

Mowden Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	138176
Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	404556
Inspection dates	27–28 June 2012
Lead inspector	Dr Michael Wardle

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	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	250
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	E McAllister
Headteacher	B Watkinson
Date of previous school inspection	14 March 2007
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Introduction

Inspection team

Michael Wardle
Moira Fitzpatrick

Additional inspector
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 20 lessons and part-lessons and made shorter visits to classes to review displays and observe individual pupils and groups at work. They listened to pupils read. Inspectors also scrutinised planning, talked to pupils and evaluated their work. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, members of the governing body and school leaders. Inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), as well as documents provided by the school. These included safeguarding records, the school development plan and school self-evaluation documents. They analysed 104 questionnaires returned by parents and carers as well as those from staff and pupils.

Information about the school

The school is slightly larger than the average-sized junior school. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils from minority-ethnic groups, and the proportion known to be eligible for free school meals, is below the national average. The proportion of those learning English as an additional language is similar to that found in most schools nationally. The proportion of disabled pupils and those supported by school action plus or with a statement of educational needs is low. The school meets the current floor standards, which sets the government's minimum expectations for attainment and progress. The school has achieved the Healthy School status and the Becta information and communication technology (ICT) award.

The school has been in a hard federation with the infant 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.

Childcare is available before the start and after the end of the school day through a private provider. This provision is subject to a separate inspection.

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 improving rapidly. Comments made by parents and carers, such as, 'We are delighted with the school and with the approachable and enthusiastic teachers' are typical. The recent federation of the infant and junior schools has had a very positive impact on school development. The school is not yet outstanding because pupil progress is not consistently rapid in every year group.
- Pupils make good progress during their time at school and leave with standards of attainment which are high when compared with the national average. The mentoring programme, in which individual learning targets are discussed with pupils, has improved pupils' progress. However, inconsistencies in approach mean that pupils make faster progress in some year groups than in others.
- The quality of teaching is good. At its very best, teaching in school is creative and well planned, so that tasks are tailored to individual needs. Sometimes, however, the rate of pupils' progress slows because they are not given enough chances to develop independence or to take control of their own learning. Opportunities to share the best teaching practice across the federation are developing, but are yet to be fully utilised.
- The behaviour of pupils is exemplary. They are courteous and polite to others and, as a result, the school is a safe and welcoming environment. In the classroom pupils are fully engaged in learning. They are brimming with enthusiasm about their lessons and their school. This outstanding attitude makes a very significant contribution to their learning.
- The headteacher and other leaders in the school, together with the committed and able governing body, have a clear vision for school improvement. The positive way in which the staff within the federation have been brought together is testament to their skilful leadership. All staff are held to account for their work and strong leadership of teaching has led to improved performance. Nevertheless, a few inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and rate of pupils' progress remain.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure pupils' progress is consistently rapid across the school by:
 - providing more opportunities to share the very best teaching practice across the federation to increase the proportion of teaching that is outstanding
 - increasing opportunities across the curriculum for pupils to take control of their learning and learn independently
 - fully embedding the target-setting process across the school so that all year groups make the very best of progress.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Parents and carers say that their children are achieving well at school. Lessons observed and pupils' work seen confirm that pupils are making good progress. In lessons, pupils move forward in their learning and develop skills in communication, reading, writing and mathematics well. Pupils are very articulate, and able to enter high level discussions, an example of which was seen when Year 5 pupils were debating the reasons for, and impact of, immigration in the United Kingdom.

Pupils start school with knowledge, skills and understanding which are significantly above average. They make good and sustained progress, building effectively upon their skills and knowledge. Consequently, by the time pupils leave school, attainment in English and mathematics is high. The percentage of pupils reaching Level 5 in reading, writing and mathematics is much higher than that seen nationally. Pupils achieve high standards in writing and mathematics because skills are reinforced systematically throughout the curriculum. Pupils are fluent readers and talk animatedly about their enjoyment of reading although their standards in reading are not quite at the same high level as those attained in writing and mathematics.

Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress from their starting points. This is because work is matched to their needs, and helps to engage them in their learning. Support staff provide effective help to groups of pupils who need to focus on certain aspects of their learning. Boys and girls make equally good progress.

The recent development of the mentoring programme has had a striking impact on pupils' achievement. Close liaison between teachers, pupils, parents and carers in developing bespoke pupil targets has led to rapid progress in some year groups. However, the rate of pupils' progress is not yet consistent across the school due to variations in the quality of teaching and because the target-setting process is not fully embedded in all classes.

Quality of teaching

Parents and carers have a high regard for the quality of teaching in school, and inspection evidence confirms that teaching is good. Teachers have worked successfully to develop their skills and, as a result, teaching has many strengths. During the inspection much of the teaching seen was good or outstanding, although some satisfactory teaching was observed.

Most teachers have high expectations for all of the pupils they teach. Lessons are well planned and learning activities match the full range of pupils' needs. All pupils, including those who are disabled, and those who have special educational needs, make good progress. Lessons stretch the more-able pupils and, as a result, attainment for these pupils is particularly high. Relationships in the classroom are very strong and pupils are committed to their learning and concentrate very well. Teachers use questioning effectively to gauge the understanding of the pupils and to move them on in their learning. Marking is consistent and effective in helping pupils see their next steps. In the very best lessons the content is highly engaging and helps to develop pupils' wider skills, such as empathy, in addition to focusing on literacy and numeracy. In an effective Year 5 lesson pupils were writing a letter to an agony aunt about relationship problems with parents and carers, based on a diary entry. Due to their active interest in the topic, pupils produced some excellent letters.

Topics and themes chosen by the teachers promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils well. In an assembly, for example, pupils listened intently to a presentation about Olympic values. When the headteacher introduced a visiting speaker, who had brought an Olympic torch to school, the hall was buzzing with excitement. During the inspection, Year 4 pupils enjoyed a Caribbean day and were seen applying their artistic and design skills well as they painted T-shirts and made bracelets. They practised their mathematical skills when inventing and tasting tropical drinks. Pupils report that these types of activity happen frequently, help them learn, and make school fun.

Sometimes, however, the pace of learning is not quick enough. Some lessons are overly directed by the teacher and there are fewer opportunities for the development of independence. Pupils make the best progress when there are opportunities for them to shape the direction of their learning, but this is not a consistent feature of all lessons. There is not yet enough outstanding teaching to lead to consistently rapid and sustained progress for all the pupils across the school.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The behaviour of pupils is exemplary, and this is significantly supporting their progress. Their attitudes to learning are outstanding. They show a high level of resilience and cooperate extremely well with their peers in class. They stay on task and work hard. A large majority of parents and carers agree, and also say that the school helps keep their children safe. When asked, pupils said that the school is a friendly and happy place and that the behaviour seen on inspection was typical. Pupils are courteous and respectful when moving around school and at unstructured times of the day. The vast majority of pupils say that they enjoy coming to school. Attendance for all groups of pupils is well above average. Pupils are punctual and lessons start on time.

Pupils say they feel safe at school and are able to describe how the school endeavours to keep them safe. They understand what constitutes different types of bullying, including prejudiced based bullying, but say that bullying is rare and that it is dealt with swiftly. When any unkind behaviour does occur, pupils have confidence that it will be dealt with effectively. A very small minority of pupils struggle to concentrate at times. However, they respond extremely well to the efforts of the teachers and their behaviour improves.

The school cares for the well-being of the children and this was seen during the transition arrangements which were taking place during the inspection. Due to the very strong

partnership with the infant school transition is well planned and takes into account the needs of individual pupils very well. Pupils were seen to be building relationships with their new teachers and becoming involved in their new school community.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher, senior leaders and governing body have cast a convincing vision for the schools in the newly formed Federation of Mowden Schools Academy Trust. This is based on the desire to offer the best education to all of the pupils in their care. School improvement and developing the craft of teaching are central to their strategic planning. For example, teachers work together across the federation to improve their skills and performance management has had a focus on this process. The mentoring programme has been introduced in a way that includes parents, carers, pupils and staff, and, as a result, has engendered a deep level of commitment within the school community.

The recent changes in leadership and governance have been handled sensitively and parents, carers and staff have been supportive of developments which are beginning to have positive results. However, it is too soon to see the full impact of initiatives to further improve provision. As a result, remaining inconsistencies in teaching and in the approach to target-setting mean that the rate of progress for all pupils is not yet rapid enough to lead to outstanding achievement.

The curriculum is good because it is exciting and stimulating. It ensures that literacy, communication and mathematical skills are used effectively across subjects and promotes a good understanding of other cultures. Clubs are well attended and wide ranging, including Scottish country dancing. The curriculum promotes the good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils. Opportunities to reflect on moral and social issues are grasped with enthusiasm, both in assembly and in lessons.

The leadership of the school has ensured that arrangements for safeguarding fully meet current requirements. Records and checks are robust. Policies and practices ensure that a safe environment is provided for pupils and staff. The school is committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for its pupils. This can be seen through the programmes designed to support those pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. Discrimination of any form is not tolerated.

The leadership has steered the school through some complex changes while remaining focused on the need to improve further teaching and the progress of all pupils in their care. This has been effective and is evidence of capacity to improve further.

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 management:	and 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 Junior School, Darlington, DL3 9DE

Thank you all very much for making me feel so welcome when I inspected your school with my colleague. We enjoyed talking to you, reading your questionnaires, looking at the work you do in lessons and hearing some of you read. We were interested to see the Olympic torch, which you also clearly enjoyed! We were very impressed with your commitment to lessons and your thoughtful, mature and courteous behaviour. We judge your behaviour to be outstanding.

We judge that your school is giving you a good education. The headteacher and all of the staff at school are making sure that your school continues to improve. Overall, you are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics, and the rate at which you are progressing is improving further.

Here are some of the strengths we found in your school:

- the partnership between the junior school and the infant school are developing well
- the quality of teaching is good. You enjoy lessons and your teachers work hard to give you tasks which are at the right level to help you make good progress
- the topics and themes you learn about help you think about other people and other cultures and help you appreciate difference
- your headteacher and other leaders are good at helping the school improve.

We have asked the teachers in your school to continue learning from each other so that your lessons are even better and help you to achieve your targets. We have asked them to give you even more opportunity to have input into the themes and topics you study and more opportunities to work independently.

We wish you well in your future.

Yours sincerely

Michael Wardle
Lead inspector
(on behalf of the inspection team)

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