



Palace Fields Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 130271
LEA Halton
Inspection number 282134
Inspection dates 22 May 2006 to 23 May 2006
Reporting inspector Mrs Lesley Traves CfBT Lead Inspector

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Badger Close
School category	Community		Palacefields
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Runcorn, Cheshire WA7 2QW
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01928 716521
Number on roll	288	Fax number	01928 716916
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs Joanne Tringham
Date of previous inspection	8 May 2000	Headteacher	Mrs D Moran

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Palace Fields is a large primary school, which draws its pupils from an area of social and economic deprivation. It houses a special unit for pupils aged 7-11, the majority of whom have statements of special educational need. These pupils have learning and/or behavioural and emotional difficulties and have often suffered from discontinuity of schooling. Many more pupils than is usual join and leave the school other than at the normal times. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. A very small number speak English as an additional language. A well above average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and the number with statements of special educational need is high. The proportion of pupils having free school meals is significantly above average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with some outstanding features. Its great strength is the way in which it includes all pupils in its work and encourages and enables them to make the most of their particular gifts and talents. The outstanding care provided for pupils and their families is one of the central reasons why pupils develop as confident individuals, who feel good about themselves and value others. To this end, the school makes excellent use of its links with other organisations. Pupils enjoy school greatly because the activities provided for them are so exciting. As a result, they work very hard and do their best. Their behaviour is exemplary because they understand how important it is to get on well together. Parents strongly support, value and feel part of the school.

Pupils achieve well. They get off to a good start and achieve well in the Foundation Stage because teaching is good and staff work hard to ensure that they have the personal skills to help them to learn. Speaking skills are a weak area for many children on entry and the school has identified the need to extend experiences for all pupils in this area. Although standards are some way below average by the end of Year 6, there are clear signs of improvement. High quality teaching is accelerating progress throughout the school. Pupils do best in reading. Writing skills are improving, but there is a need to ensure that these are used in all subjects. There is also a need in some mathematics lessons to provide greater challenge for the more able pupils. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including pupils with statements, are expertly taught and supported.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership. She is highly committed to providing the best for the pupils and supports and challenges staff in working with her to achieve this. The school has thorough procedures for evaluating its performance. Inspection judgements largely agree with those of the school about the quality of its work. Governors provide high quality support and are knowledgeable about the school's strengths and weaknesses. Strong teamwork has ensured that issues from the last inspection have been fully addressed. The school provides good value for money and has excellent capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Plan opportunities for speaking and listening more precisely, so that pupils can build systematically on their previous learning.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to use their writing skills in other subject areas.
- Ensure that the more able pupils are effectively challenged in all mathematics lessons.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

All pupils achieve well during their time in the school. Test results fluctuate widely, year on year, because of the varying numbers of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Results are also affected by the high proportion of pupils who join the school in Years 3-6 who have statements of special educational need and who have often experienced disruption to their learning. When they enter the Nursery, many children have very low skills for their age. Communication skills and personal and social development are particularly weak areas. They get off to a flying start with their personal skills and make good progress in other areas of learning. Despite this, when they enter Year 1, pupils have a lot of ground to make up. They build well on the positive start in Years 1 and 2, although their standards by the end of Year 2 are well below average. Year 1 and Year 2 pupils make the best progress in reading because their individual needs are very well catered for; progress in writing is also improving. Standards in mathematics dipped in 2005 and although showing improvement, there is still room for the small number of more able pupils to make faster progress.

Standards at Key Stage 2 are below average by some margin, but are improving. Steps taken to improve boys' reading have had a good impact and writing is improving in all classes. There has also been significant improvement in mathematics in the last three years. More pupils are set to achieve the higher levels in English and mathematics this year, but there is still scope for greater challenge for the more able in a few lessons. The targets set for pupils are challenging and are achieved.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of the high quality teaching and support they receive. Some do very well indeed to reach average levels. Parents of these pupils are delighted with how well their children are doing and the children themselves are proud of their achievements.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. The school provides excellent support for their spiritual, moral and social development. From the word go, it successfully nurtures pupils' self-esteem, confidence and enthusiasm for learning. As one boy put it, 'You feel good about yourself'. Pupils say that they love school and everything it offers. They develop exceptionally well spiritually through opportunities for reflection, art and music lessons and the school's caring ethos. Their behaviour and manners are exemplary because they understand clearly what is acceptable and how to treat each other. Pupils respond well to opportunities to learn about cultures different to their own and to enjoy the diversity of modern society. They are well prepared for future life.

Pupils take their responsibilities very seriously, for example, being good role models for younger pupils and helping them at lunchtime. They know how to keep themselves safe and are well aware of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. They are proud of their efforts in achieving the Healthy Schools and Activemark Gold awards. Pupils have

good opportunities to express their views through the school council. They are pleased that this has an impact, for example, on improving the lunch menu to include extra salads.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. In all lessons, lively introductions whet pupils' appetites for the tasks to come. Clear explanations ensure they know exactly what they will learn and how they will know if they have been successful. Teachers are particularly skilled at using interactive whiteboards to catch pupils' imaginations and move the lesson along at a cracking pace. When teaching is outstanding, pupils are totally engaged and fully motivated and challenged. In the few less successful lessons, there is too little difference in the activities given to different groups of pupils. In particular, in some mathematics lessons, more able pupils could be challenged further. In most instances, however, teachers make good use of assessment to identify pupils' next learning steps. Through marking and setting targets, teachers share with pupils how they will improve. Pupils say that presenting their work to their classmates and listening to their comments helps them to think again and to improve.

Teaching assistants are well informed and work in close partnership with teachers. They provide effective yet sensitive support for pupils who need a boost to help them achieve their targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good with some outstanding features. The school has very successfully focused on improving provision in information and communication technology since the last inspection, as part of its drive to boost learning and enhance pupils' enjoyment. The strong emphasis on creativity has ensured that the quality of art and music is very impressive and the school is rightly proud of its Artsmark Gold award. Personal, social and health education makes a very strong contribution to pupils' capacity to stay healthy and safe. This is backed up by a first class physical education curriculum. There is an abundance of exciting activities that enrich the curriculum and ensure that pupils enjoy coming to school. The very wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer is greatly appreciated by pupils and their parents. The many visits, including residentials, and visitors to school strongly enrich pupils' experience and give greater relevance to class work. Raising standards in speaking and listening is now a priority and the school is aware that curriculum planning here needs to be more precise.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school takes excellent care of its pupils and knows them all very well indeed. Pupils trust staff and know who to turn to if they need help. As a result, they feel very safe in school. Pupils and parents say that the very rare instances of bullying are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Child protection and health and safety procedures are particularly well established and effective. There are very clear strategies for the early identification of children who may be in need of additional support. The partnership between the school and other agencies such as the Educational Action Zone and the Behaviour Improvement Programme team has an exceptionally strong impact on pupils and their families. Parents and carers feel welcome in the school and are very strongly encouraged through parents' courses and meetings to be involved in their children's education.

The assessment of pupils' academic progress is thorough and rigorous. Pupils understand the targets set for them within lessons, and know what they need to do to improve their work. Arrangements for preparing them for their transfer to secondary school are good.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. Key strengths include her commitment to the inclusion of all pupils in the school's work and her determined drive towards providing the best for pupils and their families. She has created a strong team who share her vision, support her very well and play an effective part in raising standards. All staff are committed, knowledgeable and tremendously enthusiastic. As a result, there is excellent capacity within the school for further development.

There are thorough procedures in place for evaluating the school's work, which include consulting parents and pupils, as well as governors and staff. Consequently, the school has a sharp view of what it does well and what needs to be improved. A well thought out development plan effectively supports improvements. Key stage leaders and subject coordinators are developing their areas well. The areas of special needs and assessment are particularly well led and managed. There are some inconsistencies in the monitoring of teaching, which mean that, occasionally, areas for improvement are missed. For example, the school was not fully aware that more able children are not always sufficiently challenged in mathematics lessons. It is because of this that the school judged teaching more positively than the inspection found it to be. Governors support the school very strongly, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively. They are closely involved in developments, act as 'critical friends' and manage finances well.

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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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?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

You may remember that three inspectors visited your school recently to find out about all the exciting things you do and how your teachers help you to learn. Thank you so much for welcoming us and being very polite, helpful and friendly. We really enjoyed talking to you, seeing you at work and play, and listening to what you had to say about yourselves and your school.

The things we really like about your school are:

- your excellent manners and behaviour and the way in which you all work and play together so well
- the way you enjoy lessons and work so hard for your teachers
- the way in which all the people in school care for you and help you to succeed in all you do
- the way your teachers help you learn well and plan very interesting and exciting activities for you.

We have asked your teachers to improve some things to make the school even better:

- we would like them to help some of you do better in mathematics, by making sure the tasks they give you make you work as hard as you can
- we want them to give you more time to practise your writing in other subjects, such as geography and history
- we would like them to plan some more exciting speaking and listening activities for you.

Thank you very much for making us so welcome and helping us with the inspection. We hope that you will carry on doing well, enjoying school and helping the staff to make your school even better.