

Blackfell Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108833
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	377824
Inspection dates	14–15 March 2012
Lead inspector	Kate Pringle

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	246
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Angela Star
Headteacher	Connie Megginson
Date of previous school inspection	9 May 2007
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Introduction

Inspection team

Kate Pringle
Declan McCauley

Additional inspector
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Twenty lessons and nine teachers were observed. Inspectors also observed shorter sessions of small-group support for pupils and listened to reading. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, members of the governing body, and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at pupils' books, assessment information, policies and procedures, school development plans, and updates of pupils' progress. The views of pupils and staff were considered, together with those of parents and carers in the 144 questionnaires they returned. Inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection.

Information about the school

In this average-sized primary school, the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is lower than the national average. There are few pupils on roll from minority ethnic groups or who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs who are supported by external agencies is lower than average. There is a very small number of pupils with more complex behaviour difficulties. The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress. The school holds the the Artsmark Silver award, the Gold Anti Bullying Charter Mark, and Quality in Study Support.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key Findings

- In this good school, pupils achieve well. It is not outstanding because present attainment in mathematics is not as high as that in English and teaching is not consistently good or better. Attainment is above average by the end of Year 6 and pupils make good progress overall from their starting points. They make excellent progress in reading. Creativity and problem solving in mathematics could be stronger. Disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs, and those with more complex behaviour difficulties make good progress because of the effective support they receive, particularly in reading. Minority ethnic pupils also progress well. Parents and carers are highly positive and consider it 'a friendly, inclusive school which helps children reach their full potential'.
- Teaching is good because generally teachers have high expectations of pupils. Teachers' assessments are accurate and pupils engage well in lessons. However, the pace in some lessons, particularly in mathematics, can be slower and on occasions, insufficient challenge is provided for learners. Marking is effective in English, but, in mathematics, does not always indicate to pupils how well they have achieved or how they can improve their work.
- Pupils enjoy school and this is reflected in their consistently high attendance. Pupils demonstrate good relationships with their friends and with adults. They behave well, although opportunities for them to manage their own behaviour in investigative learning situations could be stronger. Pupils say that they feel safe in the knowledge that, if they have a problem, there is someone to turn to. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development is good.
- The enthusiastic school team is led by a dedicated headteacher. Self-evaluation is accurate. There is regular monitoring of teaching and rigorous checking of pupils' progress, from which effective plans are drawn to further improve teacher performance and outcomes for pupils. Improvement has been very successful, particularly in English, with attention now turned to improve mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in mathematics to be at least equal to that of English by:
 - using teachers' knowledge of pupils' abilities to match tasks better to individual needs
 - extending opportunities for creativity and problem solving in mathematics lessons and the use of mathematics in other subjects.
 - increasing the impact of the subject leader on everyday classroom practice.
- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning to be good or better by:
 - ensuring that there is always good pace and sufficient time in lessons for pupils to practise new strategies
 - increasing opportunities for pupils to direct their own learning through independent and imaginative tasks
 - ensuring that marking in mathematics lessons is always of good quality, reflecting what pupils have achieved against their individual targets and what they need to learn next.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils say they enjoy many aspects of school life. They are attentive and participate well in lessons. Pupils are keen to practice the skills they have learnt, for example, when they have opportunities to work together and consider appropriate strategies in problem solving. In such lessons, they tackle challenges with interest and learn well. Overall, achievement is good.

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills which are broadly in line with the levels typical for their age. They make good progress and achieve well because they feel safe and secure. Adults welcome children; they listen to their needs and provide well for them. This ensures that children settle quickly and are encouraged to become busy and active learners. In Reception Year, for example, children explored floating and sinking, considering why heavy things sink and light things float.

Pupils continue to progress well as they move through the school. The consistent approach to teaching sounds and letters together with highly effective intervention programmes ensure pupils make excellent progress in their reading. As a result, attainment in reading is above average by the end of Year 2 and significantly high by Year 6. Successful strategies have secured above-average writing attainment; although attainment in mathematics has been largely in line with national averages, it is presently lower. Tasks and activities in English are tailored to pupils' needs with good opportunities to use their literacy skills across the curriculum. Challenges linked to individual needs in mathematics are more variable, with fewer links to other subjects. All groups of pupils, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds, make good progress from their starting points. Disabled pupils, those with special educational needs, and the small number with complex behaviour difficulties make at least good and often better progress because of the highly effective support they are given. Parents and carers believe, rightly, that their children make good progress.

Quality of teaching

Pupils have good attitudes to learning and want to please their teachers. They understand their tasks and demonstrate good application to the work provided. Children progress well in the Early Years Foundation Stage because activities are matched well to their individual needs. Children are helped to settle quickly and are happy. Elsewhere, in the best lessons during the inspection, teachers provided a balance of teacher input and pupil activity, with well-considered opportunities for pupils to investigate using their developing skills. For example, in a Year 6 lesson, pupils used their knowledge of fractions, decimals and percentage to investigate a range of everyday problems. Teaching promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development well. Pupils are encouraged to reflect upon different situations considering what qualities they need to draw upon in order to work together harmoniously. Frequently, lessons have good pace and high expectations and pupils progress well. All parents and carers believe their children are taught effectively and many comment positively on how well they develop into confident learners. These views are supported by the findings of the inspection.

Teachers are skilled at identifying when pupils need individual support, for example, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, pupils with more complex behaviour difficulties, or those who speak English as an additional language. Staff pick up misconceptions quickly and provide focused guidance to ensure pupils make good progress. Teaching assistants are well trained and provide focused and consistently effective support for individual pupils. Greater links across the curriculum have led to increased opportunities to use English skills in other subjects, although the use of mathematics across the curriculum is less well planned. Most teachers make good use of their knowledge of pupils' past learning to match tasks to individual needs. This is seen best in English, where work is marked regularly and written comments encourage the redrafting of small sections, enabling pupils to learn from their mistakes. Pupils understand their successes and what they need to learn next. Teachers do not yet mark to such good effect in mathematics and there is less match of task to ability in areas other than calculation. There are fewer opportunities for pupils to use their developing mathematical skills through active enquiry across the curriculum, which restricts their independent learning. Reading intervention programmes are of exceptional quality. Pupils causing concern are identified early and engage in highly effective one-to-one support. By the end of Year 2, the vast majority of pupils are good readers and well prepared to advance further.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils are very considerate of each other and of the staff who work with them. They appreciate how well their teachers help them and demonstrate this in their response to learning. Staff manage conduct in lessons and about the school rigorously, although, on occasions, this limits opportunities for pupils to be responsible for their own behaviour. Pupils understand the different types of bullying and recognise it when it happens, albeit rarely: 'once in a blue moon', as one pupil remarked. They are equally certain that staff are quick to act and remedy situations. Pupils feel safe in school and they believe they understand how to stay safe in different situations because of different learning opportunities provided. The importance of good attendance is promoted very well and is highly effective, evidenced in the sustained high attendance of recent years. Behaviour is typically good over time, pupils are polite and well-mannered and this impacts positively upon their learning. Very clear expectations are set by staff and pupils know the difference between right and wrong. They understand the repercussions of misbehaviour and the

subsequent involvement of parents and carers. They report that situations rarely get past the initial stages because pupils respond quickly to what is expected of them.

Staff can evidence appropriate and effective systems to manage the behaviour of a very small number of pupils with more complex behavioural difficulties. Good levels of support and communication with parents and carers mean that these pupils make good progress in their personal development and participate fully in school life. A very small minority of parents and carers raised concerns about behaviour or bullying, although the inspection found that this view was unsupported by pupils, observations of pupils in lessons and at play, and in the school's diligent record keeping.

Leadership and management

The strong leadership team is led very effectively by a determined headteacher. She communicates high expectations successfully, celebrates the strengths of her staff and supports their professional development needs, all of which contribute to a very positive team spirit. Senior leaders drive improvement successfully. In particular, leaders and managers ensure provision for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is exceptional, leading to good or better progress for this group. The collection and analysis of assessment data is a strength of the school and it is used successfully to check the attainment and progress of different groups of pupils. Such focus has led, for example, to the setting of challenging targets, resulting in strong improvements in pupils' progress in English, particularly in reading. The newly appointed subject leader for mathematics has ensured that improvements are underway in improving attainment in mathematics to equal that in English.

The school has a very positive relationship with parents, carers and the wider community because of the work by members of staff and the governing body, who share the headteacher's values and ambition. Good partnerships with external agencies and with other schools contribute to the good and improving outcomes for pupils. Leaders and managers at all levels have proven their ability to demonstrate improvements and this is recognised and acknowledged by pupils and their parents and carers. Accurate self-evaluation is the 'cornerstone' of the school's success in improving pupils' academic progress and personal development. Consequently, the school has a good capacity to improve.

The good curriculum is planned well to meet the needs of all pupils and includes a thematic approach to learning. There is a good promotion of pupils' personal development, with strong emphasis upon a positive moral and social code, reflected in pupils' good behaviour and positive attitudes. Links with pupils from a range of other backgrounds support good understanding of other cultures. The development of a school allotment is increasing links with the local community and pupils' knowledge of where our food comes from. A wide range of additional activities extends pupils' skills in music, sport and the arts. Overall, pupils' spiritual, social, moral, and cultural development is good.

The governing body holds the school to account well as it challenges leaders to increased development. It has a good understanding of the work of the school, its strengths and its weaknesses, and is integral in monitoring improvement. This assures a firm commitment to equal opportunities. The governing body makes the well-being of staff and of pupils a priority in its management. It ensures that the before- and after-school clubs care for pupils well and provide an appropriate range of activities. Overall, safeguarding requirements are met. A positive team spirit supports this harmonious community.

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.
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.



16 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Blackfell Primary School, Washington, NE37 1HA

Thank you for the welcome you gave to the inspectors when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking to you and particularly liked the way in which you care for each other and for your school. Your behaviour is good and your attendance is high. We found that adults in your school make sure that you are looked after well and that you feel safe. You were a delight to talk to because you were polite and reflective – we learnt a lot from you. We found that you go to a good school. It is a happy place where everyone gets on very well together and you enjoy all of the opportunities your teachers give you to learn. As a result, you make good progress and achieve well.

The headteacher, staff and the governing body are all dedicated to helping you to do well. We have asked them to improve your school even more by helping you to achieve as well in mathematics across the school as you do in English. They can do this by providing more opportunities for you to use your skills independently through problem solving, and by using your mathematics skills in other subjects. We have also asked teachers to make sure you can do your very best in all lessons, giving you more opportunities to be creative and investigative. We would like teachers to make sure that the clear guidance you get when teachers mark your English work is just as clear in mathematics so that you know how well you are doing and how to improve even faster. You can help by continuing to work hard and by being ready to use your skills in mathematics and English in lots of new and exciting ways.

Yours sincerely

Kate Pringle
Lead inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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