Nicol Mere School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106430
Local authority	Wigan
Inspection number	336673
Inspection dates	15–16 June 2010
Reporting inspector	David Scott

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	270
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Bill Morris
Headteacher	Paul Gubbins
Date of previous school inspection	21–22 February 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 15 lessons, observed all 11 class teachers and had meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work; looked at the school's self-evaluation documentation, monitoring and assessment information, lesson plans and school policies; and analysed 37 questionnaires from parents and carers, 113 from pupils and 21 from staff. The school's safeguarding procedures were also evaluated.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the impact of quality of learning in lessons on pupils' attainment at Key Stage 2
- how well the school is using assessment data to secure improvement for all groups of pupils
- the provision for more-able pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- the impact of leaders and managers, at all levels, on driving improvements across all key stages.

Information about the school

Nicol Mere School is a larger than average school. Almost all of the pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. Around one in four pupils, a proportion higher than that found nationally, has special educational needs and/or disabilities, the largest group being those with moderate learning difficulties. Since the last inspection the school has gained a number of prestigious accolades including Healthy Schools status and the Sports Gold Award.

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 1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement 1

Main findings

Nicol Mere School is an outstanding school and one that is improving under the exceptionally good and inspirational leadership of the headteacher. He is very well supported by the senior team and an effective governing body. The school has excellent links with the local community, particularly with its two partner secondary schools and the children's centre.

The school's motto – 'Learning is a passport to life – enjoy' – is seen in all that it does and helps pupils to gain an impressive understanding of their futures in the world of work. Overall, pupils make consistently good progress. By the end of Year 6 they achieve extremely well in their learning because the school has very high expectations of them. Staff strive to eradicate any differences in the achievement of groups of pupils. For example, the school has been highly successful in helping pupils with previously challenging behaviour to enjoy learning and make good progress again and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make exceptional progress.

Nicol Mere has been successful at driving up pupils' academic performance and sustaining outstanding practice in supporting their personal development. Pupils feel extremely safe and secure and have a mature and very well-developed understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. They make an excellent contribution to the school and local communities. Safeguarding procedures are exemplary. The partnership with parents and carers, and other agencies is extremely strong and underpins and supports the school's exceptionally good levels of care, guidance and support. As one parent commented, echoing the views of many, 'My child loves this school and I am really happy and proud that we chose Nicol Mere.'

Through honest and accurate self-evaluation of the school, leaders have brought about many improvements. Concerted action, by all staff, has tackled pupils' underperformance and past weaknesses in teaching. As a result, teaching and learning are good, and in some cases outstanding. This has led to a rising trend in attainment over the last three years which is now high, with performance in English, mathematics and science being consistently strong. Leaders also know that there are examples of good assessment practice, although the quality across the school is variable. In a few cases, teachers do not ask sufficiently probing questions or provide specific targets that enable all pupils to make consistently good or better progress, particularly for more-able pupils. Behaviour throughout the school is exemplary.

A stimulating curriculum and the strong promotion of equality of opportunity enable almost all pupils to attend regularly. Since the last inspection the school has reduced exclusions, improved attendance to well above average levels and raised attainment. The school has excellent capacity to sustain improvement and fulfil its ambitious vision for the future.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Maintain high-quality provision and outcomes, and increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by:
  - ensuring that teachers use day-to-day assessments and review targets more systematically and effectively with pupils so they clearly understand how to improve, particularly for the youngest children
  - making questioning more probing in lessons to give pupils opportunities to develop and explain their ideas fully and enable them to be more responsible for their own learning, particularly more-able pupils
  - intensifying the programme for spreading good practice in assessment throughout the school, by coaching and mentoring.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils 1

The quality of learning and progress in lessons is good. Pupils behave extremely well, and mature into polite, thoughtful and considerate young people. The overwhelming majority of pupils are enthusiastic about their tasks and respond appropriately to teachers' requests. Year 2 pupils, for example, thoroughly enjoyed their literacy lesson where they designed posters and booklets to advertise the attractions of Blackpool that would appeal to children. In Year 6, after watching a news reel clip heralding the outbreak of the Second World War, pupils responded well, particularly boys, by creating a newspaper article based on the clip, which developed their use of descriptive vocabulary and further improved their writing skills.

Attainment is high by the end of Year 6. Despite this success, leaders are anything but complacent, being ever vigilant to continue to help pupils develop their analysis skills in reading. Overall, pupils make good progress and their achievement is outstanding. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make exceptional progress because of the high levels of care and support they receive.

Pupils get on extremely well together and are keen to engage in the many opportunities to take on responsibilities. Members of the school council are proud of their role as they were elected following real-life election procedures. Year 5 and 6 pupils undergo rigorous training in order to act as play leaders to younger children. Pupils gain first-hand experience of growing flowers, fruit and vegetables as well as of recycling. The school has worked hard both with pupils, parents and carers in raising pupils' attendance, which is now well above average. Through the work associated with the national awards, pupils have a mature understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle and regularly participate in many sporting and physical pursuits.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning Taking into account:	**1**
Pupils' attainment[1]	1
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	**1**
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	**1**
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	**1**
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being Taking into account:	**1**
Pupils' attendance[1]	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	**2**

How effective is the provision?

Classrooms are delightful, rich environments, both indoors and out, with imaginative activities and vibrant displays to capture and respond to pupils' interests and enthusiasms. As a result of these and rigorous monitoring, teaching is good, with a few lessons, as observed during the inspection, being outstanding. Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent and teachers' subject knowledge is strong so explanations are well structured and confident. New technology is used well to make lessons interesting. However, occasionally teachers' explanations are too long, which reduces the opportunity for pupils to think for themselves and explain their ideas. Also, marking and target setting do not always signpost clearly how pupils can improve their work, and questions are not always sufficiently probing, particularly for more-able pupils.

The well-orchestrated curriculum meets the needs and interests of all pupils exceptionally well. It is further enriched by exciting productions, guest speakers, international dance and music extravaganzas and clubs ranging from dance to rugby. Music and singing can often be heard throughout the school and all Year 3 pupils are able to learn a stringed instrument. A wide range of trips and residential visits provide excellent opportunities for pupils to broaden their personal and academic skills.

The school is rightly proud of its outstanding care, guidance and support. Pupils whose circumstances make them the most vulnerable benefit greatly from excellent work the school carries out with external agencies. Staff can point to real successes in helping pupils overcome difficult histories and challenging episodes in their lives. 'The school has helped me to work on my own and made me more confident in expressing myself, especially in circle time,' commented one pupil. The inclusion team provides a wide range of support to enable pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable to play a full part in school life and is very successful at engaging hard-to-reach families.

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

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

Progress and learning are accelerating at Nicol Mere School because of the determination, total commitment and dedication of the headteacher, with the support of all staff, to ensure that the school's aim that 'every pupil is enabled to reach their potential' is achieved. The school ensures that every pupil has an equal chance to learn and rigorously tackles any discrimination. Senior and middle leaders guide staff so that equality of opportunity and inclusion are excellent.

The headteacher's collaborative and highly developed interpersonal skills have created a welcoming and harmonious ethos which permeates the school and beyond. The tremendous care, concern and calmness he shows for staff, pupils, parents and carers was commented upon frequently throughout the inspection by parents and carers, and staff. 'The headteacher makes himself very accessible and the children like and respect him,' commented one parent. As a result of this high degree of support and trust, staff are very well motivated and teamwork is of an exceptionally high standard. Leadership and management have many outstanding features: for example, in the excellent way that teaching and learning are led; in provision for staff's development; in the rigour of performance management systems; in the smooth day-to-day organisation; and in the accurate and honest self-evaluation of the school.

Governors are fully supportive of the school's aims. They know the school well and have an accurate view of its performance. They challenge the school and hold it to account and are securing more rapid improvement in the quality of learning. The school has exemplary procedures for safeguarding, risk assessment and staff vetting procedures. The school has evaluated its contribution to community cohesion, which is good. This has been achieved by developing and promoting a detailed understanding of its own community and the different faiths, ethnicities and cultures that exist within it. For example, the school has developed a partnership with a school in Singapore, but acknowledges that it needs help pupils gain a deeper appreciation of what it means to be a citizen in the United Kingdom.

These are the grades for the leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement Taking into account:	**1**
The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
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	**1**

The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	**1**
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	**2**
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	**1**

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children get off to a good start in the Reception classes. They settle in quickly and are keen to learn. Children play together and are well behaved. They enjoy learning in this busy environment. Overall, children start school mostly with skill levels below those expected for their age. By the end of the Reception Year, overall, they have made good progress and attain levels that are expected for their age. For example, children responded very well to an animated version of Noah's Ark on the interactive whiteboard where they acted as science detectives to see which objects would float. This activity involved making predictions and recording their findings and developed their problem-solving skills.

Children enjoy a wide range of stimulating activities, indoors and out, carefully chosen to meet their needs and interests. They are given the opportunity to select their own learning activities and respond well to encouragement and praise to explore and widen their choices. This is contributing well to the development of independent learning skills. Teaching is consistently good, with motivating lessons moving at a good pace in a friendly and safe atmosphere. Leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good and the leader has ensured that all the welfare requirements are met and that children's progress is closely monitored, which contributes to the high-quality care children receive. Teachers and helpers note down children's achievements and make good use of digital cameras to record significant moments of each child's progress. These records are used effectively to ensure that each child's learning is moved forward, but the school acknowledges that staff need to ensure that all children fully understand their next steps for improvement. The school's support for children whose circumstances make them vulnerable is of a high standard. Partnerships with external agencies are good so that specialist help is sought and provided when needed. The outdoor area for Reception children permits free-flow movement. Nevertheless, the school is fully aware that it needs to extend the provision and the opportunities for learning outdoors in the areas of communication and number skills.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation stage Taking into account:	**2**
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

The school enjoys the support of the overwhelming majority of parents and carers who returned questionnaires. Almost all respondents were very positive about the

school and felt that it keeps pupils safe and helps them maintain a healthy lifestyle. Parents and carers praised the exciting range of activities that staff devise. Inspectors agree totally with parents' and carers' views.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Nicol Mere 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 37 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 270 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	26	70	11	30	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	27	73	10	27	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	17	46	18	49	2	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	20	54	15	41	1	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	21	57	13	35	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	17	46	16	43	2	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	17	46	17	46	0	0	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)	16	43	16	43	1	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	19	51	17	46	1	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	11	30	22	59	1	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	15	41	18	49	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	23	62	13	35	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	23	62	13	35	0	0	0	0

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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	**Outstanding**	**Good**	**Satisfactory**	**Inadequate**
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

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 to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 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. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

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:	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. • 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.

17 June 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Nicol Mere School, Wigan WN4 8DF

This letter is to thank you for welcoming us so warmly to your school and for taking the time from your breaks to talk to the inspectors. We really enjoyed meeting you and seeing you work and play. Many of your parents and carers wrote to say how pleased they were with the school, as one parent commented, echoing the views of many: 'I cannot praise the school enough in the way it is run and educates my child. It has a lovely and welcoming atmosphere for children from all walks of life.' We agree.

We came to find out as much as we could about your school and now we would like to tell you what we said in the report we have written. You go to an outstanding school. Your headteacher and teachers make your school a very special and welcoming place. You and your parents and carers told us that you like school and that it is a caring and happy place where you feel really safe. You are respectful, polite and considerate towards each other. We really enjoyed your singing in assembly, especially as it was so tuneful and sung in two parts!

Your headteacher and teachers are determined to help you succeed, as are your parents and carers. So we have asked your headteacher and teachers to:

- plan work that will challenge and engage you in all lessons, showing you ways to learn by yourselves, and particularly for the more able among you
- give you clearer advice on how to improve your work so that you can achieve your very best.

Once again, it was very good to meet you all. We would like to wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

David Scott
Lead inspector

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