



Mersey Vale Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 106059
Local Authority Stockport
Inspection number 287401
Inspection dates 5–6 March 2007
Reporting inspector Ann Welch

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Valley Road
School category	Community		Heaton Mersey, Stockport
Age range of pupils	3–11		Cheshire SK4 2BZ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0161 442 7535
Number on roll (school)	170	Fax number	0161 442 7535
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Jackie Jones
		Headteacher	Mrs Jayne Mullane
Date of previous school inspection	3 December 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Pupils at this smaller than average primary school come from a wide variety of social backgrounds. Around two thirds of the pupils belong to minority ethnic groups and between them speak fifteen languages other than English. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above that found nationally, as is the proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who have a statement of special educational needs. The number of pupils joining the school each year differs markedly and a significant number join and leave during the school year. The school has achieved the Basic Skills Quality Mark, the Healthy Schools Healthy Eating and the Physical Activity Awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. 'Working together for a brighter future' is the school motto and this is certainly the case for pupils at Mersey Vale Primary. As one pupil reflected, 'Everyone matters here, you are treated with respect and no-one is left out'. This perceptive comment sums up the overall ethos of this very caring school.

Pupils reach broadly average standards by the time they leave school. This represents outstanding achievement taking into account their very low starting points on entry to the school. The push to improve language skills, with almost two thirds of the school's population having English as an additional language, has in 2006 seen standards in reading reach the national average by the end of Year 2 and a greater percentage than the national average reaching the higher level by the end of Year 6.

Such success is down to the considerable expertise of teachers and their thorough understanding of each pupil's needs and circumstances. Relationships between teachers and their pupils are a key strength, ensuring that pupils always work hard and develop very positive attitudes towards their learning. The highly skilled teaching assistants, some of whom are bilingual, do a superb job supporting the rising population, both of pupils who have English as an additional language and of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A very positive feature of all lessons is that the teaching of academic and personal skills is often seamless. Not surprisingly, pupils' personal development is outstanding. Staff consistently express their appreciation of pupils' efforts and praise and reward their achievements. The general consensus among pupils was that the butterflies in the tummy experienced when receiving an award before the whole school was more than made up for by the extreme pride they felt when their achievements were recognised and valued in such a public way.

Enjoyment of learning is given a high priority. An outstanding curriculum includes a wealth of events and visits that are much appreciated by pupils and enables them to broaden their horizons as well as making school life a rich experience. It ensures that pupils become increasingly responsible for their own safety both inside and outside school and know how to live healthy lifestyles. The stimulating environment and exciting activities on offer in the Foundation Stage ensure that children get a good start to their education although the outdoor area is not used often enough to support all areas of learning.

Care, guidance and support are excellent. All pupils have challenging but realistic targets and their progress is monitored closely. They feel safe from bullying in the knowledge that adults in the school are caring and helpful. In turn, this helps them to understand the need to take care of others and helps them to contribute well to the school and wider community.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher is an impressive leader who sets the right direction for the school and inspires others to follow. She is supported exceptionally well by the deputy headteacher. Together they make a highly effective management team. The governing body is increasingly well-informed and is beginning to be a critical as well as a supportive friend. The school is understandably

proud of the acclaim it has received from the local authority following the restructuring of its workforce. It is also recognised as a model of good practice in terms of its provision for pupils from minority ethnic groups. The school's partnership with parents is very strong. 'The school seems able to accommodate each child's different needs and abilities very well' is a sentiment reflected by many parents. With so many excellent features, it is not unexpected that the school has outstanding capacity to improve even further. It gives excellent value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make effective use of the outdoor area in the Foundation Stage to support all areas of learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Most children start school with skills that are very low especially in language and personal and social skills. A significant number have difficulty communicating in English. They leave Year 6 with broadly average standards in English, mathematics and science and this represents outstanding progress during their time at Mersey Vale. In the stimulating Foundation Stage environment children make good progress, especially in their personal development but their language skills are still well below average by the time they enter Year 1. Achievement is good in Years 1 and 2 but is constrained by the fact that not as many pupils as nationally are reaching the higher levels, being still held back by language difficulties. Overall standards remain below average. Good progress is maintained in Years 3 to 6 with an increasing number reaching the higher levels in English and science. Vulnerable pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make excellent progress because the school is successful in meeting their particular needs.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The excellent relationships between pupils and staff and the high quality of the curriculum contribute greatly to both the social and academic development of all pupils. A strong emphasis on personal and social development of children in the Foundation Stage helps them to settle quickly and form good relationships. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The provision for pupils' cultural development is particularly strong with events such as Celebrating Diversity Week and Festivals Week along with an African drumming club for pupils. There are also strong international links with African countries through the British Council.

Pupils are always willing to help each other both in and out of class, as can be seen by the 'buddies' scheme and playground leaders. They are well behaved in lessons and enjoy coming to school. Attendance is broadly average despite many pupils from

minority ethnic backgrounds taking time away from school to celebrate religious festivals or spend time out of the country. They are involved in many community activities and contribute to school development through an active school council. Pupils are full of enthusiasm for the new playground with climbing equipment and markings for play activities, brought about by the efforts of the school council.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teachers fire pupils' enthusiasm for learning. Year 2/3 pupils, for example, were bursting to get on with finding rhyming words when creating a poem. Care is taken to match work to pupils' abilities. The support of teaching assistants is invaluable. Their exceptional skills ensured almost individual attention for pupils and resulted in all successfully completing their work. Information from assessments is used very well by staff to set lesson objectives and identify any pupils who may need additional help or support. An innovation that is working particularly well is that teachers not only share with pupils what they are expected to achieve but the success criteria that will help them know how well they have achieved the aim of the lesson.

The quality of teaching and learning in the Foundation Stage is good, with some outstanding features such as the quality of the bilingual support for children. Staff generally plan exciting tasks but on occasions, these lack sufficient challenge. Insufficient use is made of the good outdoor area to support learning in all areas of the curriculum.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Careful planning takes into account the school's diverse population so that all pupils receive the curriculum to meet their particular needs. A strength of the provision is the emphasis placed on teaching basic skills and this has ensured that achievement here is outstanding. Provision for information and communication technology has improved and there are now opportunities to develop skills across several subjects. The strong emphasis on physical education, including lunchtime clubs, has earned the school a Healthy School's Physical Activity award and goes hand in hand with the school's healthy eating initiatives. Older pupils say that the personal and social education helps them to stay safe and be aware of their rights and responsibilities. Pupils and parents value the extra-curricular clubs on offer, introducing pupils to new experiences such as samba and gardening. The outstanding range of additional activities provides exciting challenges. One pupil summed up the views of many with the comment, 'It's fun but we are still learning.'

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school is constantly responsive to pupils' needs and ensures that all get the care and support that they need to do well. Pupils feel safe in school and trust adults to look after them and sort out any problems. Targets for English, mathematics and science motivate pupils to do their best. As one pupil said, targets 'push you to do that much better to get it'. Detailed tracking ensures that any underachievement is quickly identified and addressed. Effective child protection and health and safety systems are in place and these make sure that pupils' well-being is paramount. Good staff training and clear procedures for controlling pupils' behaviour result in few interruptions to lessons. Parents are understandably very appreciative of the dedication and commitment of staff towards their children. Their views are summed up in the comment, 'the school nourishes and the children flourish'.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Outstanding leadership and management have set a very clear direction over recent years. The newly formed school improvement team pursues its brief vigorously. Already, improvements have been made to the provision for reading and in the development of the Schools Sports Partnership. Close analysis of data leads to an accurate view of performance and this in turn leads to effective action to secure improvements. Subject leaders have a good knowledge of standards in their area and training is in the pipeline for them to monitor the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects. This is already done very competently by the headteacher and deputy. There is a well-established system of performance management for all staff linked securely to training and development. Improvements in leadership and management since the last inspection have led to a well informed governing body who has a good understanding of its role. Procedures for financial control and day-to-day financial administration are now of a high standard. Very effective links with other schools and local businesses enhances the outstanding provision.

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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?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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 behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	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 the 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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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 greeting us in such a friendly way when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking to you and joining your lessons. You gave us lots of reasons why you think your school is special. We agree with you, in fact your school is outstanding. Your teachers are very skilful at planning interesting lessons for you and help you to make excellent progress in English, mathematics and science. Those of you who do not speak English at home or have other reasons for finding it difficult to learn are given lots of helpful support, often by the teaching assistants.

Mersey Vale is a very caring school, you are kind to each other and look after others. Very good quality relationships make the school a happy community. We agree with you that your playground is superb: you worked very hard to design such an exciting area. We also agree that the buddies and playtime leaders help to make your break such an enjoyable occasion. Your headteacher is excellent and leads and manages your school very well. The deputy headteacher is also a very good leader and manager. They and all the other adults work very hard to make sure you do the best you can. We know you won't let them down.

To make the school even better we have asked your headteacher to make sure that the outdoor area for the Nursery and Reception classes is used more often.

We hope that you continue to enjoy school and do very well with your work.