



Pebble Brook Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 111219
Local Authority Cheshire
Inspection number 288895
Inspection dates 15–16 November 2006
Reporting inspector George Crowther

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Balmoral Avenue
School category	Community		Crewe
Age range of pupils	3–11		Cheshire CW2 6PL
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01270 568956
Number on roll (school)	176	Fax number	01270 666028
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Rev B Baker
		Headteacher	Mrs Donna Reed
Date of previous school inspection	2 July 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Pebble Brook is a smaller than average primary school which serves an area of significant social disadvantage. A high proportion of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Pupils' attainment when they start school is well below average and, for some, very low. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. Almost all the pupils are from White British backgrounds. Of those from minority ethnic heritages, very few are at the early stages of learning English. A children's centre is currently being developed on the school site.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Pebble Brook is a good school which has improved considerably over the past few years. Inspiring leadership by the headteacher has created a very positive environment for learning, with a strong focus on supporting pupils, whatever their needs. The quality of teaching has improved and is now good overall, with outstanding practice in some classes. Parents think the school is doing a very good job and say they benefit from a range of improved links. The school has an accurate assessment of its own effectiveness, which provides a good basis for making further improvements. It provides good value for money.

Often from low starting points, pupils make good progress across the school and they achieve well. By Year 6, standards are broadly average. Progress in Years 3 to 6 has been satisfactory until recently but Year 5 and Year 6 pupils in particular are making much faster progress because improvements in teaching and learning are beginning to have an impact. Nonetheless, weaker aspects of teaching and learning remain in some classes. This is why, though good overall, teaching is too variable in quality. Many lessons are interesting and challenging because the teachers have high expectations of pupils' achievement. In a few cases, however, the pace is too slow or work is not matched well enough to pupils' needs, and so they do not learn as fast as they could.

Pupils' personal development is good. This owes much to a strong programme of personal, social and health education, which supports all aspects of children's learning. Pupils have positive attitudes to school and behave well. They have a particularly strong sense of their place in the school community, because they are successfully encouraged to take on responsibilities and help each other. Pupils know how to make healthy choices and how to keep themselves safe. The curriculum is good. It is well planned and meets the diversity of pupils' needs effectively. As a result, pupils of all abilities and from all backgrounds are helped to make good progress. Good provision in the Foundation Stage, with outstanding support for vulnerable children, ensures a confident, productive start at school.

Leadership of the school is good, with high aspirations for the pupils and a strong sense of community. The senior leadership team has seen through a number of initiatives to raise standards. Areas for development, however, are not always tackled systematically enough, and the success of measures to improve pupils' progress is not always evaluated carefully. The staff are a well motivated team, with a clear focus on raising standards and nurturing pupils' personal development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pace of teaching and the match of work to pupils' learning where these need to be stronger to improve progress.
- Manage school improvement more systematically so that where action is taken its impact on standards and achievement is measured rigorously.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Many pupils start school with weak basic skills. They make good progress and, by Year 6, have done well to reach broadly average standards. Children get a good start in the Nursery and Reception class, benefiting from high quality support, particularly in the Nurture Group (a group of children who have special support for their learning). By the time children join Year 1, however, standards are still below average. During Years 1 to 6, progress is good overall but is most rapid among the oldest pupils. In 2006, Year 6 pupils did not reach the challenging targets set for them, largely because of the weak performance of a few pupils who joined the class from other schools. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and the few from minority ethnic backgrounds or learning English as an additional language, make equally good progress. The work they do is well matched to their needs and they get good support from teachers and teaching assistants.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school does a good job in nurturing pupils' confidence and their enjoyment of learning. As one pupil said, 'It doesn't matter what you are good at, you can be successful.' They enjoy the wide range of activities, both in and out of lessons. One pupil remarked, 'I like lessons because every day you find out something new', which explains why pupils are generally keen to learn. They can lose interest, however, when activities in lessons are not varied enough. Relationships between pupils and with staff are very positive, and the pupils behave well. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. A rich range of experiences, such as opportunities in class to discuss thoughts and feelings, develops their understanding of themselves and their place in the wider world.

Pupils know how to make healthy choices in the food they eat. They say, 'You have to eat lots of fruit and vegetables if you want to be healthy.' At morning break time, however, many pupils bring crisps and do not choose more healthy options. The pupils feel safe in school, and they understand how to stay safe out of school. Class jobs and special responsibilities for the older pupils, such as acting as a playtime buddies for the younger ones, give them a good understanding of contributing to the community. They also have valuable opportunities to express their views through the school council, for example about improving the range of activities at playtime. Good progress in learning basic skills, and increased self-confidence, prepare pupils well for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good and enables the pupils to make good progress. Teaching is outstanding for the Nurture Group and in Years 5 and 6. Elsewhere, the quality is variable. All teachers plan lessons carefully and create a positive atmosphere that supports pupils' learning. Where teaching is outstanding, lively whole-class sessions grab the pupils' interest and a well chosen variety of activities promotes rapid progress. For example, Year 6 pupils developed their note-taking skills as they reported on the sinking of the Titanic. In lessons such as this, teachers' high expectations are reflected in the urgent pace of learning. Where teaching has weaknesses, whole-class sessions sometimes last too long, and the pupils are not sufficiently active or involved. When pupils work on their own, expectations of how quickly they should work are not always clear enough.

The school has thorough systems for assessing pupils' attainment and tracking their progress. As yet, however, the information is not always used to the full to make sure that work in lessons is matched precisely to pupils' needs. Pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, have their own targets for learning. Teachers usually relate these targets closely to work being done in lessons. Pupils' own evaluation of their success in lessons is developing well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

A good range of relevant activities and experiences meets the pupils' needs well. The curriculum is carefully planned and organised, which helps all the pupils to build their skills and knowledge. A well planned range of practical activities helps children in the Foundation Stage to make good progress in all aspects of their learning. Throughout the rest of the school, a strong emphasis on English and mathematics ensures that pupils build their basic skills well. After a period of concentrating on improving standards in these subjects, the school is now developing the breadth and richness of the curriculum. For example, drama, dance, poetry and computer activities are of good quality and much enjoyed by the pupils. Good links between subjects such as English and history bring added interest to learning. Activities outside lessons are good in range and quality. The curriculum meets the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities very well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care for children and their families is outstanding and parents are right to rate this aspect of the school's work very highly. Many pupils need extra support because of difficulties in their lives. From the very beginning, the school nurtures pupils' confidence and self-esteem so that they can get the most from their education.

The learning mentor makes a first-rate contribution to ensuring that pupils feel secure and well motivated to learn. The school also plays a strong role in helping families to support their children at school. All the systems needed to safeguard pupils are firmly in place.

Guidance and support for pupils' academic progress is good. For the most part, teachers make full use of the information they know about pupils' current attainment to help them take the next step in their learning. Excellent support for pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities enables them to make good progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is well led and managed. The headteacher provides clear and purposeful leadership, strongly focused on enabling each pupil to achieve as well as possible. Senior staff lead important aspects of the school's work very effectively. The school works very closely with families and the community to foster high expectations of success. These strengths give the school a good capacity for further improvement.

Good systems for evaluating the work of the school give management a clear view of its strengths and weaknesses. Extensive checks are made on pupils' progress; these have enabled the school to identify and pursue areas for improvement. Management is not as systematic, however, at checking on the overall picture, for example progress from entering Nursery to Year 6. The school has a good plan to guide its future development. A range of initiatives, such as the planned children's centre, is helping the school to improve what it provides. It has also introduced a number of measures to enhance pupils' learning, for example greater use of information and communication technology. However, the success of these measures has not been evaluated sufficiently in terms of their impact on pupils' achievement.

The views of parents, pupils and other members of the school community are sought and acted upon. The school is successful in ensuring that all pupils are fully involved in learning and school life, whatever their background, ability or particular needs. Governors have an astute view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They support the school strongly, but are not afraid to ask challenging questions about its performance.

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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?	2
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	2
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?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
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	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
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	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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 making us feel so welcome when we visited your school to find out how well you are doing, and for being helpful. There are lots of good things about your school, but we also found two ways in which we think it could be even better. The strengths we found are:

- your school feels special because everyone is happy to be there and they want to learn
- everyone is friendly and you all get on very well together
- many of you have special jobs, such as acting as buddies, which help you to feel part of the community
- your parents like the school because the teachers give you lots of help
- you try hard with your work and make good progress
- there are lots of interesting things to do in lessons
- we saw some outstanding teaching
- you enjoy the activities outside lessons, particularly the clubs
- you like the way the staff take great care to make sure you are safe and happy
- the teachers are very keen to keep improving the way you learn
- your school is getting better all the time.

We would like you to work with your teachers to improve the way you learn.

- Sometimes, your teachers do not give you the best activities to help you learn as quickly as you can. We've asked them to make sure the work helps you to improve. You must try hard and work as quickly as you can.
- Your teachers try new ways of helping you to learn quickly. We have asked them to check that these work really well for you and, if they don't, to try some other ways to help you be successful.

Thank you for helping us with the inspection of your school.