

Charles Darwin Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111053
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	319241
Inspection dates	11–12 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Mark Williams 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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	252
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Debbie Glimond
Headteacher	Mr Adam Croft
Date of previous school inspection	18 April 2007
School address	Darwin Street Castle Northwich Cheshire CW8 1BN
Telephone number	01606 75194
Fax number	01606 74143

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

This inspection was led by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors. Previously the school was inspected in January 2006 and was given a notice to improve. When it was re-inspected in April 2007 it was given a second notice to improve. In December 2007 two of Her Majesty's Inspectors checked on the progress the school was making.

Description of the school

Charles Darwin is a little larger than the average-sized primary school, although numbers have declined in recent years. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average, as is the proportion eligible for free-school meals. A very small but growing proportion of pupils are from backgrounds other than White British and/or do not have English as their first language. After a period of turbulence there is now greater stability in staffing. The headteacher has been in post since September 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

It now provides a satisfactory education for its pupils and has increasingly good features. This improvement is the result of good leadership, particularly from the headteacher. Staffing is more stable and the progress pupils make in their learning is now satisfactory as a result of the good teaching. The pupils demonstrate positive attitudes and attributes, the curriculum meets pupils' needs well and good quality systems now exist to check how well pupils are performing.

The most significant improvement the school has made is in the progress pupils make in their learning. This, for the first time in several years, is now satisfactory. This is because standards in writing have now improved; the more able pupils are more readily challenged in their work; marking is better focused and is helpful in moving pupils to the next steps in learning; and the quality of teaching is good overall and engages pupils well. Nonetheless, there is no complacency. The school realises this level of pupil progress is the minimum position it should be at. Leaders are acutely aware that the good features which have brought the school to this point, highlighted by the school's accurate self-evaluation and by inspection, must now impact even more positively on pupils' learning and personal development. They also acknowledge that the good teaching which has moved learning from inadequate to satisfactory must now be the norm and, having set high expectations, that which is still satisfactory must be improved upon. The school is well placed to move to the next level. Its record of significant improvement over this last year, not least through the impact of the headteacher, clearly demonstrates this school has good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children begin Reception with skills which are just below those typical for their age, particularly in reading and writing. As a result of good teaching, caring relationships and a well thought-out curriculum, they make good progress. By the time they begin Year 1 skills are at, and for some children above, national expectations in all areas of learning. Within the curriculum there is a good balance of activities led by adults and those chosen by children. However, because provision to learn outdoors is limited children do not currently have enough opportunities to explore or investigate outside the classroom. The school recognises this and has plans in place to increase available outdoor space and equipment.

The Foundation Stage leader provides good leadership. Strong teamwork between staff and detailed planning ensures that children benefit from a good level of personal support and individual attention. The thorough assessment systems are a major strength of the provision and staff know the children well. Links with pre-school groups and parents are strong and information gained ensures children make a smooth transition into Reception.

What the school should do to improve further

The school should build on the significant improvement it has made this year to:

- improve rates of pupil progress further
- ensure all teaching in the school matches that of the best.

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

Standards attained by learners are broadly average. Pupils now make good progress in lessons and this has remedied the previous underachievement allowing them to make satisfactory progress over their time in the school. They are on course to meet the challenging targets set for them in the 2008 national tests. This improvement is the result of better, more focused teaching, a good quality curriculum and strong leadership determined to stamp out underachievement. The school now has good systems in place to measure the progress pupils are making in their learning. Any underachievement is identified quickly and appropriate measures are put into place to secure improvement. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are at the early stages of learning English are supported well and they make satisfactory progress in their learning.

At the last inspection the school was asked to challenge the more able pupils and to improve standards of pupils' writing. It has been successful in both areas. Teachers now plan work to meet the differing needs of pupils in their classes. Teaching assistants are used increasingly effectively to support to pupils experiencing difficulties, in literacy and numeracy for example, and challenge those pupils who could do more. The school also provides good opportunities for pupils to extend writing and use literacy skills across the curriculum. Overall, the standard of writing has improved although in the current Year 6 it is, owing to the legacy of previous underachievement, below average. Nonetheless, standards in this year group have improved over this year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Their sensitivity to other faiths and cultures was highlighted by Year 3/4 pupils in their thoughtful, reflective prayers for a Muslim baby. Pupils enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in improved attendance and in their good behaviour. Pupils know how to keep safe and are aware that a balanced diet and regular exercise contribute to their good health. They demonstrate this by attending the good variety of out of class activities which promote a healthy lifestyle. Pupils relish responsibility, for example being members of the school council or acting as playground buddies. This enriches their enjoyment of school and ensures they make a good contribution to school life. They encourage pupils new to the school or who are learning English for the first time to quickly and confidently settle into school routines. Pupils contribute to the wider community well through taking part in numerous events in the local area and through fundraising activities. They use information and communication technology confidently, for example in accessing the school website or, as was the case with a group of Reception children, in programming robotic bees to move in different directions. These skills, coupled with the improved progress they have made in literacy and numeracy, are helping them to prepare for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching has improved and is now good. This improvement has helped to stem the legacy of underachievement that was a previous feature of the school and pupils are now making good progress in their lessons. However, improvements in teaching have not yet brought about improvement in the overall progress that pupils make during their time in the school. This remains satisfactory. Expectations of what pupils can do, particularly the more able, are now higher. These are demonstrated through clearer learning objectives and tighter targets that pupils understand, activities that are matched well to pupils' abilities, and more focused marking that enables pupils to move onto the next step of learning.

During the inspection most teaching seen was good or better. In the few instances where it was satisfactory pupils still made progress but less so than in the good lessons. In such lessons pupils had fewer opportunities to participate. As a result, their concentration sometimes slipped and they became restless. Where it was good or better, pupils were engaged in their learning and were very enthusiastic. In an outstanding mathematics lesson, Year 5 pupils gleefully set about solving word problems involving three and four digit numbers. Their teacher grabbed their interest from the very beginning with a well-paced warm up activity and maintained the standard with very good questions, prompts, explanations and demonstrations that involved the pupils fully. The school knows one of the challenges it faces is to ensure such positive features are the norm.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good, improved curriculum has enabled pupils to make better progress in their learning. The emphasis on the development of literacy skills, including writing, through different subjects has been appropriate. As a result pupils, find the work relevant to their needs and interests. The school also places due emphasis on numeracy.

The school makes good use of visits to places of educational interest and visitors into school to stimulate work on a theme. The improving quality of written work, for example on World War 2, underlines the success of this strategy. Personal, social, health and citizenship lessons help to ensure that pupils know how to be physically and emotionally healthy and how to stay safe. Good links exist with local high schools providing, for example, lessons in French, German and Spanish, and aspects of Chinese culture, including Mandarin. The school also enjoys support for physical education.

Pupils enjoy 'Golden Time', a well-structured programme of clubs chosen by themselves from a wide range of activities. These add further interest and enjoyment, as well as helping pupils to learn skills they might not otherwise meet. The curriculum is enriched further by a good range of clubs which promote artistic, cultural and physical activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

This is a caring school. While most parents agree, a small minority expressed concern in the inspection questionnaires that incidents of bullying have not always been dealt with well enough.

Inspectors agree with pupils' views that teachers and support staff listen closely to and address appropriately any concerns pupils may have. Procedures for child protection and to safeguard pupils meet current guidelines and appropriate measures ensure health and safety procedures are in place.

Pupils' progress in their learning is tracked well. Good use is made of assessment data to set challenging individual targets for pupils. The quality of marking has improved and in most examples teachers give helpful feedback to pupils to enable them to take the next steps of learning. Links with outside agencies are good and support the well-being of pupils and, in particular, those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or with English as an additional language well.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Good leadership and management lie at the heart of this school. Since taking up post in September 2007 the headteacher has made use of good quality support from the local authority and has forged a team that has sought to stamp out previous underachievement and inadequacies. His strong leadership has ensured they have been successful in this and there is strong sense of collaborative responsibility and accountability. Senior leaders regularly talk about the 'so what' factor, demonstrating their acute awareness that the actions of everyone at the school must impact positively on pupils' learning and personal development. The result is no complacency and a well articulated vision of continual improvement that is shared and understood by all.

The school has improved significantly over the last year. The issues of concern identified last year have been dealt with well. At the same time further improvements have been made to pupils' personal development and well-being, to the curriculum, and in the care, guidance and support offered to pupils. The majority of parents recognise these improvements and are appreciative of the school's efforts. The school's standing in the wider community has improved too: a second teacher has been recognised by the local authority for excellent practice. A further improvement has been in the quality of governance. Governors now provide good levels of support and challenge. Overall the school knows itself well, what it needs to do to improve, and how to get there. Given its proven record in improving rates of pupil progress and strengthening other important areas of school life, the leadership's capacity to improve is good.

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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?	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?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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 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	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

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.

Annex A

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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	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

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

On behalf of Mrs Henderson and Mr Martin I am writing to you to thank you for welcoming us into your school and for helping us with our inspection. Most of you will know that your school has been through quite a difficult time in recent years. Well, I am pleased to tell you that your school now provides you with a satisfactory education and has an increasing number of good features. These are some of the things we were pleased to see:

- you now make satisfactory progress in your learning
- your writing has improved
- those who need more challenge in your work are now getting it
- you behave well and are more enthusiastic about school
- you enjoy the responsibilities you have, on the school council and being play buddies for example, and take these seriously
- you make a good contribution to the local community, through fundraising for example.

So why have these features we have identified happened? It is because you have a good headteacher who is supported well by other leaders and governors. They are now a good team who know what your school's strengths are, what needs to be improved and how to go about it. As a result of determined efforts which have included improvements in the quality of teaching, the curriculum, and the care, guidance and support provided, you are now making satisfactory progress in your learning. Also importantly, you are demonstrating improved all-round attitudes and qualities which will prepare you for life as you grow older.

Now you know Mr Croft better than we do. Do you think, even though your school has made significant improvements, he will be satisfied with this report? No, we don't think so either! In fact, we know you all want to get even better. We have therefore asked Mr Croft to ensure everyone builds on the improvement that has made this year to improve your rates of progress further and make all teaching in your school as good as the best. We know you will all play your part and do your best!

Please accept our best wishes for the future (and for pupils in Year 3/4, especially for the film you are making!)