

Essa Primary School

Lever Edge Lane, Bolton, Lancashire BL3 3HH

Inspection dates

13–14 June 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils' outcomes and their learning, particularly in phonics, writing, mathematics and science, are not good. Pupils' work in other subjects, such as geography and history, is of low quality. The curriculum does not have a good impact on pupils' outcomes across subjects.
- There is a large gap between boys' and girls' attainment across the school and across subjects.
- Teaching lacks challenge for the most able pupils. Teachers do not use assessments well to plan lessons across the curriculum, which enable this group to make faster progress.
- Adults make errors when they pronounce the phonic sounds and they also make subject knowledge and spoken language errors.
- Pupils' attendance is below average. Most groups of pupils have a higher than average rate of persistent absence.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do not make good progress, particularly when their absence is also high.
- A small proportion of lessons is disrupted by pupils' chatting or messing around.

The school has the following strengths

- The school is improving. The principal provides good leadership. She is taking effective action to increase pupils' achievement through raising the quality of teaching.
- Children get off to a good start in Reception, where all groups make good progress. There is a high-quality, spacious and very well-resourced environment in which they can thrive.
- Governors help to shape the vision and direction of the school and have an overview of the strengths and areas for improvement.
- Pupils feel safe. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They are considerate of other pupils, respectful and tolerant.
- The pupil premium is used well. There is little difference between the achievement of pupils who are known to be disadvantaged and those who are not.
- There is an effective and well-designed system to make sure that there is a smooth transfer of children into Reception and across the school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the quality of teaching is at least good and has greater impact on raising pupils' outcomes by:
 - challenging the most able pupils to produce higher-quality work
 - increasing, in mathematics, the focus on pupils solving problems, and developing their reasoning skills and mathematical understanding
 - making sure that adults have good subject knowledge and accurate spoken language and pronunciation of phonic sounds.
- Reduce pupils' absence, particularly that of those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Raise boys' attainment and accelerate their progress across subjects by:
 - tracking and accelerating boys' progress in phonics, reading, writing and mathematics
 - making sure, in the Reception Year, that boys are challenged to increase their language, writing, and mathematical skills
 - in key stage 1, challenging boys to produce higher-quality work.
- Increase the impact of the curriculum on pupils' learning and attainment, particularly in science, history and geography, by:
 - enabling pupils to extend and use their reading and mathematical skills and knowledge in other subjects
 - training teachers who lead subjects to have a greater impact on raising standards
 - improving the quality of pupils' recording of science investigations
 - improving the quality of worksheets and activities so that pupils are able to write at length, developing their subject-specific skills and understanding
 - making sure that the work in the different subjects is challenging and extends pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- One of the main reasons why leadership and management require improvement is because the curriculum has not had a good impact on pupils' outcomes. Pupils' work, particularly in science, geography and history, is of a low standard. The curriculum is not challenging for the most able pupils, many of whom complete the same work at the same standard as low-ability pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- There has been a significant disruption to leadership and to teaching in the last two years because of frequent changes in staffing. This is partly to blame for the lack of impact of staff training. The staff, for example, have been trained in phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) by specialists, yet a large number made errors in pronunciation and some of the staff that had been trained are now no longer at the school. To date, leaders have not been successful in raising attainment in key stage 1 or in phonics, particularly for boys, most-able pupils and White British pupils.
- The funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is not used as effectively as it might be. Some small-group work has been unsuccessful in helping this group of pupils to make good progress. Absence for this group is too high, which means that the impact of the teaching is lost and becomes ineffective.
- There are some weaknesses in middle leadership. Some teachers who lead subjects have not raised the quality of teaching or standards because they do not have a good grasp on what different groups of pupils' outcomes are across the curriculum.
- In contrast, there are some significant positives about leadership. The principal provides good leadership and has been successful in stabilising and improving the quality of teaching. She has high expectations and is beginning to establish a positive working ethos. The staff survey indicates that morale is high. She has a highly accurate judgement about how well pupils are doing and the quality and effectiveness of teaching.
- There is good intention behind the curriculum, which is to provide a wide range of experiences to which pupils would not usually have access. There has been an improved focus in this academic year on widening the range of subjects taught. At its heart lies personal and social education and a strong focus on British values. It ensures pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils have a good understanding of democracy, elections and of parliament and show a high level of respect and understanding of each other and of people's differences. They are well placed to take a positive and active role in modern Britain. A range of clubs and extra-curricular activity supplement the curriculum, although the take-up from some Muslim pupils is low because they attend the mosque in the evening.
- Leaders work effectively with parents. Leaders have developed training workshops for parents to attend. Leaders worked very well, for example, with parents worried about swimming lessons, to explain that swimming is a life skill and is expected of all pupils in the United Kingdom. As a result, every child is attending lessons.
- The physical education (PE) and sports premium is spent well. There has been an

increase in pupils' skills, in the number of sporting clubs and in participation in competitive sport. Leaders should now work on sharpening the measures to identify the impact of the spending on pupils' health and well-being. They also should make sure that the funding is used to make quality PE teaching sustainable.

- The pupil premium funding has been used successfully. The difference in progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the school is small. The difference between this group and other pupils nationally is wide, but pupils' accelerated progress because of the good use of funding is helping to diminish the difference.

Governance of the school

- The governing body has a sound overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. It is improving its use of assessment information to challenge school leaders and to provide expertise and suggestions for improvement. Governors ask challenging questions, and there is a growing culture of transparency, which is extending to teachers who lead subjects.
- Governors are highly visible in the school and use their time well to gather an overview of the quality of teaching. They have managed to stabilise the significant turbulence caused by changes in staffing and have taken difficult decisions to tackle underperformance in teaching. They make assured decisions about the performance management of staff.
- The governing body's educational knowledge has increased, thanks in part to the wise appointment of an experienced education-based chief executive. The governing body has acted positively to commission external agencies and specialists to provide an external view of the quality of the school's work.
- The governing body has successfully shaped the culture and ethos in the school. It has a focus on developing pupils' awareness of British values and the aim of striving for excellence. As one governor stated, 'Don't put the lid on the child. Allow them to be like a butterfly and fly.'

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Records are thorough, detailed and kept meticulously.
- Safeguarding is high-profile and leaders' work has created a safe and secure culture. As visitors walk into the school, in a secure area away from pupils, they are asked to read and sign information about safeguarding and are asked to read some of the many safeguarding posters, including those relating to e-safety, pupils who are or may become transgender, child sexual exploitation and domestic violence. Leaders hold frequent safeguarding meetings with staff.
- There are effective links with external agencies, parents and with specialists, on aspects such as behaviour and attendance, to keep pupils safe. Documentation is thorough and comprehensive. Filtering systems to make sure that pupils are safe from dangerous content on websites are thorough, effective and evaluated frequently. All

staff and governors are well trained.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teachers' and teaching assistants' subject knowledge is not good. They make errors in spoken English and when they pronounce phonic sounds, such as 'cha' instead of 'ch' and 'la' instead of 'l', adding an extra vowel at the end of the sound. Consequently, pupils also make this error, which restricts their ability to spell accurately. Some teachers also make errors when teaching mathematics, history and science; this is evident in pupils' work. A few adults also made errors in standard spoken English and did not correct pupils' errors.
- Teaching of mathematics is bitty. Pupils do not develop a secure enough understanding of the mathematics being taught before moving on. There is little evidence of pupils solving a full range of problems, of reasoning about mathematics, explaining their ideas and methods or deepening their understanding. Mathematics is not taught systematically enough for pupils to make good progress. In addition, there are many opportunities lost for pupils to apply their mathematical skills in subjects such as geography, science, PE, design and technology and art.
- Teaching in history, geography and science requires improvement. Pupils' writing and reading skills are not extended well. The teachers choose poor-quality worksheets for pupils to complete, with only very small spaces to write a caption, sign, word or phrase. Yet in English, they are able to write more-complex sentences and produce higher-quality work. The development of subject-specific vocabulary and language is weak in these subjects. In science, for example, teachers do not challenge pupils to use more-complex language and terminology.
- Teachers do not challenge the most able pupils well. This group of pupils complete the same level and standard of work as less-able pupils using the same worksheets. Their work, therefore, does not reflect their abilities or skills. Teachers' expectations for this group are not high. They are sometimes, for example, asked to sit and complete work which they can do easily mentally, yet have to sit laboriously working through examples which are unchallenging.
- Teachers' assessment of pupils' writing and mathematics is accurate, assisted by external and internal moderation with other teachers.
- Pupils commented in the survey that teachers help them and are approachable when they need guidance and teachers help them to understand their work.
- Teachers use an improved system of teaching phonics. It is progressive and enables pupils to learn to break unfamiliar words down into different sounds, to blend sounds together and to use the sounds that they know to spell words.
- Teaching is improving. There is some effective teaching, for example in religious education, PE, Spanish and in reading, particularly in Year 4. The teaching for pupils from Eastern Europe, who speak English as an additional language, is effective and this group is making good progress.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils are kind, considerate and self-confident. They readily take up jobs and responsibilities around the school, such as equipment monitors. They raise money for good causes and charities.
- Most pupils show respect for each other and for adults. They appreciate and celebrate people's differences, including differences in gender, religion and belief, appearance and ethnic background. It was heart-warming to see in lessons and at break and lunchtimes how different pupils worked and played together, ignoring any perceived differences.
- Pupils and parents reported that bullying is rare, as is name-calling based on a person's race, religion or perceived sexuality. Pupils said that they feel safe and that there is someone they can talk with if they feel troubled or worried. Adults have been effective in showing pupils how to be safe, for example in case of fire or when working and socialising online.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- The main reason for this is that many pupils do not attend frequently enough. In 2016, attendance was inadequate. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are White British, are disadvantaged and boys were absent for extended periods of time. The school's assessment information clearly shows that pupils who are frequently absent make less progress and have lower standards, with the likelihood that this will negatively affect their futures.
- Since September, leaders have taken the bull by the horns and tackled issues of low attendance head on. There is a new electronic, rapid-registration system and fast follow-up by the administration team when there is any absence. Leaders discuss attendance with parents frequently and have not been afraid to issue penalty notices, but they also provide support for families. Attendance is still too low. However, persistent absence is reducing steadily.
- In some lessons, particularly in subjects other than English and mathematics, some pupils disrupt others' learning by messing around, chatting, sliding across the carpet or deliberately not concentrating.
- A few pupils do not listen to adults at breaktime and continue to play instead of lining up, by playing on the equipment or grassy bank. These pupils show a lack of respect for adults. At the end of a breaktime, a large number of pupils ignored the staff and ran up the hill and into school, thus arriving at the classroom in an uncontrolled manner.
- Most of the time, most pupils behave well. They listen attentively, work productively and there is an active 'buzz' of busy voices in lessons. For some individual pupils, for whom good behaviour is difficult, the school works well with outside agencies to

provide specialist and successful support.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do not make good progress and do not attain well. This, in part, is because they have a high level of absence, but also because some of the teaching has not been good enough to raise their achievement.
- Most-able pupils do not make good progress and do not attain the standards of which they should be capable, particularly in subjects such as science, history, geography and writing.
- The published assessment information should be read with caution. The extremely high turnover of pupils means that a significant number of pupils who finish Year 2 are not the same as those starting key stage 1. In 2016, pupils' attainment was below average in phonics, reading and writing; they were not well prepared for the next stage of their education and boys' attainment was inadequate.
- Since the dip in 2016, key stage 2 pupils' outcomes have improved. Attainment, however, remains low. The school's assessments, verified by pupils' work, indicate that in writing, reading and mathematics over half of pupils are working below the level expected for their age. There is a large gap in attainment across subjects and across the school between boys' and girls' attainment, and between the attainment of White British pupils and those from an Asian heritage.
- This low attainment is replicated in other subjects. In many classes, for example, pupils' reporting of a science experiment, observation or investigation is nothing more than captions, signs or a few phrases, and the level of data-handling is weak. This means that they are not well prepared to cope with the science curriculum taught in secondary school. Similarly, in history and geography, the standard of work is low-level, as is pupils' writing in these subjects.
- In contrast, the large majority of pupils make good progress in writing, reading and mathematics, but this headline does not tell the full story. Pupils who started and remained at the school make significantly faster progress than those who are new to the school, indicating that the longer the teachers are able to teach them, the faster their progress. Persistent absence is wreaking havoc in pupils' outcomes. Pupils who are absent most often achieve significantly less than pupils who attend frequently. In Year 2, boys are making similar progress to the girls, but not fast enough to close the gap in attainment. Pupils in Year 4 are catching up from their low base which was caused by previous instability in their learning.
- Pupils who are disadvantaged make similar progress to other pupils in the school. Funding is used well to provide extra guidance and support to tackle the barriers they have to learning and progress.
- Pupils from a Pakistani or an Indian heritage have more positive outcomes than other groups. Their attainment is higher and they are better prepared for the next stage of their education.

Early years provision

Good

- Children make a good start to their education in the Reception Year. Staff visit the large range of early years settings and homes from which children come. From the start of the Reception Year, they make good use of the information they gather to build on children's skills, knowledge and interests. Parents are actively involved. They attend a range of workshops in which staff explain the assessment, phonics and reading systems. They contribute to children's work and assessments by noting down events that have happened or skills that children have shown. These are then used well and built upon by staff.
- Children's attainment at the end of the Reception Year in 2015 and 2016 has been below average, particularly in literacy and mathematics, which appears to suggest that they are unprepared for Year 1. However, some of the low attainment in published results is because there is high mobility. Many of the children who start the Reception Year leave before the end of the year and new children, many from Eastern Europe with no English, arrive at the school. Children from all groups make good progress from low starting points, particularly those with good attendance and those who stay for the whole Reception Year. Additional funding is used effectively and there is little difference in the progress of children who are disadvantaged and those who are not. Overall, children are well prepared for Year 1.
- There are very good systems in place to continue children's education into Year 1. Teachers spend days in the Reception classes getting to know the children, their skills and their understanding. They work with Reception teachers to make sure that assessments are accurate. They use the information immediately in Year 1 and Reception teachers visit the children to make sure that they have not lost any ground over the holiday.
- One of the reasons why the quality of the provision in the early years is higher than in the main school is because teaching is more effective. Most children learn well in the Reception classes. The classes and outdoor areas are spacious, very well resourced and have a good range of equipment to inspire children to explore, play and learn. Children self-select equipment and work well with others to extend their imagination. Outdoors, away from adults, some of the activities lack challenge and do not build well upon children's literacy or mathematical skills.
- Boys in particular, although they make good progress, are sometimes engaged in activities which are unchallenging and do not enable them to make the rapid gains they need to raise their attainment. In contrast, inspectors observed some of the girls accurately reading, writing and using words such as 'nectar', 'lavender' and 'pollinate' to write about bees. The system to check that all children complete these challenging tasks is not tight enough, which means that some children are engaged in unchallenging play.
- The leaders' assessment, and tracking of children's attainment and progress, has enabled them to revise the teaching and the curriculum to plug any gaps in children's understanding that they might have. The curriculum is broad and balanced and based strongly on children's interests and extending their experiences. The leaders have a very good overview of the assessment data and of children and their families.

- Children are safe and secure, behave well and mix and work well with other children. Most respond, particularly indoors, to adults' requests and suggestions. Outdoors, children were slow to tidy away and some ignored adults' requests and continued playing. They have a good sense of equality and differences. Through the 'big question', they think about issues such as 'Is it ok for boys to wear clothes that are pink?' and 'Is it ok to be different?'

School details

Unique reference number	140973
Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	10022801

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	239
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Nigel Whittle
Principal	Joanna Atherton
Telephone number	01204 201310
Website	www.essaprimarvacademy.org
Email address	principal@essaprimarv.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- By the end of the inspection, once administrative errors had been corrected, the school complied with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school is part of the Essa Foundation Academies Trust.
- There is a nursery on site, which is inspected separately.
- This is the school's first inspection since it was formed in 2014.
- Essa is an average-sized primary school. At the time of the inspection, pupils were taught in classes from Reception through to Year 4. The proportion of pupils who have stayed at this school through their education is well below the national average. As there are no Year 6 pupils, the requirement to meet the government's current floor standards does not apply.

- A higher than average proportion of pupils is known to be disadvantaged.
- The overwhelming proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic heritages. Approximately a quarter come from White European heritages and a quarter from Pakistani heritage. Over three-quarters of pupils speak English as an additional language.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in each class and in a range of subjects, including history, science, Spanish, PE, English and mathematics. They conducted joint observations with the principal and deputy principal. They observed an assembly and pupils in the before-school club.
- Inspectors met with representatives of the governing body, the chief executive and with a representative of the local authority. They met a range of leaders, including those who lead subjects and other areas of the school, such as the early years.
- Inspectors observed break and lunchtime, met with pupils around the school and met with small groups of pupils. They took into account the 48 pupils who completed Ofsted's online survey and the views of those who completed the school's own survey.
- Inspectors gathered the views of parents by consulting the school's survey of parents, the responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and parents dropping pupils off at school.
- Inspectors took into account the views of 11 members of staff who completed the online survey.

Inspection team

Allan Torr, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Gill Pritchard

Her Majesty's Inspector

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