

Bowness Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105197
Local Authority	Bolton
Inspection number	287152
Inspection dates	26–27 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Colin Smith

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	
School	109
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs K Jones
Headteacher	Mrs Sally McFarlane
Date of previous school inspection	2 December 2002
School address	Church Street Little Lever Bolton Lancashire BL3 1BT
Telephone number	01204 333140
Fax number	01204 700179

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Bowness is a small primary school. The proportions of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and pupils entitled to free school meals are above average. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage, although pupils with minority ethnic backgrounds constitute a quarter of the school. Pupils with Pakistani heritage form the largest group along with a small number with Irish, Indian and mixed White and Caribbean heritage. All of these pupils speak English, although a few of them receive additional help with reading and writing. The school also caters for pupils from travelling backgrounds. The last two years have seen extensive staffing changes. An acting headteacher and two temporary teachers are currently working in the school. A permanent headteacher has been appointed for April 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

During a period of instability, caused by staff absences, standards and achievement declined. The strong influence of the acting headteacher, with support from the assistant headteacher and local authority officers, has been significant in turning the school around. The school is now improving at a good rate. As a consequence, the school's effectiveness and the value for money provided are satisfactory. Bowness is a very caring school, which is why parents show such high levels of satisfaction. Comments such as 'My child's self-esteem has improved considerably because of the school's caring, family atmosphere' typifies the views of virtually all parents. The school is also very successful in providing for pupils with extremely diverse needs and backgrounds. All pupils, particularly the most vulnerable ones, benefit from the staff's unstinting commitment to their welfare. This is largely why pupils' personal development is good and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. The vast majority of pupils are well behaved, happy learners who enjoy school. They appreciate the importance of healthy lifestyles, show a mature sense of responsibility and acquire secure basic skills. These factors are helping to prepare them well for the future.

Pupils' achievement and standards fell to particularly low levels in 2003 and 2004. Since then, standards have been rising because of the focus on improving teaching and learning. Taking account of the good 2006 results and pupils' current attainment, standards are broadly average and achievement is satisfactory. Achievement and standards in mathematics, although satisfactory, are slightly lower than in English and science. This is because pupils' problem-solving skills and their understanding of shape and space are not sufficiently secure.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory and improving. The curriculum is also satisfactory and starting to have a greater impact on meeting the needs of pupils. Teaching of the whole class is often good but not enough is expected of pupils' capacity to produce good quality work in their books. The marking of their work is not always constructive. These factors hamper pupils' learning.

The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory. The acting headteacher and assistant headteacher will shortly return to their own schools. However, secure foundations have been laid to ensure that the work of the school is checked and the areas requiring improvement have been identified. Staff are now united and committed in their efforts to improve further. This gives the school a good capacity for improvement. Pupils' progress is now assessed carefully. However, the data is still not used sufficiently well to improve the quality of teaching or to measure the impact of any changes on pupils' performance. On the whole, the school's self-evaluation is accurate. However, the guidance provided is not as good as the school believes, while the teaching of children in the Foundation Stage and the progress they make is good, which is better than the school believes.

What the school should do to improve further

- Use data more fully to measure the impact of change on pupils' performance and raise their achievement.
- Raise teachers' expectations of pupils' capacity to present well organised, careful and accurate work to help increase their learning.
- Improve pupils' problem-solving skills and their understanding of shape and space to raise achievement in mathematics.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

When children start school their literacy and numeracy skills are below the expected level for their age. They make good progress and, by the end of the Reception year, most children achieve the learning goals expected for their age. Pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 1 and 2. By the end of Key Stage 1, standards are average in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards and progress by the end of Key Stage 2 have both improved significantly since 2004. This has been achieved by setting more challenging targets. Pupils make satisfactory progress from Years 3 to 5. They make good progress in Year 6 because of the good teaching they receive. The 2006 test results showed standards to be above average in English and science and average in mathematics. However, standards are not as high in the current Year 6 because there are more pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Although girls make better progress initially, boys catch up. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve as well as their peers, although the achievement of pupils from travelling backgrounds is adversely affected by prolonged absences from school. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress in relation to their needs and abilities because of the high levels of support provided.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They are friendly, courteous and helpful. Pupils have learned to understand and respect other cultures and they strongly disapprove of bullying and racism. As one pupil commented, 'We all work together to make this a happy and bully-free school.' Pupils have a good grasp of the importance of diet and exercise in keeping healthy. They are very aware of potential dangers such as drugs, alcohol and smoking, and how to avoid them. Pupils make a very good contribution to the school community. They relish opportunities to make decisions and take responsibility. This is evident in the work of the school council and the way older pupils look after younger ones in the playground. Pupils are proud of their school and enjoy the many activities provided. Attendance has improved by 2%, which represents a good response to the previous inspection issue. Attendance is now satisfactory, despite the below average figure, which reflects the long-term absences of pupils from travelling backgrounds. Pupils' economic well-being is satisfactory. They have secure literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills and work well independently and in teams.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is improving because lessons are monitored and teachers learn from the experience. In all lessons, pupils are well managed. This helps them to concentrate well and complete plenty of work. The purpose of the lesson is always made clear. This encourages pupils to take responsibility for their own learning. New ideas are clearly explained, often using ICT projections. Consequently, pupils are able to visualise and better understand complex ideas such as pollination. Assessment is satisfactory and improving. Pupils' learning is regularly assessed and the information is being used increasingly well to raise the challenge and provide an accurate

match of work to their different learning needs. Although the whole-class teaching part of the lesson is often good, teachers do not have equally high expectations of pupils' capacity to produce accurate, well organised and well presented work. This is reflected in the content of their books, which is often not their best work. Where teaching is good, for example in Year 6, pupils take more pride in their work. Occasionally when teaching is outstanding, pupils are inspired to investigate further, think creatively and learn for themselves. This accelerates the rate at which they progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is largely successful in meeting pupils' diverse needs and interests. Good provision in the Foundation Stage is reflected in the delight on children's faces, for instance as they explore the artificial pond. The curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is sensitively adapted to cater for their needs. Very good support from teaching assistants helps to make their learning successful. The attention given to the needs of gifted and talented pupils is adequate but not at the same high level. A good programme of personal, social and health education makes a positive contribution to pupils' personal development. The curriculum is enriched well through visits, visitors and a good range of out-of-school activities, and this significantly enhances pupils' enjoyment of school. As one pupil commented, 'Learning is fun because there are lots of extra activities.' Although secure provision is made for ICT, lack of opportunities for pupils to develop their problem-solving skills limits their achievement in mathematics.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

A very high level of care is provided for all pupils. The school has well established procedures to recruit staff, to protect pupils and to minimise any risks to their welfare. The school has a deservedly good reputation for catering for pupils with very diverse requirements. Comments such as 'My child has been integrated into the school very successfully, despite some complex difficulties' are not uncommon. Devoted attention is targeted towards the most vulnerable pupils. The school works very successfully with health professionals to remove many of the barriers to learning. However, one barrier remaining is the very limited space in class 5, which is too small to allow wheelchair access. A determined effort has been made to inform pupils of what they need to do to improve. Marking of their work is still inconsistent but targets have been set for pupils to aim for. Although they understand their targets, they are still unsure of what they need to do to reach them. This is why the overall care, guidance and support is not quite as good as the school believes.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The acting headteacher has played a vital role in bringing purpose, energy and sensitivity to the task of raising morale and uniting staff in a clear vision for the future. Greater rigour has been injected into checking the work of the school. Lessons are observed and pupils' work examined. As a result, an accurate picture has emerged to indicate where the school is successful and where improvement is needed. Governors have benefited significantly from this experience and are now beginning to hold the school to account. Very clear priorities have emerged, such

as improving aspects of teaching and the quality of the school environment. Resources have been used wisely to achieve both of these targets. An issue from the previous inspection, to ensure that leaders exert a stronger influence over their subject areas, is now receiving attention. A well written school improvement plan illustrates how the changes will be made. Senior staff have drawn up a comprehensive tracking system to measure pupils' progress. This is already proving invaluable in identifying pupils' particular difficulties. However, the information is not yet used sufficiently to measure the impact of curriculum changes or further improve teaching, which are crucial in maintaining the current rate of improvement.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of Bowness Primary School, Bolton, BL3 1BT

Thank you for making me so welcome and answering my questions so politely. I thoroughly enjoyed my visit. After two days inspecting your school, I would like to explain my findings.

I know that standards in the school slipped two to three years ago, at a time when your headteacher and some of your class teachers were absent. Since then, with the help of Mrs McFarlane and staff, your school has improved and got back to where it was. Your school is satisfactory at the moment but I can see how much it is improving. Teaching is at least satisfactory, and improving, and you are making at least satisfactory progress. Standards in English, science and, to a lesser extent, mathematics have been rising well.

There are many good things about your school. The way children with learning difficulties and disabilities are helped and supported is particularly good. Your behaviour is good and you are eager to learn. I noticed how much you enjoy school, especially all those extra activities. You know how to keep healthy and stay safe. Your school is very caring. Teachers and support staff go out of their way to make sure that you are content and happy. It's good to see that you follow their example by helping each other.

I want to help your school to carry on improving and have three suggestions that will help.

- Although you listen carefully and work hard in lessons, the work in some of your books could be better. I believe that if teachers expect more of you, you will produce more careful and accurate work. You can help by trying your very best at all times.
- Your work is carefully assessed. I have asked teachers to use the information even more to increase your progress and improve their teaching.
- Although standards in mathematics have been rising, I have asked teachers to improve your problem-solving skills and your understanding of shape and space so that standards in mathematics will continue to rise.