

May Bank Infants School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124115
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	328057
Inspection dates	16 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Doris Bell

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

Type of school	Infants
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	179
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Ruth Smith
Headteacher	Mrs Julie Poland
Date of previous school inspection	13–14 June 2006
School address	Basford Park Road May Bank Newcastle Staffordshire ST5 0PT
Telephone number	01782 297340
Fax number	01782 297343

Age group	4–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following:

- the progress pupils have made this year
- the effectiveness of the work carried out by senior leaders to improve teaching and learning
- whether the children's enjoyment of school, their understanding of their place in the wider community, and their knowledge of how to keep themselves safe and healthy are good or outstanding.

Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation, its assessment records, the sampling of lessons, children's work and teachers' planning, discussions with the headteacher, key staff and children, and analysis of the parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified. These have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

May Bank is a popular and oversubscribed school. Very few pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds and all speak English as their first language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. It is driven by a passionate desire to ensure that all children, whatever their background or ability, have every chance of succeeding in life. The school constantly and successfully strives for excellence, reviewing and adapting its practices and making very effective use of what it learns through its own rigorous and accurate evaluation of its effectiveness. All of this gives it excellent capacity for further improvement.

Children normally start school with the skills and experiences expected for their age, although an increasing proportion are starting with speech and language or behavioural difficulties. They get off to a really good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage, where provision is excellent. From this point on, they achieve exceptionally well. Standards are significantly above average by Year 2 and have been so for a number of years.

A key factor in the school's many successes is the high calibre of leadership and management. The headteacher is an excellent leader. She has created a fully dedicated staff team who share high expectations of work and behaviour and set very challenging but manageable targets for the children. Children say they 'have lots of targets' but the key is that they understand them and know how to achieve them. Teachers' marking helps them really well in this and children readily show how they try to correct their work, acting on the advice and guidance given. Systems for checking that the pupils' progress remains on track in all classes work very well. Those who are not coping, for whatever reason, are very quickly identified and very effectively supported. Teaching assistants do a sterling job of enthusing and guiding individual pupils such as those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, or those with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. Governors too fulfil their duties exceptionally well, questioning and reviewing how well the school is doing, and spurring it on to do even better.

Children acquire excellent personal skills and strong leadership qualities. They are confident speakers and good listeners. While very respectful of each other and adults, they confidently ask questions and inject humour into discussions. A good example of this was when the school council asked, when being interviewed, how many more questions they were going to be asked! They are very reflective thinkers who are willing to share their thoughts with others. In an assembly seen during the inspection, the headteacher used the children's ideas and acknowledged where they had come from, thus showing the children how much staff value what they say. When talking about taking control, for example, the headteacher had suggested 'stop, think and choose' as a strategy. Pupils expanded this first to 'stop, think, choose and do' then, on further reflection, to 'stop, think, make the right choice and do'. Children are proud of their school and they take their responsibilities as school councillors, monitors and buddies to other pupils very seriously. They have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves safe, fit and healthy. They are aghast at the thought of any bullying and say they 'can speak to the teachers or the headteacher or the school council or anyone in school' if they have any concerns, confident that they will always get help.

Children's behaviour is excellent. They thoroughly enjoy school, and their well above average attendance is testimony to this. Safeguarding procedures meet current requirements and the school is a happy place to be. Parents are right when they say that the school is 'a great environment' where children 'thrive' and 'blossom' in a 'caring and nurturing place where (they) feel safe and happy'. High quality displays celebrate children's work and their achievements. Children know they belong to a school that cares deeply for each one of them, and they receive excellent guidance and support for their personal and academic development. The school's excellent links with external agencies, and the very successful nurture group which the school constantly adapts to meet children's changing needs, contribute greatly to this.

Despite having very few children from other cultures in the school, the children have a very good understanding of the range and diversity of cultures in the locality and beyond. The school works hard at this. It has taken its duty to promote community cohesion very seriously. This is evident in, for example, the involvement of parents in workshops and cultural diversity days, and the very effective links with a school that has a greater cultural mix. As a result, parents understand the importance of this aspect of their children's learning. Nor does the school forget the children's own culture, as shown by the photographs in the school brochure of, for example, Maypole dancing and Christmas events.

Teaching has many strengths. Lessons are vibrant and stimulating, not least because they include exciting, practical activities through which children learn and develop exceptionally well. Year 1 pupils were highly motivated by a weighing activity where they estimated and weighed real vegetables and each other, and determined what or who was heavier or lighter and by how much. In Year 2 science, pupils could not wait to get outside with their minibeast collection equipment to find out, for example, whether there were more bugs above or below ground, or in or outside the garden area. They demonstrated a good understanding of fair testing as they prepared for this. Activities are exceptionally well structured so that, even within the ability groups for literacy and numeracy, every child is equally well challenged by what they have to do. Occasionally, however, in their efforts to ensure every child knows exactly what is expected from an activity, teachers keep children sitting and listening for too long. A slight restlessness then starts to creep in because the children are so eager to get to work, and this momentarily slows the pace of the lesson.

Discussions with children reveal that they find their work challenging but not overly so. The focus on speaking and listening from an early age is particularly effective. Lessons are designed to give children opportunities to share their thoughts with each other before responding to questions, to test each other's knowledge and skills and to identify how well they and their friends are learning. All of this contributes really well to their learning and personal development. It is supported very effectively by an excellent curriculum that links subjects together and promotes the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology exceptionally well. These key skills are part of everything the children are given to do and children use them naturally as they go about their work in different subject areas. Children leave this school exceptionally well prepared for their future lives. The very effective links the school has with the junior school to which most children transfer go a long way to ensuring that their excellent progress and personal development continue after they leave May Bank.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The Early Years Foundation Stage shares all of the outstanding features found in the school as a whole. A buzz of excitement ripples through this age group as children play and learn happily together, moving around the many very engaging activities prepared for them. Fully conversant with the well-established routines, they go about their learning with the same cheerfulness and enthusiasm indoors and out. They learn to take small and calculated risks, for example when using the large play equipment. There is a real sense of fun and adventure as children catch bubbles and talk about why they burst, or work in pairs investigating and recording which objects sink or float. Adults constantly assess children's learning. They are very skilled at knowing when to intervene or question children to ensure that they are always learning while they play.

The Early Years Foundation Stage is very well led and managed. Early writing and numeracy skills are very successfully promoted. Children form letters and numbers accurately and are enthused by work related to their own experiences such as their recent visit to the zoo, one of the many enrichment activities planned for them. Children reach standards that are above average by the end of Reception, and are very well prepared for their work in Year 1. They get along with each other very well and know how to resolve conflict without always calling on an adult. Their welfare and their personal, social and emotional well-being are promoted exceptionally well, including through excellent links with parents. All of this starts with the excellent induction procedures that introduce parents and children to school life.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure teachers always capitalise fully on pupils' eagerness to learn and do not keep them sitting listening for longer than is necessary, particularly at the start of lessons.

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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?	1
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	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good is 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?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

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

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?	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
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
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?	1
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	1
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?	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

17 June 2009



Dear Children

Inspection of May Bank Infants' School, Newcastle ST5 OPT

Thank you for the very warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school, and for talking to us about your work. It was a real delight to see how much you enjoy school and how hard you work. Before our visit, when we read about your school, we thought we were probably coming to an excellent school, and we were right. It was good to hear that you and your parents think the same way.

The progress you make is fantastic and therefore you reach high standards in your work before you move on to the junior school. You play a great part in this by working hard, listening to the staff and trying to do your very best at all times. The staff play their part really well too. Teachers listen very carefully to what you have to say and they value very much the contribution you make to the life of the school and to your learning. They take account of what you already know and what more you would like to find out and they use this information exceptionally well when they plan your learning. You pay good attention to what the teachers say when they mark your work, and you try very hard to improve it.

The headteacher and governors keep a very close eye on how well each one of you is doing. They make sure that the work your teachers give you really does move your learning on so that you get the best chance in life. You behave really well and it is clear that you care very much for each other. We did notice, however, that sometimes, when you have been sitting listening for a long time, you start to get restless. We have asked the teachers to think about this and to get you going on the exciting activities they have prepared for you before it happens.

Congratulations on doing so well, keep up the good work! We hope that by doing so, you will enjoy learning for the rest of your lives as much as you do now.

Yours faithfully

Doris Bell
Lead inspector