



Armitage CofE Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 105502
Local Authority Manchester
Inspection number 287239
Inspection dates 17–18 October 2006
Reporting inspector Sonja Oyen HMI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Rostron Avenue
School category	Voluntary controlled		Ardwick, Manchester
Age range of pupils	3–11		Lancashire M12 5NP
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0161 2196600
Number on roll (school)	182	Fax number	0161 2732480
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Rev J Johnson
		Headteacher	Mr J Johnson
Date of previous school inspection	28 January 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools and an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is an average sized primary school in an ethnically diverse area of high social deprivation close to the centre of Manchester. Just over half of the pupils are of African and Caribbean heritage; 32 pupils are refugees or asylum seekers. A substantial number of pupils either join or leave the school during the school year. Ten children have left and six have started at the school since the beginning of the autumn term. Some children return to the school after a few years elsewhere. Almost half of the pupils have English as an additional language and a good number receive support in learning to speak it. There is an exceptionally high proportion of pupils with learning needs, particularly social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and speech problems. The Nursery and the Reception class are run as a Foundation Stage unit. Thirty two children attend the Nursery full time.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Armitage School sets high store by its work to create a supportive climate for learning. The headteacher leaves no stone unturned to provide the best in meeting children's personal needs. As a result, the school has developed close, effective ties with a wide range of different agencies to support the children in raising self-esteem, developing self-control, gaining skills in speaking English and settling into school life. Children, staff and parents benefit from work with therapists, time in the Calm Space and chances to participate in different projects. A measure of the success of this good pastoral work is parents' good support for the school. It is also highly evident in the way the children eat healthily, take exercise and actively seek help from buddies, peer mediators, learning mentors and other adults. The children say they feel safe, secure and at ease in school. That said, the school's academic provision is not as strong; the school is not adding as much value as it should given the good systems it has to support children in their learning.

Children find much fun in being at school. They mix well with others from different cultural backgrounds and use English as the language of the classroom and playground. They are generally willing to work, although some are quick to lose concentration and their self-control, particularly when they find the task hard or have to listen for long periods. Part of this reflects inconsistencies in the teaching which is satisfactory overall, but not strong enough to secure good gains in the children's learning. As a consequence, children's progress varies. Overall standards are below average, especially in English and mathematics, and not as high as they could be. The nursery children make good gains especially in learning to get on with each other. By the end of the Reception year, many show knowledge and skills fairly typical for their age, although a significant proportion is slow in cottoning on to reading and writing. Insufficient progress in the infant years has kept standards low, although there are signs that this is now changing. In the last few years, the satisfactory added value in the junior years has largely reflected the catch up made, most so in Years 5 and 6. Booster work and revision sessions have lifted performance, especially in science.

The school now has a stable teaching team and four key managers are working with the headteacher to raise attainment. All show an honest commitment to making things better and the headteacher has given clear, general directives. Consultants from the local authority have guided the school in using information from tracking children's progress to set targets for learning. Similarly, a good step has been to distinguish those children who have difficulties in learning from those who have fallen behind and need help to catch up. The support for children with learning needs is well led and managed. Support assistants take their responsibilities seriously and put their skills to good use.

While accurate in judging the quality of its provision for children's personal development and the quality of teaching, the school is generous in its evaluation of other areas. Two such are the quality of leadership and management and the capacity to improve which are satisfactory rather than good. The school does not have a clear picture of exactly what needs to be done to bring about improvement and can only draw on

pockets of effective action in previous years. Much has been excused by changes in staffing, the increasing number of children who join and leave the school during a school year and the personal problems some children have. As a consequence, governors and the headteacher have not been rigorous enough in pinpointing other factors or in taking steps to strengthen the teaching and to create a curriculum that is tailored to children's needs. Opportunities have been missed to root good elements from the additional programmes and projects into the day-to-day curriculum for all. The school has tackled parts of the four key issues from the inspection of 2002, but not enough to show that provision in other subjects fosters high achievement and good standards. In this, and several other key areas, including the teaching of reading and writing, the school has some way to go to match the quality in primaries elsewhere.

Although the school's overall effectiveness is satisfactory, its performance in a few aspects is inadequate. Before its next section 5 inspection, Ofsted inspectors may visit the school to monitor the progress that it has made in remedying these weaknesses. The school would receive two to five days notice of such a visit.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Strengthen the quality of teaching and learning.
- Be more rigorous in analysing the school's performance to ensure that governors and senior managers make the best possible use of all resources to meet children's personal and academic needs.
- Develop a coherent curriculum that promotes high achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children's performance in lessons and their work in books show overall standards are below average. In each year group there is a wide span of attainment with many children at least 6 months' progress, and in some cases more than 12 months' progress, behind for their age. The school's records show that this gap was also evident when children started in the nursery. The current nursery children are typical three-year-olds. They chat with adults and other children and confidently choose what they want to do. Some are starting to count and recognise letters. This bodes well for the future as does the children's stronger performance at the end of the Reception year in 2005. Although most children were doing as well as expected for their age in mathematics, a good proportion were only in the very early stages of reading and writing.

Focused work for children with learning difficulties enables them to make small steps towards their personal targets, as well as to keep up with current class topics. Children with English as an additional language often achieve well, especially in practical tasks, but their ability to read some words and to copy accurately often masks their lack of understanding.

The school's results in the 2006 national tests were higher than in 2005 and overall standards rose because more Year 6 children did well for their age. In the last few

years, Armitage has done better in the national tests than many other schools in the local authority. As in 2005, the school's best performance was in science and the weakest was in English. This also typified the Year 2 children's performance: overall standards were low, partly because some children did not do as well as they should especially in English.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school is a harmonious community where the pupils show respect for one another and generally get on well together. This is because of the effective elements and systems that promote the children's spiritual, social, moral and cultural development, as well as their mental and physical well-being. Children talked about the calm feeling they got from periods of relaxation and hand massage, and how talking to buddies and peer mediators helped them to deal with problems. They knew the school rules and the consequences of breaking them. In the last school year, several children were excluded for fixed periods because of their unacceptable behaviour. A small number of children arrive late and overall attendance is below average. The school has fallen short of its target of 93% attendance despite its best efforts to work with parents and other agencies to promote regular attendance.

Children were keen to point out how they ate healthily and passed on the message at home. They took an active, often boisterous but sensible part in games and activities outside at lunchtime. School councillors were confident and enthusiastic about their elected role in expressing the views of their classmates in what could be changed in the school. They commented that they made good friendships; newcomers quickly felt part of the school. In one club, children could hardly wait to eat the buns they had baked and were keen for the KIWI programme to start again as it gave them the chance to make all the arrangements for a visit.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Throughout the school, too much teaching is not strong enough to ensure children make consistently good progress and achieve well. Lessons are generally well planned and prepared. The children are ready learners; younger children were very involved in making patterns with soap and water, and older juniors liked the challenge of finding word pairs. In some lessons, they lost focus when the adult talked too long or when the pace was slow. The teaching assistants often did well in re-focusing the children's attention and guiding them through the steps needed to complete a task. In several lessons, the adults did not reinforce the key learning points nor showed what the children needed to do to produce good work. As a result, the children made limited gains in their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The overall curriculum lacks the richness, excitement and rigour that the school judges it to have. In the Foundation Stage, there is an appropriate emphasis on learning through play indoors and out where the paved and grassed areas are used well to promote physical development and other skills. The Foundation unit rooms offer much scope to provide an even wider range of experiences particularly in creative development. The school has acted on the points for improvement in the previous inspection, especially in music and in the use of information and communication technology, but there is still much to do to ensure quality in the coverage of some subjects. In planning the curriculum, opportunities have been missed to ensure that enrichment initiatives, such as weeks based on a theme, super learning days and visits, are planned well in advance with clear learning purposes that reinforce and complement ongoing work. The increasing range of ethnic cultures and languages spoken by the children is underused as an opportunity to celebrate diversity and to shape the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

There are many strong aspects in the personal care, guidance and support for children. However, the areas for development in academic guidance and support limit the overall quality to satisfactory. The wide range of care strategies is the basis of the school's positive ethos. Children know who they can go to for help and encouragement and know that techniques, such as 'brain gym', help them be ready to learn. They value the recognition they get for behaving and doing well but practice is inconsistent across the school. All the required procedures and checks are in place to safeguard the children and uphold their welfare. Purposeful, well prepared sessions in and out of class are the backbone of the support for children who have learning difficulties and particular needs. Their progress is well documented. The support for children with English as an additional language is not as well targeted, particularly in respect of learning in the classroom. Although the school makes regular use of tests of the children's attainment, it is only in the early stages of using the information systematically to check on progress and to diagnose where support is needed and how best to provide it.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

While there are strengths in the pastoral leadership, there are weak spots in the strategic leadership to ensure the school reflects its motto 'aim higher'. The headteacher leads a committed school family and has been highly successful in drawing in other agencies to support it and the community. He has also tapped into innovative projects and programmes which have widened what the school offers. He devolves considerable responsibility to the four senior managers who have a sound, general awareness of

where things need to improve to raise children's attainment. The headteacher has identified relevant practical aspects but is not driving a concerted plan of action. The school improvement and subject action plans give few indications of what will count as 'raised attainment'. The school has limited proven capacity to raise academic standards and managers are working with consultants from the local authority to develop strategies. The school spends a substantial amount per child and has also amassed a large reserve fund. The governing body, although satisfactory, has not been rigorous or critical enough in deciding how well the budget and other resources have been used to improve the quality of what the school provides and to ensure that the children achieve the best they can.

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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?	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	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
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	3

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	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	4
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	3
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.

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	4
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

Thank you for making us so welcome when we came to see how well you are learning. It was good to hear about your work on the school council and how you tell the governors what you think will help the school to be better.

We agree with you that there are many things that make the school special. Calm Space, massage and a visit from a helicopter are just three! Not every school has so much going on and so many people to help and support. You told us that you make good friends and enjoy being at school. Peer mediators and buddies are doing a clever job in helping to sort out your problems. We could see that you find some lessons hard and some easy, and that you get really involved when there are interesting things to do. We know that many of you could do even better, not just in reading, writing and mathematics but in subjects like art. Most of you behave really well in school and like getting merits and making the most of Friday's Golden Time. We can see why you gained the Healthy School award - you were telling us what not to eat and are keen to have a bike shed so you can cycle to school.

Some of you were not sure what your school motto 'aim higher' means - we want you to set your sights on being the very best you can in all that you do at school. Your first step could be to tell the governors, Mr Johnson and your teachers what will help you to be better readers, writers and mathematicians. We have asked the teachers to share ideas about how to speed up your learning. We have also asked them to look at ways to link different subjects with more of the projects and special things that go on in school so that even more of you can take part. We have also asked the governors and Mr Johnson to be sharper in how they decide what should be done, who should do it and whether they do it well enough.

We know you will tell the inspectors who next come to see you, how well you think you and the school are doing.