

Ferndale Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	135522
Local authority	Swindon
Inspection number	381902
Inspection dates	7–8 March 2012
Lead inspector	Colin Lee

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	362
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Malcolm Channon
Headteachers	Simon Cowley, Gary Evans
Date of previous school inspection	28 April 2009
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Introduction

Inspection team

Colin Lee	Additional inspector
Marion Hobbs	Additional inspector
Amanda Simpson	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed the teaching of 14 teachers and one teaching assistant in a total of 19 class lessons and one lesson with a small group. Meetings were held with members of the governing body, staff and groups of pupils. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work and looked at the school's data on pupils' attainment and progress, the school development plan, other planning documents and procedures for keeping pupils safe. Inspectors analysed 94 questionnaires completed by parents and carers, as well as speaking to a group of parents and carers. Questionnaires completed by staff and Key Stage 2 pupils were also analysed.

Information about the school

The school, which opened in September 2008, is larger than an average-sized primary school. It has experienced significant disruption since opening due to several changes in senior leadership, staffing and governance. In 2011, it failed to meet the government's floor standards which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress. The school is now at the end of the consultation stage prior to becoming part of a federation with Haydon Wick Primary School. That school's senior leaders have led Ferndale Primary School since December 2011. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Pupils are taught in 13 classes, two in each year group except Year 5, which has one single-age class and a few pupils in a Year 4 class. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is broadly average. The school has received the Healthy Schools award for its work in promoting pupils' understanding and adoption of healthy lifestyles. A pre-school provision is based on the school site but this is not managed by the governing body and was not part of this inspection.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school. There are several good features, notably the progress of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs that helps them also to make good progress. Prompt action by the new senior leaders has raised the quality of teaching, improved pupils' progress and past under-achievement has been eliminated. Pupils' achievement is now satisfactory, but not high enough to make it a good school.
- Pupils' attainment is average. This is in line with that which would be expected given their starting points, but no better. Year 6 pupils' attainment is much higher than that of previous Year 6 cohorts. All pupils' writing has improved steadily over time. Improvements in reading and mathematics are more recent and progress in reading shows some variation between year groups.
- Teaching is satisfactory rather than good because of inconsistencies preventing achievement from being good. More-able pupils are not always given work that challenges them sufficiently in some Key Stage 1 literacy lessons, which slows down progress. Teaching of phonics (linking letters and their sounds) and reading in Key Stage 1, while satisfactory and producing satisfactory progress, varies in quality between classes and pupils' progress is not as good as it is in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Pupils' good behaviour helps lessons have a calm but busy working atmosphere, and makes playtimes enjoyable for all. Pupils say they feel safe in school, that bullying is non-existent and any minor incidents of inappropriate behaviour are dealt with quickly.
- Senior leaders are sharply focused on improving teaching and raising teachers' expectations of both their own performance and pupils' progress. The good impact of this is seen in the improvements in most pupils' achievement in English and mathematics. In other subjects, there is no clear picture of pupils' achievement across the school due to lack of opportunities in the past to check outcomes or provision.

Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- In order to further raise pupils' attainment and increase their progress:
 - achieve greater consistency in the teaching of phonics and reading skills in Key Stage 1 so that this builds on the good practice in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
 - ensure that there is always a good challenge in the work given to the more-able pupils, particularly in reading and writing in Key Stage 1.
- Ensure that all subject leaders have the opportunity to monitor and evaluate the achievement of pupils throughout the school and plan the actions needed to increase achievement wherever necessary.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

The good quality of learning seen in many lessons ensures that most pupils make satisfactory progress, a view held by the vast majority of parents and carers. This satisfactory progress contrasts with a past picture of erratic and often inadequate progress year on year that prevented pupils from reaching the nationally expected standards of attainment by the time they left the school.

Pupils recognise that progress has improved and approach their learning enthusiastically, with strong motivation to achieve their targets. Enjoyment is a strong feature of many lessons. The first thing some older pupils said about things they think have improved was, 'new teachers and headteachers because they want us to enjoy what we do at school'.

When children start the Early Years Foundation Stage, their attainment is slightly below expected levels. Their good achievement in all areas of learning brings them up to national averages by the start of Year 1. In the past, progress has slowed down in subsequent year groups, particularly in reading and mathematics, which has widened the gap between pupils' attainment and the national expectation. The picture now is far better, gaps are closing and Year 6 pupils are on track to at least match national averages by the end of the year.

Progress of different groups of pupils is generally consistent because learning activities are, on the whole, matched carefully to their needs. Some of the more-able pupils in Key Stage 1 are not making enough progress because of lack of challenge in their work, particularly in writing. In contrast, throughout the school disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress, both academically and in their personal development. This owes much to the skilful support of the learning mentor and teaching assistants. Some younger pupils, through their good relationships with each other, demonstrate just how much the extra support is helping their social as well as their academic skills.

Reflecting the strong focus on language development in the Early Years Foundation Stage, a group of children who speak English as an additional language showed rapid progress in learning the names of shapes when they played outside with wheeled toys. They confidently said the name of the shape of parts of equipment and of the pathways they made riding tricycles. This supported their mathematical development as much as their language. Similar cross-curricular learning is evident in the well-structured writing of older pupils, showing that their skills are being effectively consolidated by using technical vocabulary in science and history topics. The pupils show clear understanding of how such work helps them with their individual writing targets.

Pupils' progress in reading varies. For most, it is satisfactory and in Years 5 and 6 it is good. Attainment in reading is broadly average by Year 2 but, as in Year 1, some lower attaining pupils do not have a secure enough knowledge of the link between letters and sounds (phonics) and resort to guessing new words rather than breaking them down into separate sounds. Year 6 pupils, when reading, used phonic knowledge confidently and accurately. They showed a love of reading, expression and fluency, matched by good comprehension and a mature ability to discuss themes, characters and meaning in books. Such skills showed attainment to be above expectations and they are therefore on track to be above average by the end of Year 6.

Quality of teaching

The vast majority of parents and carers judge teaching to be good and inspection evidence includes a majority of lessons that were taught well. However, inspection evidence shows that teaching over time is satisfactory, raising most pupils' achievement to the levels expected of them. At its best, teaching promotes a high quality of learning and excites the pupils, developing an obvious love of learning. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage were keen to demonstrate their knowledge of two- and three-dimensional shapes resulting from the excellent variety of activities planned for them to consolidate this knowledge. The same excitement was evident when Year 4 pupils explored the techniques used by the Romans to crush grapes for wine making. Skilful teaching successfully focused pupils not only on historical facts but also well in physical education by getting pupils to analyse techniques in terms of the physical actions being used.

Teachers check pupils' progress thoroughly in English and mathematics and encourage pupils to monitor their own progress towards achieving their targets in these subjects. Much of the work given to pupils challenges them appropriately although some Year 6 pupils talked of work being too easy in the past. They recognise greater challenge, particularly in mathematics, as a recent, welcome improvement. There is still work to do, for example some more-able pupils in Years 1 and 2 were seen working on writing tasks that were too easy. In the same year groups, pupils working independently in reading lessons were unsure of the specific objectives of the task they had been given. Such weaknesses in provision limit pupils' progress in lessons.

Teachers make effective use of the whole curriculum for developing pupils' literacy

skills, most especially writing, and their skills in information and communication technology. From the start, pupils have frequent opportunities to use interactive whiteboards in classrooms and do so confidently. Learning activities across the curriculum promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in many ways.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour over time is good and at least good in lessons. Pupils, parents and carers confirm that this is the norm and that their children are safe in school. This matches records maintained by the school. Consistently good behaviour is generated by the guidance pupils receive on what is acceptable, the involvement and decisions of pupils themselves, and the effectiveness and consistency of behaviour management by all adults.

Pupils say that they feel completely safe in school. They say there is almost no bullying in school and show a good understanding of different types of bullying. Talking about internet safety, some Year 6 pupils explained the importance of them not revealing names or location details in e-mails. Others reinforced that gender or racial discrimination is non-existent in school. Pupils show respect for others in many situations, for example through the harmonious relationships evident at playtimes and in listening to one another's ideas in partner and group work.

The school has seen a gradual rise in recent years in the number of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Strategies for helping these pupils to overcome their difficulties are clearly defined and, in most cases, working well. Incidents of disruption are rare and any that do occur are handled promptly and effectively.

Leadership and management

The headteacher's and senior leadership team's thorough evaluations of strengths and weaknesses have identified clear priorities for school improvement planning. Their immediate focus has been on improving the quality of teaching in order to raise pupils' achievement in English and mathematics. The quality has been raised by professional development matched to individual and whole-school needs. This has resulted from the teachers' own evaluations and working with key leaders on formulating individual support plans. This is good performance management by the key leaders. Teachers have responded by teaching more effectively, raising expectations of themselves and their pupils thus ensuring pupils make better progress. This is exemplified by mathematics where the excellent guidance of the subject leader has helped improve provision and outcomes to a point where a major weakness is fast becoming a strength.

Senior staff and the governing body are vigilant in ensuring that safeguarding arrangements are secure and effective. Promotion of equal opportunities and tackling discrimination are central to the school's ethos. Monitoring of pupils' progress looks constantly at inequality of progress between different groups. The differences shown by inspection are well known to leaders but it is too soon to judge the impact of the intervention, particularly in Key Stage 1. The governing body has generally failed to

hold senior leadership to account with sufficient rigour in the past. However, by working closely with the local authority it has promptly responded to leadership issues and improving the school's performance. Its commitment to the federation and its close working relationship with the new leadership team provide a strong foundation for the new governing body that will shortly be elected.

The curriculum promotes successfully pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In subjects other than English and mathematics, subject leaders are not monitoring pupils' achievement thoroughly enough. As a consequence, their subject development plans do not show how achievement can be improved. This has been recognised by senior leaders as an area to be developed in order to raise attainment across the curriculum as a whole. The curriculum is good in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

While school staff have worked through periods of disrupted leadership, they have maintained a focus on improving the areas found weak at the last inspection. There has been a steady improvement in most pupils' writing, and in their ability to work independently and think how they can improve their learning. This demonstrates staff's commitment to improvement and, now that effective leadership is in place and moving the school forward rapidly, it is clear that there is a satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement in the future.

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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



9 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ferndale Primary School, Swindon, SN2 1NX

I am writing to thank you for helping us during the inspection of your school. We especially enjoyed talking to you and listening to your views. We have taken these views into account in writing this report. We have judged that your school is a satisfactory school with some things that are good. Here are some of the main findings from the report.

- You all work hard and many of you are now making at least satisfactory progress. By Year 6, standards are average in English and mathematics and this matches what pupils in other schools throughout the country achieve. We think that those of you in Reception and Year 6 make particularly good progress.
- Those of you who find learning difficult receive very good extra help and you also make good progress.
- We want teachers to give harder work to some of you who find learning easy, particularly in Years 1 and 2 in reading and writing.
- You are taught satisfactorily and teachers check your progress carefully. We want the way you are taught to read, and about letters and sounds, in Years 1 and 2 to follow on smoothly from what children learn in Reception.
- We want the teachers in charge of each subject, not just English and mathematics, to check how well all of you are progressing and decide how they can help you to do even better.
- Your behaviour is good and we were very impressed by the way older pupils look out for and help the younger ones.
- You say you feel very safe in school. This is because all the adults do a good job in looking after you.
- All the staff work well together to help the school to improve.

All of you can help your teachers to make Ferndale Primary School an even better school by continuing to work hard and enjoying your learning. Thank you once again for your help during our visit, and best wishes for your work in the future.

Yours sincerely

Colin Lee
Lead inspector

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