

Mowden Infants' School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	138175
Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	404555
Inspection dates	27–28 June 2012
Lead inspector	Barbara Hudson

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	5–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	180
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	E McAllister
Headteacher	B Watkinson
Date of previous school inspection	2 December 2008
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Introduction

Inspection team

Barbara Hudson
Kathleen Mullen

Additional inspector
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors visited 14 lessons or parts of lessons. Seven teachers were observed and one teaching assistant and approximately eight hours were spent in direct observation of teaching and learning. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, members of the governing body and school staff. The inspectors observed the school's work in and out of the classrooms and looked at documentation relating to pupils' achievement, safeguarding, school improvement planning and the governing body. Inspectors analysed parents' and carers' responses expressed in the 68 questionnaires returned and the responses in questionnaires completed by staff and pupils.

Information about the school

This is an average-sized infant school. The infant school has been in a hard federation with the junior school on the same site since March 2010, and shares the same headteacher and two deputy headteachers, one based in the infants and the other in the juniors. The two federated schools have been part of an academy trust since June 2012. The Ofsted inspection teams for both schools collaborated on the inspection and the production of the reports.

Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. A few pupils are from minority-ethnic backgrounds and almost all of this group speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average. The proportion of those supported by school action plus or with a statement for special educational needs is very low. The school has achieved numerous national awards including Healthy School status, Activemark and Eco-school Green Flag 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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	2

Key Findings

- This is a good school. It is not yet outstanding because pupils' progress is not consistent in all subjects. Parents, carers, pupils and staff are very positive about the school. The recent federation of the infant and junior schools has had a very positive impact on school development.
- Progress is good and often outstanding in reading and writing so that pupils, by the end of Key Stage 1, are keen readers and write exceptionally well. However progress in mathematics, although good and sometimes outstanding, slows in Year 1. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress in all areas of learning. However, in the adult-led activities a few children do not receive the attention they require because teaching groups are too big.
- Teaching is good overall. However, it varies from outstanding to satisfactory and this affects the rate of progress pupils make. When teaching is outstanding, activities capture pupils' imagination and they are given very clear instructions about what they are to learn and how they will achieve it. This is not evident in lessons that are satisfactory. In some lessons in mathematics in Year 1, activities are not always well matched to pupils' level of ability.
- The excellent relationships between staff and pupils ensure pupils are eager to learn and feel very safe and secure. They fully understand and meet the very high expectations the school has for behaviour. Pupils' attitudes to work are excellent.
- The skilful bringing together of the infant and junior school staff into the Federation of Mowden Schools has resulted in good systems for the management of performance and the leadership of teaching. The rigour with which performance is evaluated is ensuring that the school is improving at a good rate.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure pupils' progress is consistently good or better across the school by:
 - ensuring that work is always well matched to pupils' abilities and that every lesson has a clear focus for learning, particularly in mathematics in Year 1
 - reducing the size of the groups in adult-directed activities in the Early Years Foundation Stage, so that each child's needs can be focused upon more effectively
 - building on the best practice in the school and the federation to raise the quality of teaching further.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils are very motivated to learn because they know what they do well, where they need to improve and strive to achieve their challenging targets. This is due to the recent successful introduction of a pupil mentoring system by the federation. The good teaching and interesting curriculum ensure pupils are enthusiastic learners as they eagerly master new knowledge and skills. This was very evident in an outstanding Year 2 literacy lesson where pupils were required to help 'policeman Henderson bear' to find the punctuation 'stolen' from sentences.

All parents and carers who completed the questionnaires are very pleased with the progress their children make in the federation. As one parent or carer wrote on a questionnaire, 'Every child is seen as a child first, whose strengths and passions are built on, and areas of weakness are developed.'

Children start in the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and knowledge that are above average. Careful monitoring of children's abilities and interests enables staff to provide a good range of appropriate activities both indoors and outdoors which promotes good learning. Children make good progress and leave the Early Years Foundation Stage with attainment well above average. In Key Stage 1 pupils make good progress to attain significantly better than the national average. Most pupils attain Level 2a and some attain Level 3. In some lessons progress is outstanding, as in Year 2 when pupils are given a high level of challenge and activities captivate their attention. Attainment in reading at the end of Year 2 is significantly above average. Pupils read with fluency, good expression and have good comprehension skills. In mathematics progress is sometimes slower in Year 1 because work is not always matched to pupils' level of ability.

Staff are well organised to ensure disabled pupils and those with special educational needs and the very few who are learning English as an additional language make good progress. This is because their ability is carefully analysed and a good range of bespoke interventions are put in place and carefully monitored and evaluated.

Quality of teaching

Parents, carers and pupils highly value the good teaching provided by staff. Overall teaching is good; however, it varies from outstanding to satisfactory. When teaching is outstanding lessons are broken down into small segments and pupils are given very clear instructions

about what they are to learn and how they will achieve this goal. This was very evident in a science lesson where pupils were asked to work through an experiment to find out which substances, when mixed with water, would result in a process that is reversible or irreversible. The frequent reminders to, 'think like a scientist' to solve their problem helped pupils make outstanding gains in their knowledge and skills. In the Early Years Foundation Stage teaching is good because all staff are very good at asking pertinent questions to help children think and move their learning on. This is particularly evident when the children choose their activities and the groups are small. In the adult-led activities, the bigger groups reduce the amount of focused questioning and support for individual children. In satisfactory lessons, particularly in mathematics in Year 1, lessons often lack a clear focus on what pupils are to learn and what they need to do to achieve it, and, as a consequence, pupils make satisfactory progress rather than good or better.

The presentation of pupils' work is good and pupils are proud of what they produce. Teachers' marking of pupils' work is regular and often helpful. It is most helpful in pupils' writing books when teachers provide prompts for improvements, which pupils respond to by improving their work.

Teaching provides disabled pupils and those with special educational needs with excellent levels of care and support which bolsters their confidence and allows them to learn effectively. Their work is tailored to their needs and staff work very well with parents and carers so that they can support their children at home. Parents and carers of these pupils are full of praise for the care and support their children receive in school.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Staff have very high expectations for pupils' behaviour. Pupils' response is exceedingly positive, resulting in excellent behaviour in lessons and around school. Their excellent behaviour is reflected in their excellent attitudes, which enable them to apply themselves to the work they have been given to do. In discussions with pupils, they say behaviour is always as good as this. The pupils', parents' and carers' questionnaires and the very few entries in the school's logs for behaviour, bullying and racist incidents, confirm that what was observed during the inspection is the norm. The very successful use of the mentoring system introduced by the federation has had a very positive impact on those pupils' whose behaviour can be more challenging than most, because it has provided everyone with a consistent framework to talk to pupils and to their parents and carers. Pupils show that they enjoy coming to school because their attendance is above average and they are very rarely late. As one child said, 'I love coming to school. I wouldn't miss one day for the world.'

All staff are vigilant about keeping pupils safe. Pupils say bullying is very rare and they know about different types. If bullying does occur it is very quickly sorted out because they know that they have to tell an adult. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe beyond school, such as being safe on the roads and by ensuring that an adult knows where they are at all times.

Leadership and management

The talented senior leadership team of the federation has, in a short space of time, very successfully brought together the staff from both schools into one cohesive group. The whole federation of staff and the governing body are ambitious and determined to

continually make the school a better place for the pupils. Pupils, parents and carers also see that the federation has created much closer links between the two schools and this has had a very positive impact on the time when children transfer from the infant school to the juniors. The successful introduction of middle leaders within each school has strengthened the leadership team so that new ideas can be shared, discussed and better implemented.

Staff value highly the new opportunities that the federation has given them. An excellent example of this is the way in which the school's teaching and learning policy has been reviewed and is used for rigorous performance management and appropriate professional development. The recently introduced assessment system is ensuring that each pupil's progress is carefully monitored. The rigorous analysis of the assessment data is ensuring that when a pupil falls behind, interventions are put in place and, if necessary, leaders can work with staff to ensure the problem is rectified so that pupils have equality of opportunity.

The sharing of good practice within the federation is the norm. A good example of this is the way in which both schools have revised the curriculum providing a good thematic, skills-based approach to planning, adapted from the infant school's approach. The school is aware of the need to share the best practice in teaching, learning and the curriculum even more widely across the federation in order to improve the quality from good to outstanding. The federation, although a recent development, is having a very positive impact on the outcomes for the pupils and staff, showing good and accelerating capacity to improve.

All staff and the governing body have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and where it needs to improve. An example of this being that steps have already been taken to improve the rate of pupils' progress in mathematics in Year 1, although these have yet to have an impact. The highly effective governing body rigorously holds the school to account. Its members bring a wide range of expertise and experience to the service of the school and community. They are vigilant and prudent about ensuring good value for money and are very aware of the economies, both financial and in respect of time that the federation has given them. The governing body ensures that policies are understood and implemented effectively by all staff, including those for safeguarding and tackling discrimination. Members of the staff and the governing body make extremely positive partnerships with parents and carers, who, in turn, are high in their praise of how well their children are taught and cared for in school.

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.



29 June 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Mowden Infants' School, Darlington, DL3 9QG

Thank you very much for the friendly welcome you gave the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking with you and appreciated the open way in which you answered our questions. I am sure you will be delighted to know that we judge your school to be a good school. This means that the school has lots of good things, some that are outstanding and some that need improving.

Some of the good and outstanding things about your school are:

- the excellent way in which you apply yourself to the work you do in lessons and your outstanding behaviour
- the good teaching that ensures you make good progress in your lessons
- the way in which the staff of the infant and junior school are working so well together to make the whole school a better place for all.

Even in good schools there are still things that can be improved. We have asked your headteacher to work with staff to look at ways in which:

- pupils in Year 1 can improve their progress in mathematics
- the size of the teaching groups in the Early Years Foundation Stage can be reduced so that all children can get the attention they need
- the excellent teaching in both schools can be used to increase the number of outstanding lessons in your school.

You can help the school become even better by continuing to work as hard as you do now in your lessons.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Hudson
Lead inspector

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