

Acorns Primary School

Moor Park, Blackpool Road, Preston, Lancashire, PR1 6AU

Inspection dates 20–21 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Effective arrangements are in place to make sure that as pupils move up through the school, they do so without difficulty.
- Pupils make good progress in their communication, reading, writing and mathematical skills. Their progress in their personal and social development for the vast majority is good and is occasionally outstanding.
- Teachers plan carefully and in great detail experiences that the pupils will find interesting and enjoyable. Teaching assistants are highly skilled and contribute a lot to pupils' good progress.
- Pupils' behaviour is almost impeccable and contributes very well to pupil's good progress. They feel very safe and secure.
- The curriculum is well organised and enriched by many carefully planned experiences in the community, as well as after the school day.
- Partnerships with two neighbouring children's centres have a good effect on the progress of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Partnerships with parents are excellent.
- The headteacher is ambitious for the school. He capitalises on the good partnerships with local special schools. Careful checks are made of the attainment of each pupil in English, mathematics and pupils' personal and social development. By working well as a team, leaders and staff have, since the previous inspection, successfully improved the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- A minority of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties or with visual difficulties do not always achieve as much as they are capable of.
- The school does not make full use of information about nationally expected rates of progress when considering how well its pupils are doing.
- The governing body does not receive succinct information about the school's performance and, as a result, are not always clear about how to hold the school to account.
- The outdoor area in the Early Years Foundation Stage does not offer enough opportunities for children to learn as well they do indoors.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors took account of the school's procedures for gaining an accurate view of its performance and looked at the school's development plans, minutes of meetings, records of lesson observations, targets set for teachers and documents that tracks pupils' progress.
- The inspectors observed 12 lessons and undertook a learning walk with the headteacher. Inspectors held discussions with staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and a member of the local authority.
- The inspectors spoke with pupils. The lead inspector took account of four responses from the online questionnaire (Parent View).

Inspection team

Pauline Hilling-Smith, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Maureen Coleman	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The majority of pupils have severe learning difficulties. The remainder are equally split between pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties and pupils with moderate learning difficulties. In addition, a small minority of pupils have complex medical conditions or autism.
- The majority of pupils are boys.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- The majority of pupils are of White British origin.
- A minority of pupils are from Asian backgrounds and a few are at an early stage of learning to speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils that are eligible for the pupil premium is well-above average.
- The school has achieved a Lancashire County Council Learning Excellence Award since the last inspection.
- A new Chair of the Governing Body was appointed in October 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the progress of pupils with additional visual difficulties and pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties so that their progress is consistently good or better by:
 - ensuring that the necessary specialist resources and equipment for visually impaired pupils are always available
 - ensuring that teachers always use what they know about what pupils have achieved in a lesson to set targets and plan precisely what individual pupils need to learn next.
- Improve the progress of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage even further by improving the range of activities available outdoors so that children are able to practise and develop their skills and understanding at the same rate as they do indoors.
- Strengthen the quality of leadership and management even further by:
 - ensuring leaders make better use of the information about the progress of pupils nationally so that they can compare it with the performance of its pupils more effectively
 - making sure that the governors are given more succinct information about the school's performance and that they use it to ask more challenging questions and hold the school to account for its performance more effectively.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- All pupils are working well-below the levels expected nationally when they start at the school because of their disabilities and special educational needs. The vast majority of pupils make good progress when compared to pupils with similar starting points.
- Pupils make good and sometimes outstanding progress in their personal and social development, especially their ability to express their thoughts and wishes.
- Their progress in communication and reading are good. Books are often shared and conversation is given high importance throughout the day. This means that pupils develop their confidence and enjoy reading and communicating with everyone.
- Individual pupil's talents in reading, writing and in mathematics are nurtured carefully. A few pupils gain the National Curriculum Level 2 before they leave.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress because staff know each child very well and they work well with families. However, children are not always able to practise the skills that they are developing inside when they play and learn outdoors.
- Pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium funding and those from minority ethnic groups learn at the same good rate as other pupils. There is no difference between the achievement of boys and girls. However, pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties do not always make the progress they are capable of because the targets set for them in lessons are not always as specific as they need to be.
- The progress of pupils with moderate learning difficulties and additional visual impairments do not always make the progress they are capable of because specialised resources and equipment are not always readily available.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching over time is good and, at times, it is outstanding. Teaching enables most pupils to make good progress. A few make outstanding progress in their personal development.
- Pupils make good or better progress when they spend most of the lesson working on tasks at just the right level of difficulty. In an outstanding mathematics lesson, the class teacher ensured that all staff gave exactly the right information to help pupils to succeed with appropriately challenging tasks. This was accomplished through an excellent understanding of how well all of the pupils were learning.
- Pupils make good progress because teachers give them good opportunities to undertake practical tasks, for example, when they take orders for toasted teacakes and then purchase items from the local supermarket. They learn about hygiene requirements, collect money, work out change and follow up by asking customers about the quality of the product. Pupils very much enjoy what is planned for them to do, for example, when they learn how musical instruments work and try to get a sound out of a cornet.
- Teaching assistants are highly skilful in helping pupils learn well. Where teaching is good and better, teachers planning makes is very clear exactly how the teaching assistant will contribute to the lesson.
- The school has made adjustments to the curriculum and teaching for its pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, for example, by providing sensory drama. This is having a good effect on their progress. However, teachers do not routinely identify what each pupil has achieved in a previous lesson or pinpoint precisely enough what the pupil is to learn in the next lesson.
- In a few lessons, specialist equipment, such as a Braille ruler, are not always readily available. Pupils with visual difficulties are not always able to handle objects because they are unavailable or they are not seated in a good enough position to see pictures shown to the group easily. As a result these pupils do not always complete their tasks in an efficient manner or learn as easily as

they could.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils are welcoming and polite, and behave impeccably almost all the time. Their desire to work hard and their attitudes to learning are exemplary. This helps them learn well and make good and sometimes outstanding progress in their personal and social development. Their attendance is good.
- Pupils are very supportive of each other. They recognise when others are finding it difficult to do something. They offer help to read words and are patient if a friend is trying to say something. They celebrate everyone's 'big achievements' alongside staff. This has created an atmosphere where everyone feels important and valued.
- Staff are consistent and very skilled at maintaining a highly positive atmosphere at all times. This means that pupils rarely feel stressed and any disagreements are unusual.
- Pupils' confidence grows rapidly. This is because they succeed, feel safe and know that others will be pleased to help. Pupils are keen to live up to the high expectations of staff, for example, when the headteacher communicated to a very young child, by not smiling, that getting up from her chair while eating was not what was desired behaviour. The child controlled herself well and remained seated.
- Pupils keep themselves and others safe. When they play outside, for example, they keenly observe the zones marked out for different activities. Bullying is not an issue as pupils accept and understand each other's differences exceptionally well.
- In their responses to questionnaires, parents say that they are very pleased with the level of respect and care the school gives to their child.
- The curriculum for personal, health, social and emotional development is at the centre of what the school does. Changes since the last inspection have maintained and developed further on previous outstanding work. Group teaching, such as, the talk given by the nurses during the inspection, are extremely effective.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher is uncompromising in driving the school forward. He and two assistant headteachers work well together as a team. They are ambitious to make sure pupils achieve their potential and are successful in driving improvements forward. Even so, they do not always make the best use of the nationally published information showing the progress of pupils with a similar starting point and comparing it with the progress of pupils in the school.
- The staff support one another well. Morale is high and everyone is committed to pupils' achievement. They ensure that additional funds, such as the pupil premium, are used to good effect, for example, by providing additional experiences out within the community.
- The school has an accurate view of its own performance. Plans made for improvement are effective because everyone, including members of the governing body, contributes to them. However, the documents that record the school's assessments of its own performance are sometimes too lengthy and, as a result, are not as sharply focussed as they could be.
- Procedures to check pupils' attainment and progress are thorough and accurate. Staff check their judgements with other teachers, both within the school and other local schools. In addition, the headteacher seeks confirmation from staff if their judgements appear very high or too low.
- The curriculum meets the needs of the pupils well. It is well organised and capitalises on the many learning experiences offered out within the community. It is enriched by many after-school activities. This contributes well to pupils' good social, moral, spiritual and cultural development and pupils' enjoyment of school.
- The local authority supports school improvement exceptionally well. An adviser with specialist

knowledge knows the school well. He has worked with governors to ensure that the management of the performance of the headteacher has a good effect on school improvement.

- The leadership of teaching is good. Procedures to check the quality of teaching are extensive and thorough. Best practices are shared swiftly amongst members of staff. However, lesson observations do not always sharply focus on the achievement of specific groups of pupils, such as those with profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- The partnership with parents is outstanding. Making sure that parents are fully informed and involved in what happens to their child is always given priority.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has detailed knowledge of what is happening in the school and know that this is a good school. They manage the budget effectively and have turned a deficit into a surplus. They are clear about how the pupil premium funding is being spent and know the positive effects this is having on the achievement of this group of pupils. They are involved in performance management and know about the overall quality of teaching. The new Chair of the Governing Body is very clear about the next steps for governors, such as providing additional training for new governors. At present, governors are not always in a position to ask challenging questions in order to hold the school fully to account. This is because they do not always get the information that they need, in a succinct form, particularly about the achievement of pupils over time.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	135347
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	402692

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	67
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gillian Hartley
Headteacher	Steve Artis
Date of previous school inspection	20 January 2010
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