

Beacon Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131580
Local Authority	Walsall
Inspection number	293784
Inspection dates	11–12 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Melvyn Hemmings

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	279
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stan Watkins
Headteacher	Charmain Hitchin
Date of previous school inspection	10 February 2002
School address	Davis Road New Invention Willenhall WV12 5HA
Telephone number	01922 710874
Fax number	01922 493837

Age group	3–11
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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. Most children's skill level on entering the Nursery class is below average, particularly in language and literacy. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds and the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is broadly average. The school is working with the local authority in a programme to promote improvement in English and mathematics. The headteacher was appointed two years ago, following a period of significant disruption to the leadership and management of the school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school that has good features and is improving. The good care, guidance and support given to pupils is much appreciated by the overwhelming majority of parents. One parental comment captures the views of many, 'Beacon Primary is a very caring, compassionate and supportive school.' All staff are firmly committed to ensuring pupils' safety and well-being. Pupils' personal development is good and they enjoy coming to school. They behave well and are kind and considerate to each other. This contributes greatly to the friendly and calm atmosphere that is evident throughout the school. A variety of strategies have been introduced to raise achievement, such as a different approach to helping pupils in Years 1 and 2 link letter sounds to words. This is proving successful in bringing about improvements and, as a result, pupils are now developing their skills in reading and writing at a faster rate.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory and standards by the end of Year 6 are broadly average in English, mathematics and science. Children make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes because of the good quality of teaching they receive. Despite this, by the time they enter Year 1, the standards children reach remain below those expected for their age. This is mainly because of their weak language and literacy skills, which limit their achievement across all areas of learning. In recent years, standards by the end of Year 2 have been below average. Improvement is now being seen, particularly in reading and mathematics where standards have risen to an average level. Standards in writing show marked improvement due to the school's good strategies but they are not yet up to the same standard as reading and mathematics. Progress in Years 3 to 6 is satisfactory overall but is inconsistent between classes because of variations in teaching quality. This limits achievement, especially for more able pupils who are not always challenged enough and are capable of doing better. As a result, some pupils make better progress than others. Pupils' skills in writing are a weakness recognised by the school. Currently, there are too few opportunities for pupils to extend their writing skills in other subjects.

The curriculum is satisfactory and is enriched well by a variety of out of school clubs, and a residential stay in Wales for pupils in Years 5 and 6. Provision for history and geography has been much improved since the previous inspection and pupils make satisfactory progress in these subjects. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teaching assistants provide valuable support for pupils, particularly those with learning difficulties and disabilities, who learn successfully as a result. Relationships between adults and pupils are good and this helps the school to be a friendly place in which to work and play. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher provides good leadership and has been central to the improvements made in the last two years. She has been ably supported by the deputy headteacher. A strong team ethos has been forged with all staff committed to raising pupils' standards and achievement. The role of those new to the senior management team is not yet sufficiently developed for them to play an active part in school improvement. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection and the school's recent track record shows that the capacity for future improvement is secure.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teaching provides sufficient challenge for all pupils and enables them to have a clear understanding of how to improve their work.

- Improve pupils' literacy skills by providing more opportunities for them to write at length in subjects other than English.
- Develop the role of senior managers to involve them more effectively in school improvement.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory and results in them reaching broadly average standards by the end of Year 6. However, the good progress that children make in the Nursery and Reception classes is not maintained through the rest of the school, where it is satisfactory. This results from variations in the quality of provision between classes, which means not all pupils achieve as well as they could. This is particularly the case for more able pupils, and is reflected in the less than average proportion reaching the higher levels in the 2006 national tests for 7 and 11 year olds. Over the last few years, girls have outperformed boys in the tests. Recent initiatives to address this issue, together with the support from the local authority, are beginning to show signs of success, with the gap between the performance of boys and girls narrowing. Action taken since the previous inspection to improve standards in history and geography has been successful and they are now satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. Because of this, they are very clear about what is right or wrong and co-operate well with others. Cultural development is relatively weaker as pupils show limited understanding about the diversity of cultures, background and beliefs within modern day society. Pupils have a good understanding of how to maintain a healthy lifestyle and thoroughly enjoy the opportunities for taking part in extra-curricular sporting and physical activities. They can describe various ways to keep themselves safe and free from harm. Pupils are happy to take on responsibilities such as being a member of the school council or a 'playground buddy'. They also make a positive contribution to the local community by supporting charities and taking part in local events. Most pupils enjoy coming to school, behave well and are keen to learn. Attendance is satisfactory, and the school is working hard to improve the attendance of a significant minority of pupils who do not attend regularly enough. Given their satisfactory academic achievement and their good personal development, pupils are suitably prepared for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning in the Nursery and Reception classes are consistently good and this enables children to get off to a good start in their school life. Through the rest of the school there is less consistency, leading to variations in the progress made by pupils in different classes. Good features include the positive relationships teachers have with their pupils and their expectations for good behaviour. Some lessons are lively and interesting and offer pupils practical experiences which help them to achieve well. For example, pupils in Year 2 had to try

to make a toy before trying to improve the quality of a set of instructions. However, some lessons do not fully engage pupils' enthusiasm and enjoyment in learning. Expectations of what pupils can achieve are not always high enough and so activities provided do not afford enough challenge, particularly for more able pupils. Marking is not always used effectively to guide pupils in improving their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The provision in the Nursery and Reception classes is good and provides children with a wide range of interesting practical activities. In Years 1 to 6 good use is made of visits, visitors and extra-curricular activities to extend and add interest to pupils' experiences. Recent modifications to the curriculum are starting to have a positive impact on pupils' learning. For example, well structured reading and writing programmes have been introduced over the past two years and pupils' progress in gaining basic skills is now accelerating. However, there are limited opportunities for pupils to practise and develop these skills by writing at length in subjects other than English. A range of strategies has been employed to raise the performance of boys, such as using visual media as a starting point for their work. These are proving successful, with boys showing more interest in their activities. The programme for personal development is good and is reflected in the responsible and mature manner that most pupils show.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are thorough and reviewed regularly. Child protection procedures are robust, with all staff aware of what to do if they have concerns about a pupil. The youngest children are introduced to school sensitively, with their families fully involved. Pupils' personal development is well supported in a caring environment where all individuals are valued. As one pupil commented, 'We like this school because it is friendly and we are looked after well.' The parent support worker is a new but positive addition to the school's provision and is making a significant contribution to helping parents to have a greater involvement in their children's learning. There are good links with outside agencies to provide extra support when needed, such as for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. The school is working effectively with the education welfare officer to improve the attendance of a small minority of pupils who need support in this area. Although the procedures for checking the progress that pupils make are thorough, assessment information is not used consistently through the school to help pupils understand what they need to do to improve the standard of their work. Consequently, some pupils, particularly the more able, do not achieve as well as they should.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Over the last two years there has been stability in leadership and management that was lacking in previous years because of regular changes of headship. The headteacher provides a clear direction for all in the school. There is a shared vision for future development with emphasis on raising standards and achievement. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and has enabled it to correctly identify the priority areas for development. Over the last two years the school has worked well with others, such as the local authority, to bring about improvement. There

are thorough monitoring and evaluation procedures to check the school's performance; however most of the work in this area is carried out by the headteacher and deputy headteacher with limited involvement of the newer members of the senior management team. Governors are very supportive of the school, though their role in holding the school to account is not fully developed.

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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	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	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?	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.

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

13 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Beacon Primary School, Walsall, WV12 5AH

Thank you so much for the really warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. You were very friendly and told us that you were proud of your school. We enjoyed our time with you and consider your school to be a satisfactory one that is improving.

Your personal development is good and you behave well. Teaching is satisfactory, as is your achievement, and you reach average standards by the end of Year 6. All the adults in school take good care of you, which really pleases your parents. You all feel safe and secure in school and as one of you said, 'We like this school because it is friendly and we are looked after well.' You told us you enjoy the satisfactory curriculum, especially the many sporting activities you can take part in. The few pupils who do not come to school regularly enough could help the school improve by making sure that they do come to school every day. The adults in charge of managing the school do a satisfactory job and are helping it to improve. We would like to set you all a challenge. In which year was your school built and how many rooms are in it?

A special word of thanks to the school council who gave their time to talk to one of us. You are a credit to your school.

What we have asked your school to do now.

- Ensure that you are always given work that makes you think hard and that you have a clear idea of how to improve your work.
- Give you more opportunities to practise and improve your skills in writing in subjects such as history and geography.
- Make sure that all people in charge of managing the school are fully involved in helping it to improve.

I hope you all keep enjoying your learning and showing care for everyone you meet.

Best wishes

Melvyn Hemmings Lead inspector