

# Charles Darwin Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	111053
<b>Local Authority</b>	Cheshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	295300
<b>Inspection dates</b>	18–19 April 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Frank Carruthers

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	289
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Bill Wallace
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Fiona Rimmer
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	11 January 2006
<b>School address</b>	Darwin Street Castle Northwich Cheshire CW8 1BN
<b>Telephone number</b>	01606 75194
<b>Fax number</b>	01606 74143

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<b>Age group</b>	4–11
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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 and most pupils are White British. There are very few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds or who are learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is average; the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. Most of these pupils have speech and language or reading difficulties. Staff turnover and pupil mobility have been high since the last inspection in January 2006, when the school was issued with a Notice to Improve.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 4

In accordance with Section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is, therefore, given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is needed in pupils' achievements.

After the last inspection, considerable turbulence in the leadership and staffing of the school adversely affected school improvement. The impact of this was particularly felt in the autumn term 2006. This has been followed by a more stable period of development from the start of the spring term 2007. As a result of past uncertainty and discontinuity, with three headteachers in the last nine months, insufficient progress was made on the significant weaknesses identified in the last inspection report. This led to a backlog of uncompleted actions which have only in recent months begun to be addressed under the guidance of the current acting headteacher. In addition, pupils were underperforming in their studies and their behaviour began to deteriorate. Consequently, the overall effectiveness of the school was and remains inadequate, progress since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory and the school does not give value for money.

Recent improvements, however, indicate that the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve. The acting headteacher, brought in by the local authority and ably supported by the acting deputy headteacher, is leading the school forward well. The good support of officers and consultants of the local authority has assisted all staff and governors in their work and a permanent headteacher takes up post in September 2007.

The quality of teaching, learning and the curriculum is now satisfactory. Standards of care, guidance and support are satisfactory, as are the quality and standards in the Foundation Stage. Pupils' personal development, including their behaviour, has been improved through a better whole-school approach to pupil management, introduced by the current leadership team. Pupils' academic progress has accelerated because of better attitudes to learning and improvements to teaching brought about by the impact of good quality monitoring by the acting headteacher. Standards in Year 6 are average but need to be improved, especially in the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels in English, mathematics and science. Standards of pupils' writing across most age groups are too low. Overall, pupils' achievement remains inadequate because pupils are still making up ground lost in the autumn term.

Many parents have been extremely concerned about the performance of the school and a large minority moved their children to other schools in the area. Since January they have shown renewed confidence in the leadership of the school and many feel the school is heading in the right direction. Leadership, management and governance of the school are now satisfactory. The school's procedures to evaluate its own performance are satisfactory, though the full impact of the progress made in recent months is yet to be felt. More remains to be done to improve teachers' planning and use of marking, assessments, tracking information and target-setting so that all pupils, especially the more able, are challenged in lessons and make the best possible progress. It is of paramount importance that the momentum of improvement is not lost during the transition between the acting headteacher and incoming permanent headteacher.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the achievement of more able pupils in English, mathematics and science.

- Improve teachers' planning so that the more able pupils are challenged well in lessons, and improve the use of marking, assessment, tracking information and target-setting so that all groups of pupils are achieving to their potential.
- Improve standards of pupils' writing.
- Ensure the transitional arrangements for the incoming headteacher are effective in maintaining the recent momentum towards progress and school improvement.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 4**

Children enter the Reception classes with broadly average levels of attainment, better in their personal and physical development than in aspects of early literacy and writing. They make satisfactory progress and most achieve the goals expected of them by the end of the year but fewer achieve those relating to reading and writing.

In the current Year 2, standards are average overall but are predicted to be lower than those achieved by the Year 2 pupils last year, partly as a result of pupil mobility. Standards of writing in this year group are showing improvement, for example in the proportion of pupils achieving above the expected level. This is the result of the focus given to improving writing this year. The very few children who start school with English as an additional language make satisfactory and often good progress in the language rich environment of the classrooms and as they mix with other children. In Year 6, standards in English, mathematics and science have been maintained at the levels reached in 2006, when standards were broadly average, as was the proportion of pupils reaching the higher level. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress towards targets in their education plans because of the effective support they receive through additional programmes of work.

Nevertheless, achievement overall remains inadequate because of poor progress in the early part of the current school year. A significant proportion of pupils made no progress and some even slipped backwards during the autumn term. This has now been reversed and pupils are beginning to make up lost ground. There remains a measure of underachievement among pupils, especially the more able, that has yet to be fully addressed and standards of writing remain below average in most classes, except in Year 2 where improvement has been most marked.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 3**

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is satisfactory. Levels of attendance are average and punctuality to school is generally good. Pupils report that behaviour has been unsatisfactory in the past and this is borne out by other evidence from school. Behaviour has improved in recent months as a result of clearer rewards and sanctions. The pupils confirm that incidents of bullying or other poor behaviour are fewer now and are handled well. Disruptions to teaching by staff changes and the loss of friends to other schools have badly affected the pupils' attitudes to learning. Typical comments are 'It's hard to get used to so many different teachers'. Their enjoyment of lessons is picking up, however, and they are more confident that senior staff will 'make things work'. The pupils' understanding of personal safety and a healthy lifestyle are good and there are good opportunities to become involved in decision-making. For example, members of the school council interviewed candidates for the headship of the school and feel keenly how valuable

that was. Pupils' involvement in the wider community is good and they develop satisfactory skills of teamwork and independence for the next stages of their education.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

The quality of teaching and learning is now satisfactory with good features and, as a result, pupils' progress has improved. A focus from the last inspection was to improve teachers' questioning of pupils and this is clearly evident in lessons. Similarly, pupils' ability to work independently is improving. Relationships between staff and pupils are good and teachers use information and communication technology in lessons well. Pupils gain confidence through co-operative work and sharing ideas with their 'talking partners'. However, there is inconsistency among teachers in how well they plan to challenge the more able pupils, and the use of worksheets limits the number of occasions when pupils write at length. Marking of pupils' work, though generally supportive, is not always geared towards the pupils' targets and how they can improve their work. As a result, the levels that pupils are aiming to reach in English and mathematics are not fully understood by all, except the oldest.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 3**

The curriculum has a satisfactory range of activities and places appropriate emphasis on skills of literacy and numeracy, though it has been adversely affected by the disruption earlier in the school year. There have been improvements since the last inspection in catering for the needs of gifted and talented pupils, for example in 'puzzle' classes, aimed at promoting thinking and reasoning, and other challenging activities, some involving visitors and out-of-school events. Further improvements have been made by the introduction of new technology, such as interactive whiteboards in all classrooms, and a dedicated outdoor area for the children in the Reception classes. The opportunities for activities and clubs outside lessons are satisfactory and the curriculum promotes a safe and healthy lifestyle well.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 3**

There are appropriate procedures for child protection, the safe recruitment of staff, health, safety and risk assessments. A number of policies and practices have been reviewed and updated in recent months, for example in relation to pupils' behaviour, and have had a positive impact on standards. Links with other agencies are satisfactory and support pupils at risk or those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities well. Procedures to track the academic development of pupils were being developed at the time of the last inspection and a key issue was to make best use of the information gathered. However, progress on this important aspect stalled and has only recently been re-energised. Consequently this remains an important area for development.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 3

The energy and expertise of the leadership team since the current acting headteacher took up post in January 2007 have helped to create a springboard for the school to face the future positively and creatively. The impact of the acting headteacher has been felt in key areas of the school's work, improving pupils' progress and their personal development. Monitoring of provision by the leadership team is now good, leading to improvements in the quality of teaching and learning; their findings on the quality of teaching and learning in lessons reflect the inspectors' views closely. However, in the school's self-evaluation, which is satisfactory, they view standards and provision too positively overall and their opinions are at variance with the judgements of the inspection team in a number of respects, such as the school's overall effectiveness, the achievement of pupils and the capacity to improve.

Governors have been assiduous in improving their role and contribution. Several new members have been appointed and trained, their understanding of and involvement in school self-evaluation and analysis of performance have improved, and their links with classes and teachers have increased. However, the full impact of these improvements is yet to be felt. Parents and staff anticipate the arrival of the permanent headteacher with renewed hope. A typical comment has been, 'There now seems to be light at the end of the tunnel.' However, there is no written plan indicating how the transition will be managed so that it is smooth and helps the school's development. This is an aspect for urgent attention in conjunction with the local authority.

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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>	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
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	No

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	4
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
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

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

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
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?	Yes

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Inspection of Charles Darwin Primary School, Northwich, CW8 1BN

Thank you very much for your help when we inspected your school. Those of you we spoke to were very frank and open in your views. Your school has come through some difficult times with lots of changes which are now mostly in the past. However, there is still much for the staff and the incoming headteacher to do to make the school better.

Although your school is getting better it has not been effective enough in helping you to do as well as you can.

- Your acting headteacher and deputy headteacher are leading your school forward well.
- Your behaviour and attitudes to learning are getting better now that there are fewer changes of teachers and you know what you are expected to do.
- The staff are working hard to make sure you make better progress in subjects such as reading, writing and mathematics.

Nevertheless, we want the staff to make sure they give you challenging work to do, especially the more able ones amongst you. They need to focus on improving how you write stories, reports and descriptions in English and in other subjects such as science and history. When they mark your work, they need to tell you what to do to improve it.

You have an important job to do here. You need to know your targets for improvement in English and mathematics and try your very best to achieve them.

You have a new, permanent headteacher, to look forward to next September and we want everyone - staff, governors, parents and pupils - to make sure he gets a really good start in his new job so the school can go from strength to strength.

We wish you all well for the future.