

Howletch Lane Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114198
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	363816
Inspection dates	11–12 April 2011
Reporting inspector	Clive Petts

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	454
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Graham
Headteacher	Mr Robert Hanney
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 23 lessons and observed 17 class teachers. They held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and groups of pupils. They analysed 196 questionnaire responses from parents and carers and looked at questionnaires from staff and pupils. The inspectors also looked at: pupils' progress and achievement data; intervention and support programmes; documents relating to the safeguarding of pupils; school policies; and plans for improving the quality of learning. They scrutinised pupils' current and past work and spoke to the local authority's improvement partner to discuss her reports.

The inspectors reviewed many aspects of the school's work and looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The quality of learning and the rate of progress made by all groups of pupils, including those with physical disabilities in the resource-based provision and the more able and talented.
- The quality of teaching across the school and its effectiveness in accelerating pupils' progress and raising achievement and attainment.
- The effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage in exploiting the available provision to promote good learning and development.
- The effectiveness of senior leadership in bringing about and sustaining the school's improvement and enhancing the outcomes for pupils.

Information about the school

Howletch Lane is a much larger than average-size school. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage, with very few who speak English as an additional language. The school is part of a national pilot scheme which enables all pupils to access a free school meal. A below-average proportion of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities, but over three times the average have a statement of special educational needs. The school hosts a designated resource base for up to 20 pupils with physical disabilities from across East Durham. The school has gained the Investors in People and awards for the school's success in music. The on-site Children's Centre with childcare and pre-school provision is subject to a separate inspection and will receive its own inspection report.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school that cares for its pupils exceptionally well, including those in the resource-based provision. At the heart of the positive and caring ethos are the passion and clear vision of the headteacher. Pupils are confident and happy and their high level of enjoyment of school life is evident in their positive attitudes in classrooms. Their behaviour is good and sometimes exemplary amongst older pupils. This is a reflection of the effective way pupils are taught to respect the feelings of others from an early age. Pupils gain great benefit from the strong links with the local community and take pride in their excellent input into school improvement, such as when writing to the local authority to acquire recycling bins for their use in school. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive and supportive. They particularly appreciate the quality and breadth of experiences their children receive. The comment, 'The school has a wonderful ethos and my child is very happy here', sums up the views of almost all.

Most pupils enter Nursery with skills that are well below those typical for their age, often with weaknesses in their speech and language. At the end of Year 6, although cohorts can vary, attainment in national tests is typically average. Although this represents good progress overall, rates do vary across the school. For example, there is scope to challenge children in Nursery and the more-able pupils still more to ensure faster progress and higher attainment. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities also make good progress. Pupils achieve well in reading and mathematics and, although improving, their writing is less good. Their less well developed writing techniques, coupled with some inaccuracy in punctuation and spelling, can spoil some otherwise quite imaginative and lively ideas. There are some striking examples of outstanding progress made by resource-based pupils because intervention and support is so effectively personalised to meet individual needs. Good teaching ensures good achievement, such as in the lesson in which pupils were totally absorbed when excitedly describing St George's fight with a dragon. However, not all opportunities are taken to use assessment information to tailor tasks to match individual needs and abilities. This includes creating more purposeful learning opportunities for younger children. Marking is helpful and constructive, but does not always set challenging enough targets and provide clear steps for further improvement.

The school has successfully tackled the issue raised at the last inspection. As a result, rigorous and reliable systems to check pupils' progress are in place. The school's judgements of its strengths and areas for improvement are accurate. Senior leaders' determination to enrich pupils' experiences are reflected in the highly successful music and sporting provision. The governing body is reflective and its effective approaches to quality assurance add much to the quality of its work, such as in safeguarding. Excellent partnerships with support agencies greatly enrich pupils' development and well-being. Together, this demonstrates the school's good and strengthening capacity to sustain improvements.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate the rate of pupils' progress further by:
 - - making certain that lesson planning systematically uses available assessment information to pinpoint exactly what learning needs to be consolidated, built upon and extended, especially for the more-able pupils
 - - developing the quality and accuracy of extended writing techniques to engage, entertain and inform the reader.
- Increase the proportion of teaching that is inspiring and exciting, refining the existing good practice by:
 - - tailoring all activities and tasks, both in the main school and in Nursery, to match the needs of children and pupils, to ensure that they are absorbed and learn extremely well
 - - ensuring challenging targets and well-defined steps for further improvement continuously drive the achievement for all pupils.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils achieve well and enjoy their learning. Pupils are motivated to learn because of the really good relationships they have with staff and each other. Their positive behaviour and desire to learn effectively enhance their development. When teaching is inspiring and stimulating, for example when discussing the impact of flooding on different communities, pupils respond well to the thought-provoking and challenging questions. When lessons lack that essential spark, the rate of progress can slow and pupils' concentration slips. Concerted efforts to improve writing skills are having a positive impact, although sometimes basic techniques, inaccuracy and unrefined handwriting can diminish the quality of some imaginative writing. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because their needs are identified early and classroom support is effective.

Pupils report that they feel safe and that staff are always on hand to share a worry or concern. Their excellent cultural development and their respect for the feelings of others contribute effectively to their overall good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This underpins the pupils' considerate and thoughtful attitudes. They understand the positive benefits that a healthy diet and keeping fit can bring. They especially relish the responsibilities that they are given around school. Pupils are safety conscious, particularly when helping potentially vulnerable pupils. They make excellent contributions to the wider community, for example when performing at the nearby Gala theatre in Durham or the Sage in Gateshead. Taking responsibility for the management of the healthy tuck shop promotes a good understanding of ordering stock and managing money. The school works effectively with families and support agencies to promote the benefits of regular attendance, which for almost all is above average.

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
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	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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

How effective is the provision?

The majority of teaching is good with a small minority of lessons satisfactory rather than good. Relationships are very good, with pupils especially supportive of each other's learning. Effective use is made of a variety of resources to enliven learning, such as when using a rolling sequence of emotive photographs and music in a history lesson to raise questions and promote understanding. In those lessons when progress slows or becomes more variable, demands are often mundane and occasionally pupils become restless. Robust progress-checking systems are a real strength and this provides a reliable basis to plan and manage intervention and support for pupils of all abilities and needs. Although timely action is taken when any slips in progress are identified, the information is not always exploited sufficiently to devise activities that increase the level of engagement and challenge. Target-setting does not consistently signpost how pupils can improve their work. Good use is made of open-ended questions, although questioning is sometimes insufficiently probing or thought-provoking, especially for the more-able pupils.

The well-managed and developing curriculum provides a broad range of experiences for pupils. Highly effective and often imaginative links with a range of outside organisations provide a strong and well-matched focus on pupils' personal development and well-being: for example, when supporting Niall's Mile, a charity initiative promoted by Niall Quinn, the chair of Sunderland AFC. A high-quality enrichment programme makes a strong contribution to school life, particularly in music and sport. However, in lessons, not all

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topics and ideas are exploited well enough to create and maintain interest and promote greater understanding.

The school is, rightly, extremely proud of its outstanding care, guidance and support. The total commitment to inclusion enables pupils of all backgrounds to achieve success. The school can point to some excellent examples of real success in helping pupils overcome barriers to their learning and development. There are some exceptional examples of highly effective personalised approaches for resource-based pupils. The valuable links with external agencies make an excellent contribution to the welfare and happiness of pupils, including those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Pupils thoroughly enjoy their time at school because the determination of the headteacher, with the active support of all staff, ensures that they are provided with a safe and welcoming environment in which they can all thrive. Senior leaders know the strengths of their school well. The developing confidence and expertise of middle leaders is adding to the momentum to sustain improvements. Despite the rigorous approaches to check how well pupils are doing, there remains scope to capitalise on available information to boost progress and achievement and extend skills. The governing body is proactive, holding the school to account in positive ways and shaping the school's strategic direction. The school has a strong commitment to making certain all pupils have an equal chance to learn and succeed. As a consequence, inclusion practice is effective although senior leaders do recognise that occasionally the more-able pupils could achieve more. Good safeguarding procedures and practice meet requirements and are especially robust in monitoring all adults that work with pupils.

The good engagement of parents and carers ensures that they can play a part in supporting and making decisions about their children's learning and development. Excellent community links and partnerships with agencies and the adjacent Children's Centre, add to the quality of what the school provides. Community cohesion is promoted well, with developing provision as the international links, such as with the Maori community in New Zealand, are increasingly embedded to provide pupils with direct experiences of other beliefs and cultures.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
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	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children settle quickly and happily in the caring and friendly atmosphere in Nursery and Reception. The skills and experience children demonstrate on arrival in Nursery are well below those typical for their age. Many children display underdeveloped communication and language skills. As they learn and develop, they make satisfactory progress overall although progress rates do vary. For example, good progress is made in Reception where learning is lively and fun and children's thinking is challenged by probing questions from staff, such as when building a helicopter. By the time they reach Year 1, most children are working towards the goals expected of them for their age. Activities are thoughtfully planned to enable children to pursue their curiosity and initiate their own learning and find things out for themselves. Indoors, good opportunities are increasingly provided to enable pupils to apply their skills, for example constructing a hotel with three floors from building blocks. Opportunities to explore and investigate when outside, though improving, are not fully developed. When adult questioning prompts thinking well, such as when designing, constructing and writing an Easter card using fresh flowers for inspiration, skills and knowledge are steadily extended. However, there are times when opportunities are missed, such as when Nursery children are outside, to add more purpose to their play and learning. Children regularly practise letters and sounds and blend these into words, but approaches to speed up early reading and writing are not consistently intensive.

Behaviour is good. Nevertheless, there are occasions when children become over excited, which can slow the pace of learning. Regular observations and assessment provide a sound basis for the accurate assessment of children's progress and development. Welfare requirements are well met and encourage safe habits. The positive engagement of parents and carers supports children's learning well, although not all opportunities are taken to involve them in their children's 'learning journey'. The on-going improvements in provision,

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exploiting the potential for learning both indoors and outdoors, reflect the ambition, drive and increasing confidence of leaders and managers.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

Over one third of all parents and carers returned the questionnaire with their views of the school. This is in line with the national average level of returns. Their views were overwhelmingly positive about the quality of experiences that the school provides and parents and carers appreciate that their children are kept safe and enjoy school. The inspectors entirely endorse these views. A very few parents and carers expressed concerns about the level of help that they receive from the school to support their children's learning. The inspectors observed parents' and carers' visits to Nursery, scrutinised all the questionnaire comments and met with key staff, such as the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) and Early Years Foundation leader. They found much positive evidence to demonstrate that the school engages with parents and carers well, and in individual cases exceptionally well, in their efforts to give parents and carers the help and support that they need.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Howletch Lane Primary 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 196 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 454 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	144	73	47	24	4	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	139	71	55	28	1	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	107	55	75	38	11	6	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	119	61	66	34	6	3	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	133	68	59	30	4	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	113	58	69	35	12	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	114	58	73	37	5	3	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)	108	55	78	40	2	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	115	59	62	32	9	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	118	60	67	34	3	2	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	97	49	84	43	6	3	2	1
The school is led and managed effectively	140	71	53	27	3	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	140	71	48	24	7	4	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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:	<p>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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ 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.



13 April 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Howlatch Lane Primary School, Peterlee, SR8 2NQ

I want to thank you all for the extremely friendly welcome that you gave the inspectors when we visited your school. We really valued our time talking to you.

Howlatch Lane is a good school. We were impressed by your thoughtful behaviour, your respect and consideration of others, your very good relationships with staff and the school's exceptional care for you. You clearly feel confident and happy because of the high quality of care and support you receive. There is no doubt you thoroughly enjoy taking decisions, which helps your school to get even better. You understand the benefits of eating healthily and keeping fit. The excellent links the school enjoys with support agencies and the local community add to the quality of your learning. Some of you told us that some of your teachers make your learning lively and fun. As a result, your skills are improving, including your writing. Your school is taking positive action to continue to improve and this can be seen in your continuing good progress.

We have asked your headteacher, staff and the governing body to look at further ways of helping you to work at a faster rate to improve your skills. We would like staff to use the information they have on how well you are doing to arrange activities which can excite and interest you more, both in the main school and in Nursery. We have asked that when marking your work, you are provided with more detailed help on how to improve. We would like staff to plan your lessons even more carefully to make sure your writing skills, including your handwriting, improve more quickly. We also feel that the targets that are set for you to improve could be even more challenging.

You can all play your part by working as hard as you can and continuing to attend regularly. Thank you for helping with this inspection.

Best wishes for your future.

Yours sincerely

Clive Petts

Lead inspector

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