

Lower Farm Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104169
Local Authority	Walsall
Inspection number	308533
Inspection dates	20–21 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Usha Devi HMI

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	431
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Simon Birch
Headteacher	Joe Baker
Date of previous school inspection	28 February 2005
School address	Bakewell Close Bloxwich Walsall WS3 3QH
Telephone number	01922 710479
Fax number	01922 491939

Age group	3–11
Inspection dates	20–21 May 2008
Inspection number	308533

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Lower Farm Primary is much larger than many other primary schools. Most pupils are of White British origin. The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups, whose first language is not English and with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are below the national averages. The school has received the following awards in recognition of its work: Healthy Schools, Artsmark Gold, ICT Mark, Basic Skills, Investor in People and Investor in Children.

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 with some strengths in the personal development and well-being of the pupils. One parent who responded to the parental questionnaire wrote, 'Our child is extremely happy in a positive learning environment.' Relationships between pupils and staff are good. Pupils speak highly of the school and are particularly positive about the good quality care and support that staff provide.

When children start school, their performance levels are broadly similar to those normally expected. By the time pupils leave the school, standards are similar to the national average. This represents satisfactory progress. Between 2006 and 2007, there was a steady decline in standards at the end of both key stages. During this time, pupils in Year 6 also made less progress than expected in mathematics. In response to the declining standards and slower rate of progress, the school introduced a consistent approach to teaching mathematical vocabulary and solving problems, increased the opportunities for pupils to write and purchased a wide range of books to encourage pupils to read. The school also began to identify those who were underachieving and provided them with additional support. These actions have halted the steady decline in standards and improved the overall rate of progress. The majority of pupils are now making satisfactory progress and in Year 5 and 6, a minority of pupils are now making consistently good progress. As a result, standards in these year groups are rising at a faster rate. Assessment information shows that the majority of pupils in Year 6 are working at the expected level for their age. Nevertheless, the school is aware that pupils throughout the school are capable of making faster progress and attaining higher standards.

A good range of out of school activities, visits and opportunities for pupils to participate in whole-school productions effectively enrich the satisfactory curriculum. The school has recently introduced a creative approach to curriculum planning. Staff are beginning to make greater links between subjects, which is having a positive impact on pupils and their enthusiasm towards learning. Inspectors saw a good example of this creative approach during a class assembly. Pupils enthusiastically shared their learning about Africa by retelling a story, singing an African song, reciting rhymes and performing a traditional African Gumbo dance.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory and sometimes good. Pupils' progress accelerates when teachers give pupils the opportunity to apply their mathematical and literacy skills to complete activities that are challenging and interesting. For example, in one Year 5/6 class, pupils worked independently and with a partner to solve mathematical problems about creatures from outer space. One pupil commented, 'This is making me think hard and it is fun at the same time!' In contrast, when teachers spend too long introducing lessons while most pupils listen quietly without getting actively involved, the pace of learning slows. In too many lessons, teachers do not use assessment information to match work that meets the differing ability needs of the pupils. Consequently, the majority of pupils in the school make satisfactory rather than good progress. Academic guidance is satisfactory because teachers, through their marking, do not sufficiently ensure that pupils are fully aware of the actions they need to take to achieve their learning targets and improve their work. Consequently, the care, guidance and support provided for pupils are satisfactory overall.

Leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. The headteacher is a caring and considerate leader. He is working well with staff to develop the school further by introducing a range of initiatives that are improving the quality of teaching and learning. While most senior

teachers are rapidly developing the skills required to lead developments in the school, the headteacher is aware that some aspects of the school's work are less well managed. Although senior staff regularly track pupils' progress and monitor the quality of teaching, some senior staff do not follow up areas for improvements with sufficient urgency. In addition, the written feedback to teachers does not give them the specific guidance they need to help pupils make even better progress. Governors are supportive and have a sound understanding of what the school needs to do to improve further. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory and the school's capacity to improve is also satisfactory.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children in the Foundation Stage make satisfactory progress and begin Year 1 with performance levels that are broadly in line with those expected. Teachers plan for a suitable range of play-based, independent and adult-led activities. These engage the children and help them to learn through practical experiences. Teachers carefully track children's progress and use this information to plan activities that meet the needs of most children. The activities for the more able children do not always provide them with the appropriate level of challenge. Children play together well and develop satisfactory social skills. Teachers are aware that children's speaking and listening and mathematical skills are sometimes below age-related expectations. They are taking appropriate action and increasing the opportunities pupils have to learn these skills. Appropriate links with home enable parents to support their child's learning with increasing effectiveness. While the school has secured improvements in children's progress since the last inspection, it acknowledges this has not been as rapid as it could be. This is because the senior leaders responsible for coordinating the work of the Foundation Stage have not placed a sufficient emphasis on using information from monitoring activities to provide teachers with the guidance and support they need to accelerate children's progress even further. The headteacher has suitable plans in place to improve provision in the Foundation Stage.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure a consistent rate of progress in reading, writing and mathematics throughout the school.
- Strengthen and improve the quality of teaching by ensuring activities better meet the learning needs of all pupils and by providing more opportunities for pupils to take an active part in lessons.
- Ensure all leaders and managers rigorously monitor and evaluate the work of the school and use this information to provide staff, including those in the Foundation Stage, with the guidance they need to secure the required changes.

A small proportion of 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 enter the school with standards that are broadly average. The majority of pupils make satisfactory progress and reach broadly average standards in English and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 1. At the end of Key Stage 2, they reach standards that are similar to the national average. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the more able also

make satisfactory progress because of satisfactory provision. The school has taken effective action to stop the decline in standards and improve the progress pupils make in mathematics at Key Stage 2. For instance, leaders have taken appropriate steps to improve mathematics teaching by placing a stronger emphasis on pupils' problem solving and investigative skills. The school plans to share this good practice across all key stages. Progress is now satisfactory overall and improving. Teachers in Years 5 and 6 have been particularly successful in addressing the dip in achievement. Consequently, a minority of pupils in these year groups are now making good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Relationships are good and pupils are polite and courteous to visitors, the adults they work with and each other. Attendance is good and pupils clearly enjoy school. One pupil said with delight, 'The teachers mix fun activities with the things we need to learn in literacy and numeracy.' Pupils respond positively to the school's behaviour policy because staff involve them in drawing up a code of conduct. Consequently, behaviour is good in lessons and around school. Pupils' social and moral development is good while spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory. Staff encourage pupils to make healthy choices at lunchtimes and are rewarded with a sticker if they do so. As a result, pupils have a good awareness of how to eat healthily. Through the work of the school council and local and national fund-raising activities, pupils make a valuable contribution to the community. Pupils' skills in literacy and mathematics prepare them sufficiently for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory and improving. Consequently, standards are rising and pupils are making better progress. When teachers encourage pupils to take an active part in lessons, progress accelerates. Examples of good practice include pupils talking to a partner about their ideas before working independently and pupils demonstrating to each other the strategies they have used to complete an activity. However, progress is satisfactory rather than good because staff do not always use assessment information to set tasks that fully meet the needs of all learners. As a result, tasks are often too easy and do not give pupils the opportunity to extend and apply the skills they have acquired in previous lessons. In some lessons, progress is not as fast as it could be because staff rely too heavily on worksheets. These limit the opportunity pupils have to extend or develop their ideas. Teaching assistants provide individual pupils and groups with a suitable level of support during lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Opportunities to develop pupils' literacy, numeracy and information, communication and technology skills are satisfactory. Staff are working hard to develop greater links between subjects and plan tasks that encourage creativity. Although this approach is not fully embedded, it is already having a positive effect on pupils' attitudes and progress. There is a lively mixture of enrichment activities to enhance pupils' personal development. For instance, pupils take part in the gardening club, which gives them the opportunity for reflection and promotes their

understanding of the environment. The school also provides pupils with a range of visits that support their learning. A good example of this is the Years 4, 5 and 6 visits to France, which support their learning of the language and culture. The school is in the process of developing its provision for the more able.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

'My children are happy and confident and are always listened to by staff,' wrote one parent, reflecting the views of the majority of parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire. Pupils say they feel safe because the adults in the school look after them. The school carries out the statutory checks for ensuring the safeguarding of its pupils, including regular risk assessments. Child protection and health and safety procedures are in place. Academic guidance is satisfactory. The school has in place a suitable system for recording and tracking the progress of individual pupils and setting targets. However, staff do not make sufficient use of this information to provide pupils with the guidance they need to improve and the targets that staff set for the more able pupils are not challenging enough. Teachers' marking does not always give a clear indication of what pupils need to do to work towards their targets or correct errors in their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher has established a school that places a strong emphasis on helping pupils to become confident individuals. Together with staff and governors, he is eager to improve the school further and ensure that all pupils achieve their best. The headteacher and senior staff use assessment information effectively to identify pupils who would benefit from additional support. This has led to improvements in recent rates of progress. Nevertheless, the headteacher is aware that not all senior staff consistently provide staff with an appropriate level of support. The coordinators for literacy, mathematics and science are keen and enthusiastic. They provide staff with a suitable level of support. The school improvement plan is satisfactory and uses information from the analysis of performance data, and monitoring of teaching to identify many of the school's strengths and areas for development. However, the plan does not make sufficient reference to pupils' progress targets and how these will be used to evaluate the impact of actions. Governors provide a satisfactory level of support. They are increasing their involvement in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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?	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.

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

22 May 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Lower Farm Primary School, Walsall, WS3 3QH

We enjoyed meeting you when we visited your school recently. Thank you for the friendly welcome you gave us. We liked talking to you about your work, observing your lessons and looking at your work. We would like to say a special thank you to the children in the school council who came to talk to us about the school and their work. Thank you also for inviting us to the assembly. It was good to see how much you were enjoying sharing all that you had learnt about Africa. We thought you performed the Gumbo dance with confidence.

We think that your school is satisfactory and it is helping you to make satisfactory progress in reading, writing and mathematics. These are the things we liked most.

- You are polite, well behaved and treat the adults you work with and each other with respect.
- Mr Baker and the teachers are working hard to improve the way you learn and are helping you to make even better progress. You told us that your lessons are a lot more fun and exciting.
- There are lots of interesting clubs for you to take part in and places for you to visit.
- In lessons, you listen carefully and like it when teachers give you the chance to solve problems and use your imagination.

We have asked Mr Baker, the staff and governors to help you make even faster progress in reading, writing and mathematics. We have also asked your teachers to make sure that all your lessons challenge you to do your best and that they give you more opportunities to talk about your work and share your ideas. Finally, we have asked all the senior teachers to get even better at checking how well the school is doing and to help all your teachers make sure that everything is always as good as it can be. You can help the staff and governors by always doing your best.

Thank you for making our two days with you so enjoyable. We shall take away lots of good memories about your school. We wish you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Usha Devi Her Majesty's Inspector