

Alexandra Infants' School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 124011 |
| Local Authority | Stoke-On-Trent |
| Inspection number | 314778 |
| Inspection dates | 21–22 January 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | David Driscoll |

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

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| Type of school | Infant |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 3–7 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 201 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Janine Donaldson |
| Headteacher | Linda Pennington |
| Date of previous school inspection | 9 February 2004 |
| School address | Melville Road Normacot Stoke-on-Trent ST3 4PZ |
| Telephone number | 01782 235505 |
| Fax number | 01782 235507 |

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|--------------------------|--------------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school serves an urban area close to Stoke-on-Trent. A high proportion of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school has seen significant changes since it was last inspected. The large majority of pupils now come from a number of minority ethnic backgrounds. Most of these pupils are from Pakistani backgrounds, although an increasing number come from Eastern Europe. Many of the families who arrive from Eastern Europe stay in the area for less than a year, before moving to a different area. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is now well above average, and many are at a very early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average, although the proportion with a statement of special educational need is average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Parents are very happy with the good education provided by the school. As one parent put it, 'I am proud to tell others that my child goes to Alexandra Infants'. Pupils' standards on leaving are below average, but this represents good achievement given their very low starting points. Progress is good in reading and mathematics, and even better in writing, where standards improve to average by the end of Year 2. The reasons for such progress lies in the school's good curriculum and teaching. Throughout the Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2, a lot of time is devoted to improving pupils' language skills. Speaking, reading and writing are combined in the same task, so pupils learn to write a letter or word almost as soon as they can say it. The school assesses pupils accurately to determine the areas in which they most need support. Pupils are then placed in small groups according to their needs, and specific help is provided for them. This approach has been particularly successful in raising the standards of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are at an early stage of learning English. Whoever teaches the class or group, teacher or teaching assistant, expectations are high, the pace brisk and pupils work hard and behave well.

Pupils' personal development is also good, as a result of good care, guidance and support. Pupils really enjoy coming to school because they get on so well with their teachers and friends. Good emphasis is placed on ensuring pupils are safe, and teaching them how to look after themselves. Some of the most able are not able to find information for themselves as well as might be expected, because they do not get enough opportunities to use computers, which also slows progress in information and communication technology (ICT). From the Reception class onwards, the marking of pupils' work in literacy and numeracy results in the setting of clear targets, and teachers tell pupils exactly how to reach them. This is not the case in science in Years 1 and 2, so progress is slower, although still satisfactory.

The school has made good progress since it was last inspected, as a result of good leadership and management. The headteacher and governors have identified key areas for improvement and taken effective actions to make them better. However, despite good systems for evaluating its work, the school's evaluation of its effectiveness is not entirely accurate, because managers do not have a complete picture of achievement in Years 1 and 2. The same is also true of attendance, where the analysis does not go deep enough to identify the patterns in pupils' absence, so attendance is no better than satisfactory. The school's managers have responded very well to the rapidly changing circumstances of the pupils and clearly have all the determination and skills necessary to improve the school even further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children arrive in Nursery with skill levels that are very low for their age. They make good progress, but their skills, especially their knowledge and understanding of the world, remain well below average by the time they start Year 1. Children quickly become used to routines and most are soon playing together happily. Assessments are frequent and accurate, so teachers in Nursery and Reception are able to plan lessons that are well matched to the needs of the individual. The good mix of activities includes ones that are planned by the teacher, as well as those that the children think up for themselves. However, sometimes the children spend too long on the carpet around the teacher, so they lose interest and become restless. There are effective links with parents to keep them well informed of their children's progress, and good

arrangements to ensure the children's health and safety. The Foundation Stage manager provides very clear direction for staff and has a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement. Progress since the previous inspection has been particularly good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Analyse data more rigorously to gain a clearer picture of pupils' achievement in Years 1 and 2 and the underlying causes of absenteeism.
- Ensure marking in science provides pupils with guidance on what they need to do to improve their standards.
- Provide better resources in ICT to improve pupils' progress and their research skills.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children join the Foundation Stage with skills that are far below those expected for their age. From then on, they make good progress in their personal development, language and number skills, so standards on starting Year 1 are higher but still well below average. Good progress continues through Years 1 and 2, and pupils leave the school with standards that are a good deal higher than when they started, even though they are below average. Progress in writing is very good, so standards are average on leaving Year 2. Progress in ICT and science is slower, but is still satisfactory. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, or who are at an early stage of learning English, have made slower progress than others in recent years. However, the school's work on improving the curriculum for these pupils is now paying dividends, and they make equally good progress as others. Pupils who are eligible for free school meals start school with similar skills to others and also make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils are very happy at school. They have lots of friends and work and play together in harmony. Behaviour in lessons is usually good, but when the whole class is being spoken to, they can become restless if the presentation does not spark their interest. Some are not as independent as might be expected. This is particularly true of the more able, who are not confident in finding information for themselves. Attendance is satisfactory. On paper it appears much worse than it is, because the figures for absence include pupils who join the school and then leave again without the school being informed. The school records them as absent, when in fact they have moved to a different part of the country. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep safe and the importance of exercise and a healthy diet. Pupils are particularly good at explaining the correct way to cross the road, and older ones can even demonstrate how to roll if their clothes are on fire. Pupils are quick to take opportunities to exercise responsibility, which promotes their good understanding of how to be a part of a community. Pupils' understanding of environmental issues is remarkable, helped by the excellent eco-committee, which pupils chair and administrate themselves. They are particularly proud of earning their second eco school flag. Pupils' good progress in their basic skills prepares them well for their next stage of education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers and teaching assistants plan together very well to meet the needs of individuals and small groups of pupils. They use their marks and knowledge of the pupils' standards to plan tasks that will make the pupils think and work hard in order to gain success. A typical lesson starts with the whole class on the carpet as the teacher explains what they are to do. This can sometimes go on for too long for more able pupils, who have understood the instructions the first time and do not need the repetition necessary for others. Once in groups, though, progress is rapid. All staff are relentless in their pursuit of correct answers and responses, such as making sure letter formation is precise. Teachers are quick to move pupils between groups in the lesson if they are struggling or making better-than-expected progress, so the work always matches the ability of the individual pupil.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum has been well planned to meet the needs of the many different groups of pupils represented in the school. Many pupils have very weak language skills on joining the school, which holds back their learning in other areas. The school has responded by concentrating on teaching language skills. All language work combines reading a letter or word, speaking it aloud, putting it into a word or sentence and then writing it down. In this way, pupils' writing skills progress particularly well. Lots of extra help for pupils is available to support the work in lessons, such as for those at an early stage of learning English, those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or those who are falling behind in their reading. Many groups meet at lunchtimes, so the pupils get an extra lesson to help them catch up. Good emphasis is also placed on developing pupils' personal skills, although pupils do not get enough opportunities to use computers and the school has limited access to the Internet. There is a good range of extra clubs and activities for pupils, and trips and visits are used well to enhance learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Staff have a good knowledge of pupils' social and emotional needs and make effective use of outside agencies to support and guide pupils. Those who are immature for their age have a specific support group that improves their personal development at a good rate. Child protection and risk assessment procedures are firmly established to ensure that pupils are kept safe. Marking provides accurate assessments of where each pupil has reached in their literacy and numeracy work, so teachers are able to tell pupils exactly what they need to do to improve. However, this is not the case in science.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and governors lead the school well and set challenging targets for its improvement. They have made good use of the recommendations from the previous inspection to improve the school. The main priorities have been identified well, while detailed and

comprehensive checks on teaching have provided a blueprint for how improvements can be brought about. Weaknesses in the Foundation Stage and provision for different groups have been tackled, and are now strengths of the school. Data are analysed well in the Foundation Stage to provide a clear picture of pupils' achievement, but this is not the case in Years 1 and 2, nor are data analysed in sufficient depth to determine the main reasons for pupils taking time off school. The school goes to good lengths to ensure all pupils learn to treat each other equally.

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

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| 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

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

Achievement and standards

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|--|---|
| 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 disabilities make progress | 2 |

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 2 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 2 |
| How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 2 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 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 |

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

23 January 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Alexandra Infants' School, Stoke-on-Trent, ST3 4PZ

Thank you for talking to us and helping us when we visited your school. We really enjoyed our visit. You go to a good school, where all the grown-ups take good care of you and make sure you know how to stay safe and fit. You do well at school and quickly learn lots of new things. Many of you are learning English for the first time or find some work difficult, but the grown-ups soon find out how best to help you, and soon you are getting on as well as the others. They do this by splitting you into groups and then giving each group work that is just hard enough to make sure you can do it if you really think. This works well for all of you, even those who find learning easier. You work very hard in your groups, but some of you need to listen more when the whole class is on the carpet.

We think it is really good that you know your targets for reading, writing and numeracy. This helps you to learn more quickly and you do well, especially in your writing. We have asked the teachers to give you targets for science too, so that you can do as well in science as you do in literacy and numeracy. You clearly like using computers, so we have asked the people who run the school to let you use them more often, so you can get even better at ICT.

You all seem very happy at school. You have lots of friends, and everyone gets on well with each other. You quickly learn how to cross the road and stay out of danger, and it was good to see so many of you choosing healthy food at lunchtime. A special thank you to the eco-committee. You were great, and clearly doing a lot of good work to help the planet.

The people who run the school are making it better and better. They are quick to spot the things that could be improved, and even quicker to do something about them. We think they could do even better if they looked at all the marks and information they have about you more closely.

With all best wishes for your futures

David Driscoll Lead inspector



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Lead inspector