

Kirk Merrington Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114074
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	378792
Inspection dates	7–8 December 2011
Reporting inspector	Christine Inkster HMI

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	79
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ernie Foster
Headteacher	Helen Williams
Date of previous school inspection	24 January 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. The inspectors observed teaching and learning in five lessons and during a learning walk, observing three teachers and all teaching assistants. They also held meetings with pupils, staff, a member of the governing body and school leaders. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including the school development plan, minutes of governing body meetings, pupils' work, information about the care and protection of pupils (safeguarding) and pupils' performance data. They scrutinised questionnaires from 54 parents and carers, 12 staff and 16 pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The attainment and rates of progress of pupils, particularly higher attaining pupils and in writing.
- How good the quality of teaching and assessment are and how well work meets the needs of all pupils.
- The quality of leadership and management at all levels and whether leaders have successfully improved the quality of teaching and learning.
- The outcomes for all groups of pupils, to help evaluate equality of opportunity.
- The outcomes and provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage and if the needs of reception children are met within the mixed-age class.

Information about the school

Kirk Merrington is a smaller than average sized primary school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average. There are very few pupils from a minority ethnic background and none speak English as an additional language. A higher proportion of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities than that found nationally. These pupils mainly have specific learning difficulties, speech, language and communication difficulties or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school has three mixed-age classes and children in the Reception Year are taught alongside Year 1 and Year 2 pupils. The school has a number of awards, including Healthy School status, the Activemark, Artsmark Silver, the International School Award and UNICEF Rights Respecting School Award.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Kirk Merrington Primary is an outstanding school. Pupils greatly enjoy coming to school as shown by one pupil who commented, 'the school is kind, loving and caring; people make each other happy'. This reflects the outstanding care, guidance and support that pupils receive which contribute very well to pupils' personal development and well-being. The school is exceptionally well led by the headteacher, who is very effectively supported by a team of staff committed to promoting the best possible outcomes for every child.

Children get off to a good start in the Reception class and thoroughly enjoy their learning enabling them to make good progress. However, provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, although good in respect of adult interaction particularly by support staff, is limited by the restrictions in the amount of opportunities and space available for children in independent activities. Pupils make consistently good progress from Year 1 to Year 6 and by the time they leave, attainment is high. This is because teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. Lessons progress at a brisk pace and pupils have a good understanding of their learning. Teachers have good subject knowledge and work is mostly matched well to pupils' needs. However, new assessment procedures have been introduced in reading and writing and these are not yet fully embedded to enable staff to identify 'next steps' in learning more precisely. The curriculum is outstanding and the high quality range of activities that are planned for pupils during and beyond the school day, contribute greatly to their enjoyment in learning.

Pupils say they feel very safe in school because they know the adults care for them very well and they have an excellent understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. They promote healthy lifestyles through exhibitions that are open to parents, carers and members of the local community, choose healthy foods and participate in a wide range of sporting activities. Their behaviour is exemplary and they are very polite and courteous. Pupils demonstrate a high level of responsibility taking on important jobs within the school and in the many outstanding contributions they make to the school and to the wider community. Attendance is above average and pupils are developing their skills at a rapid rate which is preparing them extremely well for the next steps in their education and future lives. They have high aspirations of what they want to achieve in the future.

The school has highly effective partnerships with other agencies, which promote pupils' learning and personal development very well. The school is vigilant in ensuring that all pupils have equal opportunities to make the progress they are capable of. As a result of rigorous monitoring and evaluation and effective action taken, many aspects of the school's work have improved since the last inspection. However, although the school improvement plan identifies very appropriate priorities based on the school's own self-evaluation, it does not always identify ways in which success can be measured. The school has good capacity to build further upon its many successes.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Embed new assessment procedures in reading and writing to help staff identify next steps in learning more precisely.
- Improve the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage to ensure that a wider range of activities are consistently available for children within the mixed-aged class in order to extend learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour are exemplary. In lessons, they are keen to participate and offer their views and opinions as shown by a 'hot seating' drama activity in a Year 5 and 6 class about a Victory Day street party at the end of the Second World War. Pupils were able to empathise very well with the feelings of the characters, from those who had lost a relative to those experiencing joy that the war was over. Similarly, in a Year 2, 3 and 4 class pupils were very excited when they received a letter from an alien who had a problem with the satellite navigation system on his spaceship and needed help to learn to read a map using compass points. They were very keen to help, particularly when they received a 'top secret' envelope containing their task. Pupils work very cooperatively and there are many valuable discussions about their work, particularly through their 'talk partner' sessions. Pupils have a clear understanding of what they are learning and take great pride in their work, which is exceptionally neat and well presented.

Pupils' achievement is outstanding. Children's skills on entry to the Reception Year are broadly typical for their age, but weaker in some aspects of communication, language and literacy and in their personal, social and emotional development. They make good progress from their starting points and by the time they enter Year 1, their attainment is above average. They make consistently good progress across Key Stages 1 and 2 and attainment is high by the end of Year 6. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because their needs are identified accurately and they are supported effectively by well trained staff. This enables them to contribute fully in lessons and all activities within the school. All groups of pupils, including those who are higher attaining, make similar progress.

Pupils make an exceptionally strong contribution to the community. They take their responsibilities as monitors very seriously and older pupils arrange activities for younger pupils, such as singing and dance sessions and games at playtimes. They have a strong voice within the school, as shown by achieving the 'Rights Respecting Award' and they are greatly involved in contributing their ideas towards the design of their new school. They undertake significant work to promote sustainable development by promoting recycling and growing their own vegetables. They contribute to a wide range of charities both locally and through their international links, for example, with South Africa as they are raising funds to provide equipment for a school. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They are able to demonstrate a very secure understanding of those from different backgrounds and religions to their own, know the difference between right and wrong and work and play together in harmony. Pupils are very well prepared for the move to secondary school, not only through their very good basic skills and above average attendance, but also through their excellent personal qualities which prepare them exceptionally well for future success.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is consistently good across the school and some lessons are outstanding. Teachers make lessons fun and enjoyable for pupils. They make it very clear what they want pupils to learn and the steps they need to take to ensure success. Teachers have good subject knowledge and skilful questioning is used to challenge pupils' thinking and check their understanding. Pupils understand their individual learning targets and work hard to achieve them. Marking and feedback are of good quality and are used consistently across the school. Pupils' work is of good quality; there is prompt attention to spelling, punctuation and grammar and work is extremely neat and well presented. Assessment is mainly used effectively to inform planning. However, new assessment systems have been introduced for reading and writing but they are not yet embedded enough to ensure that precise 'next steps' in learning are identified for individual pupils.

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

The outstanding curriculum offers an extensive range of interesting activities. Pupils engage in a wide range of valuable first hand experiences such as a visit to an army camp to learn about the Second World War. They also experience residential visits such as those to France which greatly enhance their understanding of those from other countries and cultures. Music is a strength of the school and pupils have gained the gold 'Sing up' award and most pupils in Key Stage 2 are part of the brass band. A very wide range of enrichment activities include visits, visitors, and a variety of sporting, creative and cultural activities which greatly enhance pupils' learning.

Staff know pupils extremely well as individuals. Prompt action is taken to ensure that every child receives the support they need, particularly those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable or those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, to enable them to achieve as well as they can. Pupils are adamant that they are very well cared for and that the school is a very safe place to learn and play. There are very effective links with other agencies in order to promote pupils' personal, health and emotional development. The respect that the staff and pupils have for each other makes this an exceptionally caring school. As one pupil stated, 'We are all like one big family; if one person is sad, we are all sad and if someone is happy, we are all happy'.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher, very ably supported by the deputy headteacher and a team of highly committed staff, provides inspirational leadership. There is a very positive team approach, with staff sharing a strong commitment to evaluating their practice, sharing ideas and trying out new ways of working. Leaders constantly strive to improve and are not complacent. Leaders monitor and evaluate the work of the school effectively and use the outcomes to identify areas for further development, including in respect of improving the quality of teaching and learning. The effectiveness of the governing body is good. It provides effective challenge and support and has a good understanding of the school's performance. Together with the headteacher, the governing body is providing a strategic role in planning for the new school building.

The school has a wide range of extremely effective partnerships with other schools and agencies, including those at home and abroad. The opportunities provided for pupils as a result of these partnerships make an important contribution to pupils' personal and academic success, including correspondence with pen pals and residential visits to France. The school's promotion of equality of opportunity is outstanding because of the way in which it meets the needs of all groups of pupils and all pupils are included in everything the school has to offer. Community cohesion

is outstanding and forms an important part of the school’s work. The school is a calm and very harmonious community and there are extensive links within the local, national and international communities. This enables pupils to understand the valuable role they have to play in today’s society. Systems for safeguarding pupils are implemented effectively, appropriate policies and procedures are in place and all staff are appropriately trained ensuring the school is a safe place for pupils to learn.

These are the grades for the leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
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	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make a good start to their education in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Strong relationships and sensitive support ensure that children settle quickly and make good progress in their learning and personal development. Staff work effectively as a team to support the learning needs of children and use questioning and observation well to plan activities that build upon their prior learning. Staff quickly identify any children who may need additional help and support is promptly provided. Children are motivated to learn and are keen to talk about their discoveries for example, in one session led by two teaching assistants, children were extremely excited when they discovered that aliens had visited, leaving footprints and pictures of themselves around the room. A special gift was left with a card asking the children to search in the ‘alien slime’ for some letters and asking the children to show the aliens how well they knew their sounds and could write their letters. The excitement and joy on the children’s faces was a delight to observe. However, provision is limited in terms of space and the breadth of activities available for independent learning within this mixed-age class. It is the good quality adult intervention, particularly by highly trained support staff, that enables the children to make good progress. The Early Years Foundation Stage is well led and managed and all welfare requirements are met.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation stage	2
Taking into account:	2
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Approximately two thirds of parents and carers responded to the questionnaire. Most parents and carers greatly appreciate the work of the staff, the extent to which the school keeps their child safe and the way in which the school helps their child to have a healthy lifestyle. An overwhelming majority say their child enjoys school. As one parent wrote, echoing the views of most, 'An excellent school which provides a happy and safe education for my children'. Other parents and carers indicated that it is a caring school and that any concerns have been dealt with in a quick and effective manner in order to reduce any anxiety. A very small minority of parents and carers feel that their child is not making enough progress or that the school does not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour. The inspectors judged that pupils are making at least consistently good progress and that pupils' behaviour is exemplary. Leaders indicate that they are keen to listen to any concerns expressed by parents and carers so that these can quickly be resolved.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Kirk Merrington 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 inspector received 54 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 79 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	31	57	22	41	1	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	32	59	19	35	3	6	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	22	41	28	52	2	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	26	48	21	39	4	7	2	4
The teaching is good at this school	33	61	15	28	5	9	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	25	46	23	43	1	2	3	6
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	25	46	29	54	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	19	35	26	48	3	6	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	18	33	30	56	2	4	2	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	21	39	27	50	6	11	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	17	31	31	57	3	6	3	6
The school is led and managed effectively	18	33	27	50	5	9	2	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	25	46	23	43	3	6	3	6

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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 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 2010/11 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.



9 December 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Kirk Merrington Primary School, Spennymoor DL16 7JB

Thank you for making us so welcome when we came to visit your school and for sharing your views with us. You told us how proud you are of your school and how much you enjoy your learning. I would like to tell you about some of the things we found.

- Your school is outstanding and has many strengths.
- Staff care for you extremely well and this helps you to feel very safe.
- Your behaviour is excellent and you support and help each other very well.
- You enjoy your learning because the curriculum is exciting with lots of clubs, visitors and visits, including the residential trips and visits abroad.
- You make good progress in your learning because teaching is at least good and sometimes outstanding and, as a result, you reach high standards in your work by the time you leave Year 6.
- Your headteacher, the staff and members of the governing body think very carefully about the ways in which your school could be better and this is helping make sure that your school continually improves.

We have asked the headteacher and the staff to do two things.

- Ensure that they use the new systems to assess your work even more carefully in reading and writing so that they can provide you with work at exactly the right level for you.
- Ensure that the opportunities for the youngest children are even better, particularly in your new school where there will be more space for them to learn and play.

We hope that all of you continue to work very hard and enjoy your learning. You should be very proud of yourselves and your school. We wish you the very best in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Christine Inkster
Her Majesty's Inspector

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