

Bullion Lane Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114209
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	395377
Inspection dates	25–26 April 2012
Lead 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	314
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Bailey
Headteacher	Sarah Barningham
Date of previous school inspection	3 April 2008
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Introduction

Inspection team

Clive Petts

Anne Vernon

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Additional Inspector

Additional Inspector

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 17 lessons taught by 12 class teachers. They also observed intervention activities for small groups of pupils, talked to different groups of pupils about their learning and scrutinised in detail the work in pupils' books. Inspectors checked pupils' reading across the age range. In addition, inspectors held discussions with pupils, members of the governing body, staff, an external consultant and the designated senior school improvement adviser. The inspectors observed the school's work and examined a range of documentation, including the school's records relating to pupils' progress and achievement, evidence relating to leadership and management, monitoring and evaluation, behavioural records and safeguarding. They also took into account the questionnaires, returned by 59 parents and carers, 79 pupils and five staff.

Information about the school

Bullion Lane is a larger than average-sized primary school. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage with none at the early stage of learning English. An above average proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is twice the national average, with a higher than average number with a statement of special educational needs or at school action plus. The school meets the government's current floor standard which sets out the minimum expectations for attainment and progress. The school extends its services in that it provides a breakfast club each morning. The privately run Bullion Lane After School Club which operates from a demountable building on the school site, is subject to a separate inspection and will receive their own inspection report which will be available on the Ofsted website. The school has achieved the Artsmark Gold, Activemark and Enhanced Healthy School status. In September 2011 a new headteacher was appointed. For three months during the autumn term 2011, the school operated in temporary accommodation in a nearby school while classroom ceilings were repaired.

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

Key Findings

- Bullion Lane is a satisfactory school. It is improving steadily because the headteacher has quickly established a strong focus on enriching learning and increasingly high expectations. She has secured the confidence and trust of parents and carers. The school is not good because it has yet to achieve a sustained and consistent pattern of good achievement and average attainment at the end of Year 6. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Children enter the Nursery class happily and confidently and make good progress in their social and emotional development. Over time, pupils make satisfactory academic progress by the time they leave school. It is improving appreciably, because staff expectations of what pupils can achieve are ever-increasing, especially in their reading and writing. This includes boys, although they still make slower progress than the girls.
- A majority of teaching observed was good and occasionally outstanding but over time its impact on pupils' achievement is satisfactory, because aspects of practice are inconsistent. When progress is slower, assessment information is not always well matched to the pupils' needs and the challenge and pace in lessons is not sustained.
- All parents and carers think extremely highly of the school. Pupils' behaviour is good and sometimes exemplary. Attendance is average and improving. Incidents of any type of bullying are very few and when they occur they are dealt with swiftly and appropriately. Pupils demonstrate a good sense of how to keep safe and avoid danger.
- As a result of the headteacher's drive and accurate evaluation of school performance, there are distinct signs of improvement in almost all aspects of the school's work. She has galvanised the work of staff and all feel valued and share a common ambition and purpose. The governing body are increasingly pro-active challenging and holding the school to account. Teaching is well led and coaching increasingly effective. The strong sense of family promotes spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement and attainment in reading and writing to be least average, particularly for the boys, by:
 - making certain activities inspire and excite pupils' thinking to keep them interested and fully engaged in lessons
 - providing more opportunities in all subjects to practise their skills, especially their writing
 - extending pupils' confidence and skills to answer questions fully, explain their reasoning and justify their ideas.

- Ensure that all teaching matches the best in order to boost achievement by:
 - building upon the existing imaginative and thought-provoking practice in the school to ensure a consistent level of challenge, pace and variety in lessons
 - ensuring rigorous use of assessment information to match activities closely to the pupils' varying age, ability, needs and interests
 - making certain that pupils are clear about what they are expected to learn
 - using marking consistently and concisely to provide clearly defined steps for improvement.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

The achievement of pupils over time is satisfactory, although it does vary from the well-below average and sometimes low starting points. At present, it is improving for all groups of pupils as improvements in the richness and quality of learning are systematically embedded. Positive action has been taken to establish robust systems to check pupils' development. The identification of those who require extra help or those whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable is increasingly accurate. A sharper focus on the teaching of letter and sounds relationships is promoting skills consistently. For example, in a Year 1 lesson excellent use was made by the teacher of role play with 'Mr Lee' the imaginary character exciting and inspiring pupils to practise new letter sounds. In a majority of lessons observed, pupils' enjoyment was evident, encouraging good progress across all ages and abilities. Despite the accelerating pace of improvement, pupils' progress is satisfactory, because a consistent pattern of higher achievement has yet to be sustained.

On entry into the Nursery class, children's speech and language skills are often underdeveloped and a few find the rigour of classroom routines difficult. Most children settle quickly and happily to make good progress in the nursery, because they are motivated to explore and investigate for themselves. High expectations for routine working in Nursery and Reception classes promote positive attitudes and good self-control. The increasingly creative curriculum combines subjects together in appealing ways, such as when using a boat trip on the River Wear at Durham to describe the condition of a river. However, not all opportunities are exploited sufficiently to practise reading and writing skills in all subjects to help close their attainment gaps even more rapidly. At times, tasks are not sufficiently well-matched to capture and hold the interests of pupils, particularly of boys. Occasionally, pupils are not always clear what to do.

In national tests in 2011 at the end of Year 6, attainment in mathematics was below average, but in English it fell significantly below the level expected with the writing skill of boys a particular weakness. Previously, attainment had been typically broadly average, although lower in English than mathematics, especially for boys. Over time, this represents satisfactory achievement. The school's information on pupils' progress, confirmed by inspection evidence, reveals that current Year 6 pupils are making faster progress and achieving at least satisfactorily. Attainment is rising through the school and gaps between subjects and pupil groups are closing, including in writing and for boys and those eligible for free school meals. For example, pupils are increasingly fluent discussing their views and writing to present an argument or express a feeling or mood. Attainment in reading by the age of six and at the end of Year 2 is below and sometimes well below that expected for their age. Concerted action to improve the teaching of reading is promoting a school culture in which pupils can enjoy and use reading to gain further knowledge. In Year 6, improvements are being made in nurturing an interest in and enjoyment of reading, although a large majority of pupils, often boys, is at an early stage of acquiring an appreciation of an author's style. Consequently, skills are below the level typical for their age.

Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs also make satisfactory progress and in individual cases good progress, especially in mathematics. Their rate of progress is quickening more consistently as intervention programmes, support and the checking of their development become increasingly effective. All parents and carers appreciate the good progress their children are making but inspectors judge progress to be satisfactory over time.

Quality of teaching

Teachers set high expectations for pupils' behaviour and enjoy excellent relationships with them. Consequently, a positive climate for learning exists in classrooms. Inspectors found that improving teaching is making greater demands of pupils, including the more able, taking advantage of their enthusiasm and the opportunities the curriculum offers. All parents and carers feel that their children are well taught. However, the impact of the improvements has yet to be seen in a consistent pattern of good achievement across all ages and groups of pupils. In particular, in many lessons teachers plan too few activities to develop pupils' basic skills, particularly for writing, in meaningful contexts in a range of subjects. As a result, teaching is satisfactory over time. The school employs effective approaches to improve the quality of learning support.

Effective professional development and coaching is improving the quality of teaching, such as the teaching of early reading and writing. The best lessons shape and adapt activities thoughtfully to meet individual needs, fun approaches capture interest and questioning constantly thought-provoking. For example, older pupils were observed totally absorbed drawing fact triangles quickly and accurately before justifying their solutions. In lessons when teaching is outstanding, thought-provoking questioning encourages pupils to explain their answers and ideas fully. When teaching is satisfactory, activities are not consistently matched to individual needs and pace of learning is often slower, because too much time is spent on the same task. Opportunities are also missed to allow pupils to explain their thinking and pupils are not always clear about what is expected of them and how to improve their work. As a result, concentration slips and progress slows.

Careful planning and effective support ensures that disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are fully involved and are able to achieve equally well. More-able pupils particularly enjoy their opportunities in 'partner talk' to challenge each other's thinking. The

good and sometimes excellent levels of collaborative working are strengths of their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Older pupils are familiar with the levels at which they are working. Marking is positive and helpful but does not consistently provide clearly defined steps for improvement.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' good and sometimes exemplary behaviour contributes very positively to the very strong social and moral ethos of the school. Pupils enjoy school and this is evident in their improving attendance. Classrooms are happy and friendly places to work. Almost all parents and carers agree. Pupils willingly participate in the activities provided for them and are particularly supportive of one another when working in pairs or groups, including in Nursery and Reception. Occasionally when tasks are unexciting, pupils can become a little fidgety, but in most lessons pupils' enthusiasm makes a strong contribution to their learning. The friendly atmosphere in the well-organised breakfast club provides a positive start to the school day.

Pupils report that there are very few incidents of inappropriate behaviour or bullying of any type. The school's records demonstrate that this is the case over time too. For example, there has been a significant reduction in exclusions, particularly of boys, since the previous inspection. Pupils describe that if they have any concerns or worries, staff are always on hand and respond promptly. The school is effectively meeting the needs and interests of pupils whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable through the use of excellent partnership working with parents and carers. Good links with other schools and specialist agencies add to the quality of care and support such as the recent appointment of a parent support worker shared with the nearby secondary school. Pupils state that they feel safe and almost all parents and carers agree. Younger pupils describe how Policeman 'Brian' helps them use new technology safely. The school council takes much pride in their positive contributions to a wide range of school improvements, such as organising the support given to younger pupils in the playground. The value of regular attendance is well promoted with improvements celebrated in meaningful ways.

Leadership and management

After an unsettled period of leadership the headteacher, with good support from senior colleagues, has galvanised the whole school in a short space of time. Staff feel that their contributions are valued and welcome the responsibility given to them to bring about sustained improvement. Performance management is firmly linked to each pupil's development. The increasing confidence and expanding expertise of subject leaders is adding to the drive for sustained improvement. The monitoring of teaching is robust and linked to appropriate programmes of professional development. Systematic checks on pupils' development are quickly detecting any slips in progress, helping to close the gaps in pupils' achievement. The supportive and recently strengthened governing body provides satisfactory challenge, but is increasingly pro-active in holding the school to account in positive ways and shaping the strategic direction of the school. Self-evaluation is now accurate. Effective collaborative working with local authority specialists, such as in the drive to reduce unauthorised absence, is adding to the impetus of improvement. The capacity to sustain improvements is satisfactory with distinct signs that it is progressively strengthening.

The satisfactory curriculum is being systematically remodelled, extending the range of interesting learning experiences and approaches, for example, when adopting more

imaginative approaches to the teaching of writing. Themed events add to the interest for pupils, although not all opportunities are exploited enough, especially for boys. The increasing range of cultural experiences, for example the visit of the Zulu Warriors, promotes pupils' good understanding of the diverse world around them. Although discrimination is tackled effectively, equality of opportunity is satisfactory overall. It is improving steadily as inconsistencies in the pattern of pupils' progress and achievement are successfully addressed. The excellent links the headteacher has established with parents and carers is encouraging them to be increasingly involved in their children's education. Safeguarding requirements are met with much good day-to-day practice adopted, such as ensuring the site and building access are secure. The use of temporary accommodation was well managed and safety aspects carefully met.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	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 to 31 December 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.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures
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.



27 April 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Bullion Lane Primary School, Chester le Street, DH2 2DP

We want to thank you all for the enjoyable time we had when we visited your school to see how well you were learning. We were very impressed by your friendly welcome and the thoughtful and sensible way you responded to our questions.

We think that Bullion Lane is a satisfactory and steadily improving school. We were pleased with the excellent relationships your headteacher has established with your parents and carers since she arrived. You told us that your staff never stop encouraging you to do as well as you possibly can. We were impressed by your good and sometimes excellent behaviour and the friendly and considerate relationships you enjoy with all of your staff. It is good to hear that you feel so safe and think bullying of any sort rarely happens. You said that your staff deal promptly with any issues you raise. You also told us of your pride in helping your school to improve.

Your headteacher and governing body are taking very positive action to make certain your school continues improving. They are keen to make certain your reading and writing, especially that of the boys, continues to improve and we agree. We would like the school to ensure all lessons are interesting, encourage you to work quickly and frequently test your thinking. We would like your teachers to share their best practice and ideas to make certain all of your activities are well-matched to your needs and interests and make clear what you need to do. We have also asked your teachers to provide you with distinct steps for improvement in your books, so that your skills are improved with every new piece of work.

You can all play your part by attending regularly and continuing to work as hard as you possibly can. All the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Clive Petts
Lead Inspector

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