

Palace Fields Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	130271
Local Authority	Halton
Inspection number	328523
Inspection dates	9–10 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Denise Shields

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	288
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	Mrs Joanne Tringham
Headteacher	Mrs D Moran
Date of previous school inspection	22 May 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Badger Close Palacefields Runcorn Cheshire WA7 2QW
Telephone number	01928 716521
Fax number	01928 716916

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	9–10 December 2008
Inspection number	328523

© 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 three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average sized school. Numbers on roll have fallen since the previous inspection. It serves an area that has significant levels of social disadvantage. It houses a Resource Base for pupils aged 7 to 11, the majority of whom have a statement of special educational need. These pupils have moderate learning difficulties. Many more pupils than is usual join and leave the school other than at normal times. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils eligible for a free school meal is more than twice the national average. A well above average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the number of pupils with a statement of special educational need is high, although steadily declining. Nearly a third of pupils in each year group is identified with a learning difficulty. A Nursery and Reception class form the school's Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision. The school has gained the Healthy Schools, Activemark gold and Artsmark gold awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Palace Fields is a good school. This successful school serves its local community extremely well. Some aspects of its work are outstanding. For example, the pursuit by the headteacher to secure the best possible opportunities for all pupils in order to broaden their horizons and lift their aspirations is exceptional. It enables pupils to make the most of their time in school and nurtures their particular gifts or talents. The school is vibrant, attractive and very well cared for. Pupils' superb art and design work is prominently displayed and pupils say that they are very proud of this. The inclusion of all pupils, whatever their background or particular need, is given very high priority. The school's extensive partnerships with an exceptionally wide range of organisations have a significant impact on pupils' all-round education and ensure that excellent care and support are provided for pupils and their families. This is one of the reasons why pupils grow so much in confidence and self-esteem and learn to value others. Pupils greatly enjoy school and relish the responsibilities they are given. They talk with enormous enthusiasm about the many visits, visitors and extensive opportunities they have to take part in activities outside their lessons. Pupils' outstanding personal development is due to the very welcoming and caring atmosphere, within which they are highly valued. Pupils feel safe and happy and can always find an adult to talk to if they have a problem. They develop an impressive understanding of a safe and healthy lifestyle and an enjoyment of learning. They work very hard and are well prepared for the next stage in their education. 'Teachers encourage you to become successful learners and there are lots of opportunities to experience something new' typifies pupils' views.

Leadership is very strong. All staff share a clarity of vision and determination to bring about improvement. The school self-evaluation is first rate and links very clearly to its plans for the future. The firm actions that have been taken have had measurable success. For example, the school recognised that standards in Year 6 were not high enough. Programmes were introduced to boost pupils' performance. The provisional 2008, Year 6 national test results in reading, mathematics and science, although below average overall, show a dramatic rise in standards compared with previous years. An impressive increase in the proportion of pupils reaching the higher Level 5 is also indicated. The good curriculum is under review. There has been a recent, successful focus on improving pupils' literacy and numeracy skills and inspection evidence shows that this is helping to raise standards and achievement throughout the school. However, pupils do not have enough opportunities to use their writing skills in other subjects. As a result, standards and achievement in writing are weaker in all classes. Most of the areas for improvement identified at the time of the last inspection have been dealt with well. Together with recent other successful developments this demonstrates that the school has a good capacity to improve further.

When children start in the Nursery their skills are poor compared to expectations for their age. By the time pupils leave Year 6, they have achieved well to reach below average standards. There are clear signs that overall, pupils' achievement and progress is accelerating. The quality of teaching is good overall, ranging from satisfactory to outstanding. In the best lessons teachers use a very good range of practical activities which help pupils to understand their work and to make learning enjoyable. Where teaching is no better than satisfactory, pupils' progress is slower. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the Resource Base and those with additional difficulties make good progress in relation to their specific starting points and achieve

well. This is because the work they are set matches their needs well and the targeted, sensitive support they receive from teaching assistants underpins their learning effectively.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the EYFS is good. Children achieve well because learning is made exciting and interesting. Despite very few children reaching expectations for their age in many areas of their learning by the time they enter Year 1, they make good progress. There is a very strong emphasis on the teaching of social and listening skills and this lays a secure foundation for children's future learning and development. Personal development and well-being are given a very high priority, as are care and welfare arrangements. As a consequence, children settle to new routines quickly and form trusting relationships with adults. Children take the lead in establishing with staff 'sunshine rules,' for example, smile, listen, say sorry. As a result, children learn to play and cooperate together very well. The curriculum is good. Indoors there is an appropriate balance between those activities led by an adult and those that children choose for themselves. The latter develops their independent learning skills well. The outdoor area has recently been built. Inspection evidence clearly shows that children thoroughly enjoy the experience of learning outside. However, activities are not yet securely planned to enable children to have free access to the outdoor area in order to extend their skills in all areas of learning. The EYFS is well led and team work is strong. A very strong partnership with parents has been forged so that transition from pre-school is smooth. Transition into Year 1 is planned and organised well and consequently children make a seamless move to their next stage of learning. Assessment is good. In both the Nursery and Reception classes careful observations are made and used well to plan the next steps in children's learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards in writing throughout the school and provide more opportunities for pupils to use their writing skills in a wider range of subjects.
- Ensure the quality of teaching and learning is at least good in all classes.
- Develop the outdoor curriculum for EYFS children to help to extend their skills in all areas of learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards vary considerably each year because of the many different starting points of individual year groups. They are also affected by the higher than usual proportion of pupils who join the school other than at the usual time and who have often experienced disruption to their learning. Nevertheless, standards in Year 2 and Year 6 have declined since the previous inspection. The school has recognised this and taken robust and effective action to raise standards. School data and the provisional 2008 Year 6 national test results indicate that although standards were below average, they have improved significantly compared with previous years in reading, mathematics and science. The proportion of pupils attaining the higher Level 5 has also risen sharply. School data and inspection findings also show that standards in these subjects are continuing to rise throughout the school, most notably in upper Key Stage 2, where particularly strong teaching ensures that pupils make very good gains in learning. Achievement and progress are good, but vary according to the quality of teaching. Throughout the school, standards in

writing are weaker with pupils' achievement and progress no better than satisfactory. This is because pupils do not have enough opportunities to use their writing skills in other subjects.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the Resource Base and those with additional difficulties achieve well. This is due to the sensitive support and guidance from teachers and teaching assistants that enables them to take small, but measurable steps in their learning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is outstanding. The extensive range of activities outside lessons and their involvement in the performing arts contribute to pupils' good understanding of traditions and cultures other than their own. However, their awareness of life in a multi-ethnic society is less well developed. Pupils say confidently that their views are listened to and acted upon. For example, the school council took the lead in implementing the recent anti-bullying week. Members of the school council make an extremely good contribution to the school community through their environmental work and as 'learning champions'. Pupils take these responsibilities very seriously and talk about them with great pride. Their behaviour is very good in lessons and when moving around the school. Outside at lunchtime, behaviour is almost always of the same very good quality, but occasionally, because there is little for pupils to do, behaviour is boisterous. The majority of pupils arrive at school regularly and on time. Since the previous inspection the school has further strengthened its rigorous attempts to encourage regular attendance, including the involvement of external agencies and the family support team. As a result, attendance has improved and is now satisfactory. The school's significant emphasis on developing pupils' social, emotional and personal well-being prepares them well for life beyond school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

A key strength in teaching is the friendly relationships that are evident in all lessons. This gives pupils the confidence to tackle new tasks and to ask for help when they need it. Work is usually well matched to pupils' abilities and needs, expectations of what they should achieve are high and visual aids are used to good effect to bring learning to life. As a result, learning is good. Where practice is outstanding, teachers use questions very effectively which enables pupils to quickly extend their skills and knowledge. They also use a very wide range of imaginative activities and tasks to capture pupils' attention and ensure lessons proceed at a very brisk pace. Sometimes, however, lesson introductions are too lengthy, activities are not precisely matched to pupils' needs and as a result learning slows. In most instances, teaching assistants make a good contribution to the work of particular groups and so pupils are fully involved in lessons and make good progress. At its best, particularly in literacy, marking is helpful and constructive and clearly pinpoints what pupils need to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is under review and there are clear and innovative plans to provide greater links between subjects and to develop the outdoor areas around the school. The recent focus on programmes to teach the basic skills of literacy and numeracy is helping to lift standards

throughout the school, but there are still too few opportunities planned for pupils to extend their writing skills in other subjects. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is well planned and pupils say they thoroughly enjoy using new technology. The performing arts are a great strength of the curriculum, giving all pupils the opportunity to develop their speaking and listening skills and to gain confidence as performers. These significantly raise pupils' self-esteem. The school's excellent emphasis on personal, social, emotional and health education develops pupils' understanding of safe and healthy lifestyles very effectively and ensures that they are well prepared for their next stage of education.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care and support provided are exceptionally good and make a significant contribution to pupils' social and emotional well-being. Adults know pupils very well and this does much to ensure that each pupil is safe, happy and ready to learn. Child protection arrangements and those to safeguard pupils are fully in place. Health, safety and welfare arrangements are excellent. The family support team, based within the school, work extremely well with families to promote relationships, to encourage them to support their children's education and to clarify the importance of regular attendance. This team also works sensitively with individual pupils to promote their self-confidence, to support them when they experience difficulties in their lives and to aid others to develop self-discipline if they have difficulty controlling their behaviour. There is very good support and guidance for pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Very good systems are in place to identify pupils' specific needs and to set appropriate targets for learning. Since the previous inspection, strenuous efforts to improve attendance have continued. Systems to ensure regular attendance are constantly reviewed and revised, but despite the school's vigorous attempts, a small group of families do not respond. Academic guidance is very good. Learning targets are clear and pupils say these help them to improve their work

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides purposeful and innovative leadership and management. In this she is ably assisted by the enthusiastic deputy headteacher and other senior leaders and middle managers. Team work is very effective. Leaders and managers have a very clear picture of the school's performance and the changes that need to be made to secure further improvement. Advanced plans are in place to revise the curriculum. For example, the school has identified the need to provide more opportunities for pupils to use their writing skills in other subjects, but programmes to address this have yet to be implemented. Rigorous arrangements have recently been established to accurately track and assess pupils' progress and to identify any underachievement. Arrangements to train and develop staff are very good and securely linked to the school's plans for improvement. The positive impact of this professional development can also be seen in the new approaches introduced to teach literacy. These are helping to raise pupils' standards and achievement. Challenging targets are now being used effectively to help to raise standards. Governors work closely with the school. They provide effective support, are not afraid to ask challenging questions and they help to set priorities for improvement. Many and varied partnerships with local schools, the community and external organisations, help to

improve the quality of pupils' education and ensure that those in need of additional help are very well supported.

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?	2
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?	1
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?	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?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

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

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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?	1

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	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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

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

Thank you for helping with the inspection of your school by talking about your work and all the many activities you take part in. You were very helpful, polite and friendly. I thoroughly enjoyed my short time with you, especially watching the nativity performance in which the infants sang beautifully.

Palace Fields is a good school and we know you are very proud of it. These are some of the things I found out.

- Adults take exceptionally good care of you and help you to stay safe and healthy.
- You try very hard with your work and enjoy learning.
- Most of the time your teachers give you work that helps you to learn at just the right pace.
- You make good progress overall and your achievement by the time you leave at the end of Year 6 is good.
- Children in the Nursery and Reception class have a good start to their education.
- The headteacher, deputy headteacher and all other staff work very closely with the governors to help plan what needs to be improved.

To make your school even better I have asked your headteacher and governors to give you more opportunities to practise your writing skills in many different lessons, so that you reach higher standards in writing. You told me that most of the time your teachers make lessons interesting and fun. I have also asked your teachers to make sure you learn as well as you can in all lessons. You can help too by always trying your very best and working hard.

The Nursery and Reception children have lots of activities in their classrooms. They now have a lovely, new outdoor area and I have asked your school to make sure they get plenty of chances to choose lots of different activities outside.