

Rock Ferry Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105045
Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	355690
Inspection dates	23–24 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Paul Bamber

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	280
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Barbara Oakley
Headteacher	Jan Lambeth
Date of previous school inspection	30 April 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. They observed 25 lessons led by 14 teachers and on one occasion a teaching assistant. Meetings were held with members of staff, parents and carers, groups of pupils and representatives of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation that related to self-evaluation, improvement planning, performance management and governance. Inspectors analysed 100 responses to the parents' and carers' questionnaire and also responses to pupils' and staff' questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Whether pupils' attainment is continuing to improve strongly.
- Whether strategies to ensure pupils' good progress are fully effective.
- The accuracy of the school's judgement that its promotion of equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination is outstanding.

Information about the school

Rock Ferry is larger than average in size for a primary school. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds but with a currently average proportion of pupils from minority-ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is average. Nearly 70% of pupils are known to be eligible for a free school meal, which is well above national figures. The school houses a resourced provision for up to 12 pupils who have moderate learning difficulties. All of these pupils are on the school roll and have a statement of special educational needs, thus making the proportion of pupils who come into this category much higher than average. There are 12 looked after children in school. At over one third, the overall proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is high. The number of pupils who leave or join the school other than at normal times is also much higher than that found nationally.

The school shares its site with a children's centre. There is a breakfast club run by the governing body. The school has been awarded the Basic Skills Quality Mark. There has been a recent change in the structure of the senior leadership team, with two assistant headteachers appointed on the retirement of the long-serving deputy headteacher.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school. The high quality of the care, guidance and support pupils receive contributes very significantly to their good overall academic progress and their good personal development. Highly effective safeguarding procedures ensure that pupils feel extremely safe. The vast majority of parents and carers are very positive about all aspects of the school's work, especially about how well their children are looked after.

Very many children enter the Nursery classes with skills that are extremely low compared to those expected for their age. Despite pupils' good overall progress and their rising standards, their attainment in English and mathematics is still low when compared nationally by the time they leave Year 6. Extremely effective provision for the high proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and for those who speak English as an additional language, results in these groups making exceptional progress from their starting points.

The overall good quality of teaching and a relevant and stimulating curriculum contribute well to pupils' good achievement both academically and personally. Teaching and the curriculum are particularly effective in providing those pupils who lack some self-belief with the confidence to face any difficulties they might have with their work or in their personal circumstances.

The headteacher and senior leaders are effective in driving improvement and ensuring that the staff share their vision to raise pupils' attainment. They rigorously evaluate the school's performance, which enables them to accurately assess what needs further improvement and what is working well. The school is highly effective in ensuring equality of opportunity and that no discrimination of any kind is tolerated. All leaders and managers recognise that more work needs to be done to raise attainment further and to raise the overall quality of teaching from good to outstanding. The good record of improvement since the previous inspection, together with senior leaders' pragmatic and accurate self-evaluation, indicates that the school has a good capacity to sustain further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in English and mathematics to at least broadly average by:
 - increasing the accuracy of both pupils' spelling and their use of punctuation
 - enabling pupils to sequence their writing more effectively
 - continuing to promote pupils' better speaking skills so that they can rehearse orally what they write
 - enhancing pupils' reading skills in order for them to better infer meaning from what they read
 - better consolidating pupils' knowledge of number bonds and multiplication tables
 - extending pupils' understanding and use of mathematical vocabulary.
- Improve the quality of teaching from good to outstanding by:
 - ensuring that throughout lessons pupils of all abilities are appropriately challenged, especially during whole-class sessions
 - asking more of the open-ended questions that make pupils think for themselves and reflect on what they have learnt.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Overall, pupils achieve well and very much enjoy learning. They are very keen to succeed and persevere well when they find their work difficult. These attributes contribute significantly to the excellent progress made by pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. In lessons, the warm relationships and the positive atmosphere created by pupils working diligently, result in pupils' overall good progress and achievement. Pupils particularly enjoy working as shoulder partners and in discussion groups, to share ideas and to learn from each other. This was evident in an outstanding lesson in Year 6 where pupils discussed rights and responsibilities and moral dilemmas, and in a Year 4 English lesson when pupils questioned each other rigorously about characters in a book they were reading. Pupils enjoy using information and communication technology to support their learning and do this effectively.

Although attainment remains low, it is improving strongly across the school. Pupils' overall progress is good and the excellent provision for the high proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language ensures that both of these groups make outstanding progress. Therefore, despite low attainment, pupils' achievement is good overall. The main contributors to pupils' low attainment in English are weaknesses in spelling and punctuation, a relative inability to sequence their writing and difficulties in inferring meaning from what they read. In mathematics, an insufficiently strong grasp of basic number facts and of mathematical vocabulary limits pupils' attainment. However, there are strong indications of secure improvement in these aspects.

Pupils behave well and feel exceptionally safe. They effectively adopt healthy lifestyles and talk authoritatively about what represents a well-balanced diet and the

benefits of regular physical exercise. Through membership of the school council, by assuming responsibilities around the school and by involving themselves in community projects, pupils contribute well to the school and the wider community. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They have a strong sense of fair play, are tolerant of each other's differences and through their positive attitudes and good conduct, contribute well to the school being a harmonious community. Although pupils develop good social skills that will stand them in good stead for the future, their overall preparation for the next stage in their lives is only satisfactory because of their low attainment and average attendance and punctuality.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The overall quality of teaching is good. In outstanding lessons, high expectations, meticulous planning, tasks very effectively tailored to pupils' needs and a cracking pace, result in pupils' rapid progress. All of these qualities were observed in a Year 5 mathematics lesson that required pupils to identify the operations to use when solving a two-step problem. Because the activities were so stimulating and the teacher's questions so well directed, pupils worked very enthusiastically and effectively to achieve extremely well. Strengths in teaching throughout the school include the creative use of information and communication technology to enthuse pupils and to help to clarify learning. Very effective behaviour management, based on excellent relationships and clear structures, the good use of assessment to help to plan next steps or to trigger support and intervention when needed, all contribute to the overall good quality of teaching. Teaching assistants work effectively to support class teachers. They also very effectively lead intervention groups, both to teach phonics, or to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities or those who speak English as an additional language. These interventions make a significant contribution to the outstanding progress made by these two groups of pupils. Teaching in the resourced provision is very effective and promotes the very good progress made by the pupils there.

¹The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

The fact that some teachers do not sufficiently tailor tasks to meet the needs of pupils of different abilities during whole-class sessions, and that questioning is not always sufficiently open-ended, limits the quality of teaching to good rather than outstanding.

The curriculum is well matched to pupils' needs, especially those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and who speak English as an additional language. It is increasingly effective in promoting pupils' better basic literacy and numeracy skills. Pupils enjoy learning because its focus is often relevant and reflects their experiences. The curriculum also broadens their experiences through visits and visitors. It promotes their personal development very effectively and embraces partnerships well to provide experiences otherwise unavailable to pupils, such as modern foreign language tuition and specialist sports coaching. There is a wide and varied range of out-of-school activities which successfully promote pupils' physical and emotional well-being.

Pupils are cared for, supported and guided extremely well. This excellent provision lays the foundation for the good overall progress pupils make and the excellent progress of the more than one third of all pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Parents and carers testify to the excellent care and support they receive as families that impacts so positively on their children's well-being. An extract from a letter received by the inspection team from a parent typifies parents and carers views, 'They give pupils and parents and carers outstanding support whether it is by teaching methods, behavioural monitoring with achievable targets and realistic strategies. Fantastic communication and voluntary help- they do so much I couldn't write it all down!!' There is high quality support from external services that very effectively backs up the school's excellent work, to ensure that the most potentially vulnerable pupils, for example, those who are looked after, feel secure and achieve well. Such support also enables those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities or who speak English as an additional language to achieve outstandingly. There are excellent arrangements to help pupils who join the school part way through the school year to settle in quickly and to achieve well. Likewise, arrangements for transfer to secondary school work smoothly and reassure those pupils moving on from Year 6. Procedures to improve attendance and to ensure good behaviour are also highly effective. The school's tenacious pursuit of better attendance has resulted in a considerable reduction in both persistent and more casual absenteeism. This has meant that overall attendance is now average rather than low as it had been in the past. The strategy to ensure good behaviour has been very successful. The breakfast club offers pupils a healthy and calm start to the day.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has a very clear and high ambition for the continued improvement of the school that is firmly based on further raising pupils' attainment. This is an ambition fully shared by other senior and middle leaders who play an effective role in securing improvement. There is a palpable unity amongst all staff and high morale, with celebration of success, but realism about the improvements still necessary for the school to improve further. Very effective systems for self-evaluation, typified by the tight tracking of pupils' progress and rigorous checks on the quality of teaching and learning, together with well thought out and relevant continuing professional development, ensure that priorities for development are identified and effective action taken to address them. The success of this is evident in the strongly improved rate of attendance from low to average. The governing body is knowledgeable, supportive and pro-active in challenging the school's performance. Further evidence of good governance is in prudent financial planning and management. The school runs smoothly day-to-day, in no small measure due to the efficient and welcoming administrative team.

Partnerships with parents and carers and with outside agencies are productive in ensuring effective support for pupils' learning and their personal development and highly effective in promoting their well-being. The school is outstandingly successful in promoting equal opportunities and in tackling discrimination. The extremely close monitoring of the progress of different groups and the success the school has in closing the attainment gap between different groups, indicate how effective leaders are in this aspect. The harmonious way in which pupils from different backgrounds work and play together and actively promote equality through, for example, the school council, is testament to the school's considerable success in tackling discrimination and breaking down barriers.

Safeguarding procedures are exemplary and policies and practice go way beyond statutory requirements. This is a particular strength of governance. Extremely rigorous vetting of staff and security procedures ensure that all who work or learn in the school feel extremely safe. All staff reinforce safe practices on a daily basis and recent and relevant training in child protection and in first aid, ensures staff's expertise.

The school's promotion of community cohesion within the school community is very strong and understandably the focus of most of its work in this aspect. Leaders acknowledge that little has yet been done to forge links with communities in the wider United Kingdom or abroad. The school's good use of resources and the resulting effective outcomes indicate that it offers good value for money.

These are the grades for the leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2

The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Given children's extremely low overall attainment when they enter the Nursery Year, they make good progress through the Early Years Foundation Stage, despite many not acquiring the skills expected of them by the time they enter Year 1. There are many children who struggle initially to adapt to routines or to communicate. Sensitive induction arrangements and effective liaison with parents and carers, the children's centre and with outside agencies ease the path for these children and begin to break down considerable barriers to learning and personal growth.

Teaching and support are good. Activities are appropriate to children's needs, keep them interested and provide a wide range of experiences, both indoors and out. The balance between child-initiated and adult-led activity is effective in providing reassurance and encouraging independence. Children's progress is carefully and frequently tracked and recorded helpfully in their learning journals.

Leadership is good. The recently appointed Early Years Foundation Stage manager is knowledgeable and has a clear understanding of current provision. She acknowledges that in the Nursery Year experienced adult supporters are not always utilised to their full potential and that at times children spend too long on the carpet.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Around one third of parents and carers returned the inspection questionnaires, a higher than average response. The vast majority expressed positive views of all aspects they were asked about. The most positive responses concerned how safe they felt their children are in school, how good the teaching is and their overall happiness with their children's experience at school. Inspectors concur with parents' and carers' positive views.

A very small minority felt that unacceptable behaviour was not dealt with effectively. Inspectors followed up their concern. During the inspection behaviour was consistently good with no incidence of unacceptable behaviour observed; systems and the practices for ensuring good behaviour worked well. Pupils confirmed that any

poor behaviour, including rare occurrences of bullying, was dealt with swiftly and effectively and that they felt extremely safe in school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Rock Ferry Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 100 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 280 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	49	49	46	46	4	4	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	61	61	37	37	2	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	53	53	43	43	3	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	48	48	45	45	4	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	56	56	43	43	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	49	49	49	49	2	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	43	43	53	53	4	4	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	38	38	55	55	2	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	46	46	49	49	3	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	42	42	48	48	8	8	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	39	39	53	53	5	5	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	46	46	48	48	4	4	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	55	55	41	41	2	2	1	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



25 May 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Rock Ferry Primary School, Birkenhead, CH42 2BL

I would like to thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We were delighted with how friendly and polite you were and how keen you were to tell us how much you enjoy school. Thank you, especially to those of you who spoke in groups with the inspectors.

You go to a good school. It is outstanding in the way that it cares for and supports you and helps those of you who find learning more difficult than most and those of you who speak English as an additional language to make excellent progress. It is also outstanding in ensuring that you are safe and that you are all given equal opportunity to do well in all aspects of school life. You behave well, live healthy lives and overall make good progress in your work. We were also impressed with the work of the school council and with the way you help each other and contribute to the community.

Part of my job is to work with the adults who run the school to decide what needs to be improved the most. One thing is for you to improve even more your work in English and mathematics, things like spelling and punctuation, understanding better some of the hidden meaning in what you read in English, and getting better at knowing your tables, number bonds and mathematical vocabulary in numeracy. The other is for the teachers to make sure that all of you have exactly the right sort of work during the whole lesson and for them to ask you more questions that really make you think very hard.

You can all help by trying your very best all the time and to carry on being the lovely children you are now. Thank you again for your help with the inspection and I hope you are pleased with the letter.

Yours sincerely

Paul Bamber
Lead inspector

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