

Bowker Vale Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105397
Local Authority	Manchester
Inspection number	324218
Inspection dates	20–21 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Liam Trippier 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.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	360
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
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Tom Lister
Headteacher	Mr Ian Lawton
Date of previous school inspection	24 May 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Middleton Road Crumpsall Manchester M8 4NB
Telephone number	0161 740 5993
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

This is a larger than average primary school situated in north Manchester. It serves a diverse community. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average but the number with statements of special educational need is above. A large proportion of learners are from minority ethnic groups and over a third speak English as an additional language. The school has Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision for nursery and reception aged children. The school has been awarded Healthy Schools Bronze, Activemark and Leading Aspect awards. The school is also a Professional Development School for Manchester Metropolitan University.

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 and improving school. The hard work of the headteacher and senior leaders is having a positive effect on the school ethos and on improvements in achievement and standards in recent years. Inspectors agree with the headteacher that staff have 'raised their game', although senior leaders are the first to recognise that there are inconsistencies that still need to be resolved. Inspectors also agree with the view, expressed by parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire, that the school has 'turned a corner' and improved.

The personal development and well-being of the pupils are good and are strengths of the school. Pupils work and play together well and have a clear understanding of how to live healthily and act safely. Although low attendance is an issue for the school, pupils understand the importance of arriving at school promptly. Staff demonstrate a high level of care for pupils and safeguarding requirements are met fully. Support and academic guidance for pupils is satisfactory overall, as many do not receive accurate information on how to improve their work. Some good practice exists but it is not consistent through the school.

Intensive efforts to improve standards have reversed their decline at both key stages. At Key Stage 2, standards improved in English, mathematics and science in 2008 compared to the previous three years. Pupils' overall attainment is now just below average, representing satisfactory progress given their lower than average level of skills on entry. However, the school recognises there is more to be done to raise standards further, particularly in English and mathematics. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, those identified as underachieving, and pupils who are learning English as an additional language receive effective additional support and make satisfactory progress.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and some lessons are good or better. In good lessons pupils learn well and make good progress due to the teacher's enthusiasm and positive relationships with pupils, good subject knowledge and the good use of examples to explain ideas. This ensures that pupils are fully engaged and enthusiastic about their work. While the learning needs of most pupils are met in satisfactory lessons, teachers do not use assessment information well enough when planning activities so tasks are not sufficiently challenging. The more able pupils are disadvantaged most when this occurs. In such instances, the pace of learning slows and some pupils lose interest. Teaching assistants support learners well and provide good opportunities for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to develop and improve their basic skills. Teachers use information and communication technology effectively to enhance the presentation of their lessons.

The satisfactory curriculum is broad and balanced with an appropriate emphasis on developing pupils' basic skills while providing effectively for their differing needs and interests. Recent developments, such as the teaching of French to older pupils, are appreciated by learners who enjoy the new activities.

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Senior leaders provide strong direction for the school. They monitor and evaluate the work of the school effectively to bring about improved achievement for pupils. The monitoring of lessons is carried out regularly, but subject and middle leaders have not yet had the opportunity to evaluate the impact of teaching on children's learning.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Provision in the EYFS is satisfactory. A new leadership structure has recently been put in place to improve the EYFS. The team work closely together and have identified strengths and areas to develop. All staff are involved in planning activities and observing children's learning. This is leading to more secure judgements about children's abilities.

Children enter the EYFS with levels of development that are often below those typical of most three- and four-year-olds. They make satisfactory progress from their starting points. The vast majority of Reception age children can now write their own name and are starting to write independently. Good progress was observed by inspectors when the teacher told the children the Little Red Hen story. The children were able to join in the refrain and actions successfully and choose good learning activities based on the events in the story. However, sometimes learning opportunities were lost when the adults in charge did not have a clear focus on the learning intention and questioning was not used effectively to extend pupils' use of language.

There is an appropriate balance of focused group work and child-initiated learning. The indoor and outdoor learning environments reflect the six areas of learning and provide opportunities for independence. The outdoor environment is organised well although one area, currently unused, is in need of repair. One indoor room is in urgent need of redecoration and some untidy areas make it unattractive to the children and limit the opportunities for learning.

Staff ensure that children are well cared for. Parents have regular contact with their child's key workers. As a result, some aspects of the children's personal development are good, such as their relationships with each other and the staff. Children are confident in their surroundings and they enjoy playing with each other. The environment is secure and supervision is adequate. The EYFS is organised as one unit ensuring that transition between Nursery and Reception is seamless.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teachers' use of assessment and tracking information in English and mathematics when planning learning so that they fully and consistently meet the needs of all pupils in lessons.
- Develop the quality of teaching and learning so that lessons are of a consistently good quality across the school.
- Ensure teachers inform the pupils what they need to do next to improve their work and help them make better progress.
- Enhance the provision in the EYFS.

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 enter the school with skills that are below those expected for their age. The majority make satisfactory progress to reach standards that are just below national averages by the time they leave in Year 6. Some learners make good progress but there is also some underachievement, particularly for the more able pupils who do not always reach the higher levels expected of

them. The school has introduced a range of measures which are successfully tackling this matter. There are no significant differences between the performance of other groups of pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or pupils learning English as an additional language. They also make satisfactory progress.

Inspection evidence from school assessment records, pupils' workbooks and from lesson observations confirms that standards in English, mathematics and science have risen after a period of decline. Standards are now closer to national averages at both key stages. Some of the issues identified in the last inspection are still evident to some extent but the school's intensive efforts to raise standards in the core subjects has impacted positively to improve pupils' achievement. Significant investment in staff training and modifications to the curriculum have played a part in this improvement. The school has raised its targets year-on-year and pupils have moved closer to meeting them. The school has compelling evidence to suggest that the majority of pupils in the present Years 2 and 6 will meet their challenging targets in 2009.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy their time in school. They are courteous and polite and really value the friendships they make. They work and play cooperatively together, demonstrating good behaviour both in lessons and at play-time. Older pupils are proud to look after the younger ones as play-time buddies and ensure they are enjoying their break times.

Pupils have a good understanding of the need to eat healthily and to exercise regularly. In Year 2 they particularly enjoy the 'Wake Up and Shake Up' sessions and pupils make good mealtime choices from the healthy school meals on offer.

Pupil's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. For example, at the end of the day in class and in a Key Stage 1 assembly, pupils reflected upon events in an atmosphere of calm and wonder. Children are interested to learn about different cultures and the school has developed a good link with a school in China. Pupils interact positively with a range of religious leaders in the community to develop their understanding of different faiths.

The school council is well established and 'pupil voice' is strong. Pupils are invited to talk to the headteacher or a member of the senior leadership team to share their views or concerns. Pupils say they feel safe and well supported and know that the teachers will take their concerns seriously.

Despite many efforts, such as awarding stickers, certificates, the setting of targets and the appointment of an attendance officer, rates of attendance are a concern. The problem is partly due to families taking holidays during term time and a small number of persistent non-attendees. Apart from absences during Eid in September, the attendance figure for the autumn term showed improvement, bringing it broadly in line with the national average. Pupils are aware of the need to attend regularly and the school continues to regard this correctly as a priority. Preparation for pupils future economic well-being is satisfactory and improving as standards continue to rise.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is predominantly satisfactory and some is good or outstanding. However, rates of progress vary in different classes at both key stages. In lessons where teachers demonstrate high expectations and offer challenge, pupils are keen to succeed and demonstrate high levels of commitment to their work. In lessons that are good or better planning is clearly differentiated to meet the various needs of pupils with different starting points. Pupils work well together showing good attitudes and determination. In some classes, the setting of targets is good and pupils have a clear understanding of what is required to improve their work. Progress is consequently good in such lessons. In high quality lessons there is a clear focus, brisk pace and active learning, such as in a Year 4 lesson learning about homophones. Here, learners were fully engaged in linking words to their meanings and using them in sentences in a fast and effective game of homophone dominoes.

Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not consistently high enough in all classes. This results in some pupils, particularly the most able, being insufficiently challenged in their work and this limits their progress. This is due in part to some teachers' ineffective use of the school's achievement and tracking information so that activities do not meet the learning needs of all pupils. It is further compounded by marking which, although regular and positive, does not always help pupils understand how to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum and other activities are satisfactory. Learners benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum which matches their interests and backgrounds effectively. The curriculum promotes academic achievement satisfactorily. However, innovative elements such as the focus on Human Values Education and a facility for pupils with additional emotional needs enhance their personal development well.

There is a clear focus on numeracy and literacy. Pupils have had their writing published in their own book, 'We are Writers' and this has heightened interest in literacy. The use of the structured 'Letters and Sounds' approach to teaching phonics in all key stages is helping to accelerate progress in reading and writing. The local environment is harnessed to enrich the curriculum and provides opportunities for experiences such as bird-box building and tree planting.

There is a wide variety of extra-curricular clubs available with choices including knitting, baking, board games, sports and comics. The school has made good arrangements to ensure the vast majority of pupils are able to attend these additional activities and pupils of all ages say they enjoy them. Pupils in Key Stage 2 attend the clubs in mixed age groups, which further enhances the school's focus on personal development. Visits and visitors are used to enrich the curriculum and to reflect the school's diverse community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory with some good features, particularly pastoral care. The school places a high priority on the care and welfare of pupils. Staff know and support

pupils and their families well. One parent commented, 'I don't know what I'd do if school wasn't here.'

Safeguarding and child protection procedures meet requirements. Governors take their responsibilities for health and safety seriously: all these requirements are met and reviewed regularly.

Since its last inspection, the school has introduced an effective system for tracking pupils' progress, half-termly, in English and mathematics. This has given teachers a greater understanding of how well each child is doing. The information provides clear evidence of progress and enables staff to intervene where under-achievement is identified. It has also enhanced teachers' sense of responsibility for the progress of the children in their care. However, the information gained during these assessments is not yet transferred to all teachers' planning and it does not enable learners to know, and consequently work towards, their targets effectively.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall with some strengths. Under the highly effective leadership of the headteacher, there is a secure focus on raising standards. The headteacher knows the strengths and areas for the school to develop, including those aspects of teaching and learning which require improvement and the need for pupils to improve in mathematics and writing. He is taking appropriate steps to ensure this occurs and standards are rising. Senior leaders have made some difficult decisions to resolve complex staffing issues and brought about improvements to the benefit of the learners. The majority of parents who made their views known to the inspection team were very supportive of the school and the recent improvements.

The senior leadership team lead by example and have established effective systems to track the progress of every pupil each half term. This now includes the use of challenging targets to focus staff on expected levels of performance, although further work is required to ensure this has impact for pupils in all classes. Senior leaders hold teachers to account for the progress and attainment of pupils in their classes, which has brought about an improvement in standards. Although middle leaders show signs of promise and are keen to make their mark. They are aware they have yet to systematically monitor and evaluate teaching and learning in their areas to bring about change and improve outcomes for all pupils.

Governors have a clear view about the school's strengths and weaknesses and recognise that the school still has more to do to improve achievement and standards. Value for money is satisfactory. Community cohesion is promoted well and there are good links with local community leaders such as the Imam and different religious groups. The determined leadership, enthusiastic staff, changes to the curriculum and the drive to improve standards demonstrate good capacity to improve.

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
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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?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	3
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	3
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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

How good are 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
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

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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

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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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

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

Thank you for making Mrs Carroll, Mrs Sadler and myself so welcome when we inspected your school recently. We very much appreciated your support and help. The report is now complete and I would like to tell you what it contains.

Here are some of the things we found.

- Bowker Vale is a satisfactory and improving school.
- You behave well in lessons and around school.
- Your school takes good care of you.
- You are now making better progress in your lessons.
- You feel safe and happy in school.
- You know how to live healthily.

We have asked your headteacher and the staff to make improvements in the following areas.

- To improve the way teachers use the assessment information about your learning, when they plan lessons, so all of your needs are met.
- To make sure all of your lessons are good so that you can learn well all of the time.
- To let you know how to improve your work so you can reach your targets.
- To improve what the school provides for the Nursery and Reception classes so all children there can learn better, too.

I am sure you will do your best to help your teachers bring about these changes by continuing to work hard, behaving well and turning up to school on time every day.