

# Firs Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	106303
<b>Local Authority</b>	Trafford
<b>Inspection number</b>	309089
<b>Inspection dates</b>	7–8 May 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Gill Jones HMI

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	236
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Peter Leigh
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Janet Lakin
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	27 June 2005
<b>Date of previous funded early education inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Date of previous childcare inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Firs Road Sale Cheshire M33 5EL
<b>Telephone number</b>	0161 973 7350
<b>Fax number</b>	0161 962 2803

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<b>Age group</b>	3–11
<b>Inspection dates</b>	7–8 May 2009
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector.

## Description of the school

This is an average size primary school situated in Sale, an urban district of Trafford. The number of pupils attending the school increased in 2008, following the closure of a local primary school. More pupils move to and from the school than is found nationally. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is nearly double the national average and a significant proportion of pupils come from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Pupils are mainly of White British heritage. A small proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. None of these are at the early stages of learning to speak English. The percentage of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities increased in September 2008 and is now above average. The school has a local authority specialist provision for up to 10 pupils with moderate learning difficulties. There are currently eight pupils in this unit. The Early Years Foundation Stage comprises a Nursery and Reception class. The headteacher was the executive headteacher of another local primary school in addition to being headteacher of Firs Primary School during 2007 and 2008. At the time of the inspection the school was undergoing major refurbishment.

The school has gained a number of awards, which include the Activemark and the Healthy Schools award. It provides a breakfast club and an after-school club run by a private provider. These were inspected at the same time. A separate inspection report for these is available on the Ofsted website.

## 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, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to pupils' achievement and standards.

The headteacher sets an ethos in which pupils' personal development and well-being are the first priority. Pupils say they are happy, particularly those who recently joined the school, and behaviour is good. They know how to lead healthy lifestyles and contribute well to the school and local community. Their personal development and well-being are good. Parents appreciate the care shown by staff, especially towards pupils who experience learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, at the end of Key Stage 2, the standards reached by 11-year-olds in English, mathematics and science are much too low, particularly for the more able pupils, and their achievement is inadequate.

Children get a good start to their education in the Early Years Foundation Stage (Nursery and Reception) and, from levels of development which are below those typical for 3 and 4-year-olds, achieve well. They make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 1 and most reach standards in reading, writing and mathematics that are expected nationally for 7-year-olds. However, the standards reached by 11-year-olds are much lower than at the time of the last inspection. In 2008, well over half the pupils in Year 6 did not reach the standards they were capable of achieving. Consequently, many pupils leave the school poorly prepared academically for their secondary education.

The school has experienced a turbulent three years. There has been significant disruption to staffing, particularly in Key Stage 2. In addition, the presence of the headteacher at Firs was limited during the period of her executive headship and the flow of pupils in and out of the school increased. The staffing situation is now more stable, and consequently, the school is in a better position to get back on track. The senior leadership team is strengthened by the recent appointment of a Key Stage 2 leader and raising pupil's achievement is now a high priority. However, the school is still not setting challenging enough targets for pupils, particularly for the more able, and this is contributing to their continuing underachievement.

During the inspection, most of the lessons seen were of satisfactory quality and a few were good. Teachers are positive and relationships are good. However, their expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving are generally too low and the work set for pupils is not always at the right level for their ability. Pupils' work is marked regularly, but it is often not made sufficiently clear to them how to improve it. The curriculum meets statutory requirements and is of satisfactory quality. It is enhanced by a range of enrichment activities, including residential visits, sports and music coaching. The curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. It is relevant to individuals' learning needs and pupils are supported effectively by well-trained teaching assistants. The school works effectively with other agencies to help pupils and families who experience social and emotional difficulties.

Governors are supportive of the school and know the local community well. However, they have not managed to bring about improvement since the last inspection. They are now aware of the extent of their duties, particularly with regard to holding managers to account to secure better outcomes for pupils. The senior leadership team knows the strengths of the school well, but

has an overly optimistic view of the weaknesses. This is because managers have not made the link between the impact of their work and the current outcomes for pupils. Not all pupils are provided with an equal opportunity to succeed. Transition arrangements for pupils new to the school have been well managed, as is the current building work. The senior leadership team is putting some effective measures in place to stop the declining standards. This demonstrates that the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

## **Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 2**

Children start the Early Years Foundation Stage (Nursery and Reception) with skills and abilities that are below those typical of 3 and 4-year-olds generally, though there is a wide range of ability. Their skills in language and literacy are lower than in other areas of development. Children make good progress and by the time they leave Reception, almost all achieve the early learning goals for this age. Children's personal development and well-being is outstanding. They have positive attitudes, are happy to talk and play with visitors and are eager to learn. They are confident using all the space available to them, indoors and outdoors, and they help each other to complete tasks well.

Teaching is good. Staff plan imaginative activities to develop the children's language skills and understanding. In the Nursery, children were encouraged to talk about their paintings, including how to use the brushes and the paint. Staff are highly skilled at engaging the children's interest. For example, puppets are used effectively to enable children to learn their letters and sounds. The leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. Teamwork is seamless and staff are constantly evaluating the impact of their work against children's achievements. The assessment arrangements are excellent. The children are well cared for and all the current statutory welfare requirements are met. The school provides good opportunities for parents to share in their children's success and the introduction of a slide show is providing parents with more information about their children's day at school. However, the school recognises that there is more to be done so that all parents are better prepared to support their children's development effectively.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Raise standards and achievement, particularly for the more able pupils, in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.
- Improve teaching and learning, matching work to pupils' ability more accurately, so that a greater proportion of lessons are good or better.
- Make better use of assessment to set more challenging targets for pupils, so that they are able to reach the standards of which they are capable.
- Ensure that managers use the information about pupils' achievement available to them to direct their actions, to hold staff accountable and to evaluate the impact of their work against the outcomes achieved by pupils.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 4**

Pupils start Key Stage 1 with skills and abilities that are typical of 5-year-olds nationally. Since the last inspection they have made satisfactory progress and most reach standards that are in line with those expected for 7-year-olds. However, standards in reading are slightly below the

national average and well below for the more able pupils. Standards in writing are improving and this is reflected in the work in pupils' exercise books.

In Key Stage 2, standards in English, mathematics and science are well below the national averages for 11-year-olds. They are much lower than at the time of the last inspection. Standards have been in decline for the past three years, particularly for the more able pupils. Fewer pupils reach the higher Level 5 in the end of Key Stage 2 national tests than in other Trafford schools and nationally. In 2008, the progress made by pupils was inadequate. Well over half the pupils in Year 6 did not reach the standards of which they were capable. The school has not met its targets. Currently a large proportion of pupils in Key Stage 2 are working at levels well below their capabilities and below the standards expected for their age. This is evident from the school's own data on pupils' progress and from the work in pupils' exercise books. The legacy of underachievement is impacting on pupils' ability to catch up, despite some effective teaching in Year 6 and additional individual support. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve better than their peers and their progress is good.

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

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development, are good. Pupils work well together, they are confident, make friends easily and are kind to those who are new to the school. Pupils know how to lead healthy lifestyles and take part in the wide range of sporting activities provided, particularly basketball. They are active at playtimes and their behaviour is generally good. A very small minority of pupils have behavioural difficulties and they say they are given good support to manage their anger; other pupils understand their needs well. Although pupils know about healthy eating, not all choose to eat healthily. Pupils have good attitudes to their work and say they are keen to do well at school. Their attendance is satisfactory. The school council is active and pupils who are new to the school are well represented. They are keen for the school to achieve the eco award. During the inspection, eco warriors' switched off lights and collected paper for recycling. Pupils learn skills such as answering the office telephone and managing the healthy snack tuck shop, preparing them well for the world of work. However, their basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics are well below national expectations and this means they are less well prepared academically for the next stage in their education.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Teaching is generally lively and teachers make good use of resources such as the interactive white boards. They are encouraging of the pupils and behaviour is consistently well managed. The less able pupils are supported effectively by well-qualified teaching assistants. In the few good lessons observed, teachers use praise judiciously. Their expectations are high and pupils know exactly what they have to achieve in a set period of time. As a result, pupils are industrious. There is a rigour to the assessment of pupils' work and marking shows pupils what they need to learn next. Where teaching is weaker, the tasks set for pupils are not always well matched to their ability. Consequently, progress is too slow. The more able pupils are often given more tasks to complete rather than set work which is more challenging. Pupils often spend too long listening to the teacher and expectations

of what pupils should achieve during a lesson are not high enough. This is reflected in the volume and quality of work in pupils' exercise books.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 3**

The curriculum meets statutory requirements and provides adequate opportunities for teaching the basic skills. Subjects such as music, art and sport are given good emphasis. However, there are few links made between subjects and opportunities for pupils to practise their basic skills in subjects such as geography, science and history are not well used. Pupils often complete worksheets rather than set out their own work in exercise books and this limits opportunities for the more able pupils in particular to show what they are capable of achieving. The curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. It is relevant to their needs and well matched to their abilities. The school provides a residential visit annually and a good range of local visits and visitors to the school extend the pupils' experience of the wider world.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 3**

The school provides a good level of pastoral care. It meets the current statutory requirements to safeguard the health, safety and well-being of the pupils. Staff know the pupils' individual circumstances well and are vigilant with regard to their safety. The recent appointment of a pastoral mentor is improving the attendance of pupils and links with the local community. Parents comment on the good support their children are given, particularly where the child has learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The provision for these pupils is well managed. Transition arrangements are good. Pupils who recently joined the school following the local school closure were given good opportunities to get to know staff and pupils prior to starting and there are good links with the local secondary school.

The guidance pupils receive to improve their work is inconsistent. Marking is regular and teachers' comments are positive. However, in some classes, scant information is given to pupils on how to improve their work and many pupils are not clear about their teacher's expectations of them. Conversely, pupils are very clear about staff expectations for their good behaviour. There are pockets of good practice in marking from which staff can learn.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

The headteacher has created a culture which secures the health, safety and well-being of the pupils effectively. She is well supported in this by an experienced senior management team, recently strengthened by the new appointment of a Key Stage 2 leader. Staff morale is good and together they have successfully managed some key challenges since September 2008. These include the transition of pupils whose school was closed and a major building project. The senior leadership team is now setting a clear direction to improve pupils' academic achievement. Subject leaders have a good knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses in their subjects and are keen to build improvement. Governors are now aware of the need to hold the school more effectively to account for the outcomes achieved by pupils. Consequently, the school is demonstrating a satisfactory capacity to improve.

However, as a result of the turbulent past three years, the school still faces significant challenges. These include tackling the legacy of underachievement in Key Stages 1 and 2, particularly for the more able pupils, and ensuring that the procedures for holding staff accountable for the outcomes achieved by pupils are sufficiently robust. Although the headteacher's executive headship gave staff the opportunity to step up into senior leadership roles, during this time, some of the monitoring of the school's work was not sufficiently robust. As a result, the school's view of itself is over-generous and the targets set to improve pupils' achievement are not challenging enough.

Governors understand the needs of the local community well and are very supportive. The school is a cohesive community and is building relationships with the local community, strengthened by its pre- and after-school clubs. It takes particularly good care of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, their needs are managed well. Partnerships are used effectively to support pupils and families, particularly to ensure the smooth transition to secondary education. However, too many pupils are currently still not achieving the standards of which they are capable, so the school does not provide sufficient value for money.

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## Annex A

## 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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

### Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

<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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
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

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	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

## 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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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

**Annex B****Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Inspection of Firs Primary School, Sale, M33 5EL

You may remember that recently I visited your school with Mrs Cooper to carry out an inspection. Thank you for taking the time to talk to us about your school. We listened carefully to what you said and to the views of your parents in their questionnaires. This letter is to tell you what we found.

We judged that although your school is now getting better, too many of you are not doing as well as you can. Many of you leave Year 6 with far lower standards in English, mathematics and science than you are capable of achieving, so we have asked the school to improve this aspect of its work.

Your school does some things well. It encourages your good behaviour and we were impressed by your friendliness. You know how to keep fit and healthy and you are provided with a good range of sporting activities. You enjoy music lessons, where some of you explained how it helps you play in music groups at home. Your school council and eco warriors' work hard to make the school environmentally friendly. Your headteacher and all the staff care for you very well and the youngest children, have a good start to their education and make fast progress in their learning.

To improve your school, I have asked your headteacher to:

- raise the standards you reach in English, mathematics and science, particularly for the more able pupils, in Key Stages 1 and 2
- make sure that teachers always give you work with just the right level of challenge
- to set targets which help you to make faster progress
- make sure the school's managers use all the information they have available to them to check that you are achieving as well as you are able.

You can help your teachers by letting them know if you find the work too easy or too hard and by continuing to have a good attitude in lessons. In a few months time another inspector will visit the school to check how well you are doing. Thank you for welcoming me to your school and I wish you all the best for the future.