able children and the standards they reach in English and mathematics. The curriculum is broad and balanced and increasingly offers enriching experiences. Quality and standards in Foundation Stage are satisfactory. Children throughout the school are well cared for and their personal development is good. Satisfactory teaching reflects children's overall achievements, but is insufficiently challenging for the more able children and reflects a weakness in teaching. The headteacher provides strong leadership and has now formed a united team with the common purpose of improving provision. In the last year the headteacher and governors have taken tough action to ensure higher quality teaching for Year 6 children, which is clearly improving their standards and achievement. Despite recent improvements there still remain significant weaknesses in subject co-ordination and in governance. The school's self-evaluation is satisfactory overall, but systems to check children's performance are not sharp enough to ensure that all children make the progress they should. Despite agreeing with the school that improvement since the last inspection has been inadequate, current indications are that the school has the capacity to improve. This is based on the improvements already made since the critical reviews of the school's provision made by HMI and the local authority in the autumn term 2004.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the standards more able children achieve in English and mathematics by setting them more challenging tasks, asking them more open-ended questions and giving them more opportunities to work independently and to assess their own work.

- Improve the quality of performance management by ensuring that the very recently introduced procedures to track children's progress, for target setting, for improving subject co-ordination and for linking training to teachers' needs are fully developed.
- Enhance the work of governors by providing them with the knowledge and skills that will enable them to effectively monitor the school's provision.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Overall, children achieve satisfactorily, but a significant number of more able children make inadequate progress because teaching is not good enough to make sure that they make sufficient progress in lessons. More able children do not achieve well enough because tasks lack challenge in many lessons. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities throughout the school make satisfactory progress. On entry, standards are broadly average. Children make satisfactory progress in the Reception classes because teaching is well organised and assessment information is used effectively to plan each child's learning. Most achieve the standards expected for their age before joining Year 1.

Standards in Year 2 in the 2005 national teacher assessments were lower than in previous years, though they were still broadly average compared to other schools. There was a similar picture for the Year 6 national tests. Overall, this indicates that most children made satisfactory progress. However, in Year 2 and Year 6 far fewer children achieved the higher levels than in the past. The school has correctly identified the shortcomings in provision causing this and has acted recently and rigorously to correct them. Although, these measures have not yet impacted to challenge the more able children sufficiently, evidence from lessons observed show that the range of activities these children tackle is gradually improving their achievements. Standards and achievement for this significant group of children are not high enough and statutory targets set for them have been missed by a wide margin. Because of this the inspection team disagrees with the school and judges achievement and standards to be inadequate.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school judges personal development and well-being to be satisfactory. However, because children have positive attitudes, behave well and are well aware of what they need to do to lead a healthy lifestyle, inspectors judge it to be good. Children enjoy school, feel safe and secure and say that 'our teachers make learning fun'. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. This is enhanced through religious education and the involvement of outside agencies, for example, a visit from an artist in residence. Community and cultural links have been developed well. For example, a visit to Italy by staff was followed up in school by an 'Italian Week'. Children behave well in the classroom and throughout the school. This is demonstrated through the buddy support system where older children care for younger ones at lunchtime. The

recently introduced behaviour management policy has been effective in improving children's behaviour and eliminating exclusions, which previously were above average. The school council provides children with an effective voice to influence the school's provision and to learn the principles of democracy. Attendance is now broadly average having improved well in this academic year as a result of the school's close liaison with the local authority and its own procedures to encourage children to take pride in attending well.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. However, it has significant shortcomings as regards the teaching of more able children who underachieve as a result. There is some good teaching in each year group but it is not consistent enough to promote better achievement. In the best lessons there is good pace, high expectation, effective use of resources and rigorous planning which enthuses children and meets their needs well. Examples of these qualities were observed in lessons in Reception and in Years 1, 2, 4 and 6. In those lessons where strengths only just outweigh weaknesses there was insufficient challenge for more able children, and overall teaching for these children is inadequate. Teachers fail to set difficult enough tasks or to ask sufficiently probing questions to enable these children to achieve the standards of which they are capable. Throughout the school good humour and warm relationships are characteristics of lessons promoting positive responses and a desire to learn amongst children. The recent much increased opportunities for children to help each other learn has contributed well to their enjoyment of lessons and how well they relate to each other. Good support is provided for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for those few children with English as an additional language, enabling them to achieve appropriately. Teachers mark children's work assiduously, following the school's guidelines and many make helpful comments which help children to improve their work. However, the use of assessment to inform lesson planning and of target setting for individual children is inconsistent across the school, with recently introduced procedures still being implemented and as yet not fully meeting the needs of all children.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. Over the past year much has been done to broaden and enrich children's experiences. This is in response to criticism made by successive reviews by HMI and the local authority in the autumn of 2004, which identified too narrow a curriculum heavily focused on the teaching of English and mathematics in preparation for national tests. The curriculum provides a secure, supportive environment for most children, including pupils in the Foundation Stage and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities that enables them to make satisfactory progress. However, the

needs of the more-able are not fully met and consequently this group of children underachieve. In addition, the lack of a dedicated outside area for children in Reception classes places some restrictions on the breadth of their curriculum. The curriculum meets statutory requirements in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). Good opportunities are available outside the classroom at lunchtime, after school and through residential trips. These are well attended and enjoyed by the children and promote their physical, aesthetic and personal development. For example, children successfully organise the school fairs giving them an opportunity to take responsibility and experience working in a team.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school provides satisfactory care and support for children although some weaknesses in accommodation, which the school is aware of, have been identified. The security of children and staff is assured with notable improvements over the last 18 months. Satisfactory systems for academic guidance and the tracking of children's progress are now being developed, although the success of these systems is yet to be seen. The school is working successfully to improve attendance which, in the recent past, has been below average. Procedures for child protection and risk assessment are in place and meet with statutory needs. The school regularly works in close partnership with outside agencies and parents or carers to ensure that vulnerable children receive the support they need. Children's views are gathered through the recently formed school council. Playground buddies support younger children in the playground, thus developing a good sense of community. Parents are supportive of the school and welcome the recently initiated workshops which have enhanced their knowledge of the curriculum.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The overall quality of leadership and management is satisfactory. Very soon after the headteacher's appointment, successive reviews by HMI and the local authority revealed very significant shortcomings in the quality of the school's provision. These included the quality of teaching and learning, too narrow a curriculum, a lack of assessment procedures and aspects of management. Following these reviews the headteacher has worked tirelessly and effectively to systematically address the many weaknesses identified. As a result of realistic self-evaluation, pragmatic and often tough action has been taken to improve provision. Through the positive personal example of the headteacher, ably supported by newly appointed key stage co-ordinators, good progress has been made in improving teaching, initiating much needed management systems and in providing a unity of purpose amongst the staff. Despite this, there currently remain some weaknesses in aspects of teaching and learning, performance management and in governance. These are more the result of there being too little time to address all the weaknesses identified in the reviews mentioned above rather than any lack of pace in bringing about improvements. Apart from in English, mathematics and ICT,

subject co-ordination is still underdeveloped. Parents have been consulted about changes and indicate through their communications with inspectors that they are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. Governors are supportive and committed and their committee structure is sound. They acknowledge that they still need more knowledge and expertise to effectively carry out their duties to monitor the school's provision and are imminently to receive training to help them carry out this aspect of their responsibilities more effectively. There is a capacity to improve evidenced by the progress the school has made over the last twelve months and the unity of purpose and determination now demonstrated by staff and governors to improve standards and achievement.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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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?	4	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	3	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	4	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	4	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for making us so welcome during the two days we spent in your school. We really appreciated the open and frank way in which you chatted to us and let us know so many interesting things about your school. We would like to share with you those things we thought were good about the school and those things we felt it could do a bit better.

What we liked most about your school:

- you behave well, enjoy school and try hard to do your best
- you are well cared for and there is a nice atmosphere in lessons and around the school
- your headteacher and senior teachers have a good programme to help you improve the school even further.

What we think the school could be doing better:

- to make sure that those of you who find work easier than others reach as high standards as you can
- the things that have been introduced recently to help you all have an even better education work really well
- the governors should know a bit more about how you are getting on and visit the school more often to see what happens.

Thank you for helping us with the inspection of your school. We hope that you continue to enjoy school and do well with your work and carry on trying really hard to improve.