

Arden Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103324
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	323798
Inspection dates	10–11 December 2008
Reporting inspector	John Horwood

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 on roll	
School (total)	524
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Asif Suleman
Headteacher	Mr Tony Lacey
Date of previous school inspection	10–11 October 2005

School address	Baker Street Sparkhill Birmingham B11 4SF
Telephone number	0121 675 7702
Fax number	0121 675 0643

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a very large primary school serving an inner city area of Birmingham. It has just re-opened fully following an extensive rebuilding programme. The number of pupils is increasing each year as part of a planned expansion. All pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and most speak English as an additional language. There are many pupils at the early stages of speaking English and this includes pupils who join the school in the older classes. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is much higher than the national average. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the majority of whom have communication or moderate learning difficulties, is also above the national average. Pupil mobility is high.

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision is within the Nursery and three Reception classes. The school provides extended care for pupils by providing a breakfast club each morning.

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. Parents recognise this and the vast majority are satisfied with all it provides. Parental views were typified by one comment, which said, 'I am very happy with the school and would not send my child to any other school.' Pupils are also very supportive of the school. They really like the creative activities that have been introduced on Fridays and the Wednesday 'tea-party' where they can express their views, in an informal setting, directly to the headteacher.

The senior leadership team has a clear commitment to raising standards. The quality of leadership and management is good. Its success in improving teaching contributes to the school's good capacity to improve further. Governance is satisfactory. Governors carry out their statutory duties but are not sufficiently involved in helping the school to raise academic standards. Whilst some governors make informal visits to the school, there are insufficient regular planned visits with a clear focus. This means that governors are not sufficiently aware of the strengths and weaknesses in the school to be able to provide support and challenge to the leadership team. The contribution the school makes to community cohesion within the school, the local community and the national community is good. It is only satisfactory overall because the international links are not yet fully developed and pupils' global awareness is relatively limited. This does not have a significant impact on the equality of opportunities for pupils because their multi-cultural backgrounds together with the strong cultural development within the school, including the awareness of faiths in the UK and the wider world, compensate for it.

Children enter school with levels of skill that are exceptionally low. Staff successfully ensure that each pupil is supported well and that, with the exception of some of the more able pupils, they have equal opportunities to make progress in their academic and personal skills. To achieve this, a high priority is given to language development from the earliest age. As a result, pupils' academic achievement is good and standards are broadly average by the time they leave the school. Standards are weakest in literacy because of pupils' poor language skills when they start school. All pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make consistently good progress in lessons because the quality of teaching is good. The school manages very well the individual support for pupils who join the school after the start of Year 1, and ensures that they too make good progress.

Teachers are knowledgeable and they make lessons enjoyable within a supportive and caring learning environment. Work generally matches the needs of all pupils because the teachers' good planning is securely based on their accurate assessment of pupils' learning. The marking of pupils' work is regular but it does not always provide guidance for pupils on what they need to do to improve. The curriculum focuses clearly on providing as many experiences for the pupils as possible and in a stimulating way. However, provision for more able pupils is not sufficiently developed to enable them always to make the better progress of which they are capable, and opportunities to improve literacy are not always taken in all subjects. A very good range of well-supported extra-curricular activities successfully enriches pupils' learning and personal development.

Pastoral care is good and safeguarding requirements are met fully. The school's strong links with external agencies ensure good support for pupils who find learning difficult for whatever reason. Its very good links with the secondary school help the older pupils when they move between the schools.

Relationships are good throughout the school. Pupils behave well, they enjoy school and they know how to keep themselves safe. Attendance is above average and pupils make a good contribution to the community. Their understanding of how to live a healthy lifestyle is only satisfactory because although the school promotes healthy eating and healthy food is available, pupils choose not to eat it. Parents do not always support the school sufficiently in this because they include many unhealthy items in their children's packed lunches.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage **Grade: 2**

Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage although, in most years, standards are still well below average at the end of Reception. The significant variations in each year group's attainment on entry, however, mean that standards fluctuate. For example, in 2008, they were close to the national average. The teachers' effective planning and organisation ensures a good range of play-based independent and adult-led activities that successfully engage the children and develop their independence. Where possible, learning opportunities are linked to the real world. For example, children were observed making 'frost' pictures using paint and glitter and had previously had experience of exploring snow crystals.

Children form good relationships with staff and with each other. They work and play together well and their behaviour is good. Induction procedures are good, as are relationships with parents. All of this, and the good attention paid to their health, welfare and safety, enable children to settle quickly into the well-established routines in the Nursery. Here, the warm and caring atmosphere successfully ensures that children's physical, social and emotional needs are well met.

Staff carefully record children's progress but the school had not always checked rigorously enough that the data was accurate. It took steps to do this last year and, as a result, children's achievement improved. Overall, leadership and management are good and there is effective teamwork amongst the staff. They know the children well and have a strong commitment to providing the best for them.

What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate pupils' progress in literacy through a focus on developing their speaking and language skills at every opportunity, including in other subjects.
- Improve teachers' marking throughout the school to ensure that all pupils, especially the more able, receive clear guidance on how to improve their learning.
- Improve the governors' knowledge of the school and their ability to hold it to account for its outcomes.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

From an exceptionally low starting point, pupils make good progress and they leave school having reached broadly average standards. Pupils generally enter Year 1 with standards well below average. They make good progress and leave Year 2 with standards that are below average. However, standards vary from year to year because of differences in the proportions of pupils with special education needs and the increasing numbers of pupils leaving and joining the school.

For several years, progress in Key Stage 2 has been satisfactory. However, improvements in teaching have successfully raised it to good. This is evident in lessons, in pupils' books, and in analysis of the data by which their progress is tracked. The school has taken steps to improve speaking and listening skills in order to raise standards, especially in literacy. It is too early to judge the impact of this work, but the signs are encouraging. However, pupils do not readily transfer their learning in literacy to their work in other subjects.

No significant differences were seen between groups of pupils during the inspection, although more able pupils do not always make as much progress as they could in some lessons. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of the support they are given, as do pupils who join the school other than at the normal starting times.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their relationships with each other and with adults are good. There is mutual respect between adults and pupils as well as among pupils. Behaviour is good, ensuring that all pupils can learn in a safe and happy environment. A small minority of pupils show some inconsiderate behaviour in corridors. Pupils enjoy their lessons, especially the practical and creative activities, and their attendance is above average. Although punctuality is improving, there are still some who arrive late.

Pupils understand the principles of healthy living, and the school has a Healthy Schools award. However, many pupils do not make healthy choices at lunchtime, saying they prefer 'junk food', and others do not always eat their lunch. Pupils take on responsibility well, for example as school councillors or by helping serve salad at lunchtime or support others in the playground. They make a good contribution to the school community. The school council has been active in organising fundraising and in making choices about school décor. Most opportunities currently involve the older pupils and this has been identified by the school as an area it wishes to develop, to extend opportunities to younger pupils as well. Pupils have low self-confidence and poor clarity of speech when they start school. However, their good progress and broadly average standards by Year 6 ensures that they are at least adequately prepared for their future.

Quality of Provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Within overall good teaching, there is some outstanding practice that promotes learning at a rapid pace. Work is usually well matched to pupils' abilities and most teachers make good use of assessment information in their planning. They make lessons interesting and fun. Often, this is achieved by the effective use of clear and challenging timescales for activities. Teachers use a very good range of activities and make full use of information and communication technology (ICT) to stimulate pupils' learning.

Planning is good and learning objectives are shared with pupils, giving them a good understanding of what is expected of them in a lesson. However, in a minority of lessons, there is not enough challenge for the more able pupils because teachers do not have high enough expectations for them. Additionally, marking does not always give pupils sufficient advice on how to improve their learning. Teaching assistants provide effective support for those who need additional help.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

To meet the needs of the pupils better, the school is developing a skills-based creative curriculum. This is showing a positive effect on pupils' progress, attitudes to learning and their independence. There is a strong focus on raising standards in literacy and numeracy through grouping pupils with others of similar ability. Opportunities to develop pupils' progress in these two areas are good through, for example, well-planned effective ICT provision and the reading initiative at the start of each afternoon, which pupils enjoy and say is helpful. However, the opportunity to support improvements in literacy skills is not taken consistently in all subject areas.

There is good provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The support provided for pupils with limited knowledge of the English language is also good. Bilingual staff, other support staff and external specialists who come into school contribute well to all of this. Varied enrichment activities enhance pupils' learning and personal development well. They include a gardening club, sport clubs and a range of visits, including a Year 6 residential trip.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The pastoral care of pupils is good. The school has established strong links with external agencies, successfully ensuring that pupils are cared for and supported well. Child protection procedures are securely in place. There is a high emphasis on personal development and supporting pupils with their basic literacy skills. As a result, pupils relate extremely well to each other. The systems for managing behaviour and monitoring attendance are effective.

Pupils have a good knowledge of how well they are doing and most know their targets in literacy and numeracy. They receive good support in lessons, for example

through effective verbal guidance on how to improve. However, teachers' written marking is not always as helpful. This is because it does not consistently show pupils how to improve their work, or present more able pupils with the challenges they need to take their learning further. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good support in the classroom and in group sessions where they are withdrawn from class. The newly-formed breakfast club provides excellent care and support as well as promoting independence extremely well for a small number of pupils. It has a good impact on punctuality and participation in learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The senior leadership team is very capable and has a good mix of experience and enthusiasm. It is well supported by effective middle managers in ensuring that teaching is always good within an extremely caring and supportive environment. The governing body fulfils all its legal requirements but governors have little formal direct contact with teachers and pupils. The impact the leadership team has had on improving the school is good, and the school has gained several awards, including Healthy School Award, Quality Mark, Leading Aspects Award and Sportsmark.

The self-evaluation systems in the school are good and, together with the school improvement plan, demonstrate that areas for development are known and are being addressed. Good assessment systems are in place and have begun to have an effect on raising standards, except for some more able pupils. Investment in improved ICT systems and the strengthening of the leadership team to include expertise in assessment, have successfully addressed the concerns about previous inaccuracies in teacher assessment. This is already having an impact on progress in lessons throughout the school. The school promotes community cohesion satisfactorily, the weaker area being around the development of global awareness.

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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?	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 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 is the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
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

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.

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	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
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?	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

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	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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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	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



14 December 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Arden Primary School, Birmingham B11 4SF

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. We enjoyed talking to you, looking at your work and seeing how your school is helping you learn. We were impressed by your behaviour and how polite you are to visitors.

Your school is providing you with a good education and it is making sure that you make good progress in your work. These are some of the good things about your school:

- the staff care about you and look after you very well
- relationships throughout the school are good
- your behaviour is good, ensuring you can all make progress in lessons.
- you have developed good social skills
- your headteacher and staff are working hard to improve your learning further
- there is a very good range of clubs and after-school activities
- teaching and learning are always good and you make good progress.

We have asked the school to help you reach higher standards in literacy by giving you every opportunity to practise and use your literacy skills in everything you do. We have also asked it to make sure that when teachers mark your work, they always give you guidance on how to improve it, and finally, we have asked it to help governors to become more involved in the school so that they can work more closely with the headteacher and staff to help it improve. You can support your teachers by always working hard and asking them to help you when you need it.

We wish you all the best in the future.

John Horwood
Lead inspector