

Simonside Primary School

Bedeburn Road, Westerhope, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Tyne and Wear, NE5 4LG

Inspection dates 16–17 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement.

- The progress pupils make varies between year groups and subjects and is not consistently good.
- Too few pupils achieve standards that are above the expectations for their age in writing. Not enough time is devoted to allow pupils to practise their writing in other subjects. Pupils' weaker handwriting and spelling skills also slow their progress.
- Teaching requires improvement as it is not yet of a consistently good standard. This is because teachers do not always have sufficiently high expectations of what pupils can achieve and how quickly they can learn. Time is not used well in all lessons to accelerate pupils' progress.
- The most able pupils are not always challenged in lessons to enable them to make the best possible progress.
- When teachers mark pupils' work, they do not always make it clear to pupils how to make their work better or allow pupils time to act on advice given.
- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Some pupils find it difficult to settle to their work. This is because behaviour is not managed consistently well across the school.
- Middle leaders do not sufficiently check on the progress of different groups of pupils, when observing lessons or scrutinising work in books, in order to support the drive for improving pupils' progress and the quality of teaching.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher, senior leadership team and the governing body are committed to improving teaching so it is consistently good. They have a clear understanding of what needs to be done based on a secure understanding of data.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage provides exciting learning opportunities and, as a result, children achieve well.
- Pupils feel safe and happy.
- The school is improving, for example, more pupils are attending more regularly and pupils' progress is speeding up in reading and mathematics.
- Pupils with special educational needs make good progress owing to high-quality intervention and support.
- The school offers pupils many exciting opportunities to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 15 lessons or parts of lessons. Three observations were conducted jointly with either the headteacher or deputy headteacher. The inspectors also observed pupils being taught in small groups and listened to pupils from different year groups reading.
- Meetings were held with pupils, the headteacher and deputy headteacher, middle leaders, members of the governing body and two representatives of the local authority.
- There were insufficient responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) to allow results to be shown. However, the inspectors took account of the school's own questionnaire to parents (December 2013), and held discussions with parents at the start of the school day.
- The responses to 19 staff questionnaires were considered.
- Inspectors observed the overall work of the school and looked at a number of documents, including the school's data about pupils' current progress. In addition, the inspectors looked at documents relating to safeguarding, governance, behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors looked at a range of other evidence, including displays, the school's website and evidence representing the school's wider achievements beyond the classroom.

Inspection team

Margaret Armstrong, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Derek Sleightholme	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is well above average. (The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children that are looked after by the local authority.)
- The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action is above average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- Since the last inspection there have been significant changes to the leadership of the school, including the appointment of a new headteacher and deputy headteacher. Three newly qualified teachers have also recently joined the school.
- The school extends its services in that it provides a breakfast club each day. It also works in close collaboration with local schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better, to further raise standards and rates of pupils' progress, especially for the most able pupils, by:
 - increasing teachers' expectations of how much work pupils can produce and the speed at which they can learn
 - ensuring pupils are offered sufficiently challenging activities which enable them to make faster progress
 - ensuring that the marking of pupils' books consistently gives sufficient guidance to pupils about how to improve their work and time to act on advice given.
- Raise standards in writing by:
 - improving pupils' handwriting and presentation skills so that pupils are more fluent in their writing and reach higher standards
 - giving all pupils opportunities to regularly practise their spelling
 - making sure pupils have plenty of opportunities to write imaginatively at length in other subjects.
- Further improve the behaviour of those few pupils who find it difficult to settle quickly to their work, by consistently applying the school's strategies for managing behaviour.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring middle leaders support the overall drive for improving pupils' progress and the quality of teaching, by a stronger focus on checking the progress of different groups of pupils when observing lessons and pupils' work in books.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Although standards have improved since the last inspection, the rate of improvement has been too slow in writing and the achievement of the most able pupils has not been good enough over time.
- From their individual starting points, pupils do not make consistently good progress in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. This is because the overall quality of teaching is not always good and learning opportunities are not always well matched to pupils' needs. As a result, pupils' achievement requires improvement. This is particularly the case for the most able pupils who are not challenged sufficiently to make sure they make the best progress they could.
- While standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 are lower than those expected nationally, they improved in 2013. However, not all pupils make equal progress across the key stage because teaching is not consistently good. As a result, pupils' progress requires improvement overall.
- The rate of pupils' progress fluctuates across classes in Key Stage 2. The proportion of pupils who make the progress expected of them is well above national expectations but too few make more than the progress expected of them in writing. This is because teachers do not regularly offer pupils opportunities to write at length in subjects such as history and geography. In addition, pupils' handwriting and spelling skills are not sufficiently well developed.
- When children start in the Nursery their skills and knowledge are well below those typical for their age, with particular weaknesses in their literacy skills. They make good progress in all areas of learning. Skilful teachers settle the children quickly and help them develop their speaking and listening skills. A wide range of exciting activities both inside and outside enthuse children and foster a love of learning. For example, children were observed talking excitedly together when researching information about polar bears in 'The Arctic' role-play area.
- The recent introduction of a phonics programme (learning about letters and the sounds they make) for younger pupils is effective and is improving abilities to read well. As a result, standards in the national screening check for reading at Year 1 are broadly average. Nevertheless, pupils are not always able to apply their skills when attempting to spell new words and this slows down their progress in writing.
- Pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium achieve standards that are in line with those seen nationally for similar pupils. Funds are used thoughtfully to reduce teaching group sizes and to provide specific additional teaching. As a result, in 2013 pupils who are known to be eligible for free schools meals made better progress than their classmates in writing.
- Pupils enjoy reading and use a variety of strategies to read with accuracy and understanding. Inspection evidence shows that progress in reading is improving because there is a strong focus on reading across the school. Pupils say that improvements in the teaching of reading and more exciting books have encouraged them to read more often and with greater enjoyment, at home and at school. Older pupils are eager readers who talk enthusiastically about their favourite authors and themes. Overall, skills are average by the end of Year 6.
- The progress pupils make in mathematics is improving. This is because teachers are planning more practical activities so that pupils develop their understanding at the same time as practising their calculation skills.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress and achieve well. This is because of the carefully tailored support they are given in lessons, in small groups and individually. This reflects the school's commitment to providing an equal opportunity for all pupils.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Teaching across the school varies too much in quality and too much requires improvement. Although some good and occasionally outstanding teaching was seen during the inspection, there is not enough for pupils to make consistently good progress, as also evidenced in work in pupils' books.
- Learning in lessons sometimes moves along too slowly and fails to capture pupils' interest. In these lessons teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve by the end of the lesson are too low. Too often, questions asked of pupils and activities set do not give them sufficient opportunity to think and develop their ideas. This is particularly the case for the most able pupils who do not always produce their best work and this restricts their progress. In a mathematics lesson in Key Stage 2, for example, pupils found the work too easy and teaching was not inspiring enough to push the most able pupils on further.
- Work set in some lessons does not stretch the most able pupils sufficiently well. A review of pupils' books showed this clearly and pupils' comments that learning in some lessons was 'too easy and boring' confirmed this.
- Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and always provide pupils with feedback on the quality of their work. However, marking does not consistently show how pupils can improve and there are not enough opportunities for pupils to make the improvements teachers have identified.
- Some teaching is good, reflecting in learning that is exciting, enjoyable and challenging for pupils. In a Year 5 lesson for example, all pupils worked industriously to edit and improve their reports about the recent flood damage in parts of Great Britain. The teacher explained quickly and clearly what was expected, reminding pupils of the previous day's learning. The teacher's adept use of time ensured there was sufficient opportunity for pupils to reinforce their learning and understanding by allowing them to talk with and challenge each other. The sharpness of the teacher's questioning captured pupils' interest and imagination and ensured they thought very carefully about the language which would best describe the dangers of flooding. Pupils made brisk progress in this lesson and, as a result, some pieces of writing included stunning sentences such as 'The treacherous wave demolished everything in its path'.
- Children who attend Nursery and Reception clearly enjoy coming to school, as evidenced in the speed at which they settle down to work at the beginning of each day. Staff work closely together and children benefit from a wide range of activities, both in the classroom and outdoor areas, which offer good opportunities to explore and develop independence. As a result, children make good progress and achieve well.
- Teaching assistants are used well in lessons to support learning, particularly for pupils who have special educational needs. They are actively involved in planning learning and skilfully support pupils' learning by helping them develop their literacy and numeracy skills and to contribute fully in class.

The behaviour and safety of pupils requires improvement

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement overall. Teachers and pupils say that behaviour has improved recently as a result of a review of policies and the introduction of new initiatives designed to help teachers to manage behaviour and encourage pupils to behave well. There are well defined expectations and a system of rewards and sanctions which have helped pupils have a clear understanding of how to behave well. However, these practices are not yet consistently applied across school. Consequently, in some lessons, a few pupils find it difficult to behave well and their attention drifts. There can be some distractions when the pace of learning drops in lessons and occasionally this disrupts learning for all pupils.
- In some classes, pupils do not take enough care with their work. This is particularly the case in writing where work is sometimes untidy and handwriting difficult to read. In some instances, the quantity of work produced by pupils is limited and its quality below expectations.
- In the playground, pupils play and get on well together. They are supported by an appropriate

number of adults and there are few instances of behaviour falling below expectations. In addition, pupils show caring and friendly attitudes to each other, staff and visitors.

- The needs of a small number of pupils who have significant behavioural difficulties are well managed by the school. The daily 'Nurture Group' provides effective support for pupils who find it challenging to manage their own behaviour and enables them to join in all aspects of school life.
- Pupils develop social skills well in the well organised and safe breakfast, lunchtime and after-school clubs and through responsibilities they have around the school, such as playground helpers and 'buddies'. Pupils feel valued as part of the school community and their views are communicated well to senior leaders through the school council.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep safe. They are alert to a range of different dangers that they may encounter, such as fire and water, and how to act in these situations. They were unanimous about feeling safe in school and stated that adults look after them well. Older pupils willingly look after younger children and help them learn to play safely and happily together.
- Pupils are particularly clear about the different forms bullying can take. They feel that incidents are rare because pupils are made aware, through for example the school's internet safety policy and through special events, of the effect bullying can have on others. Pupils said there was no bullying in their school because 'the headteacher does not allow it to happen' and this view is supported by the school's records.
- As a result of clear initiatives introduced by the school to encourage pupils to attend regularly and on time, attendance has improved and is now only slightly below average. The proportion of pupils who are persistent absentees has decreased significantly. Pupils spoke openly of their enjoyment of school. In the words of one pupil, 'I like my school because I learn new things and my school is a joyful place'.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because the quality of teaching and pupils' progress varies too much between classes and subjects. In addition, leaders have not yet ensured that teachers plan a sufficiently high level of challenge for the most able pupils so they can make the best possible progress.
- The new headteacher's drive and ambition for the school to improve has begun to secure improvements across the school. Following new appointments, she has successfully established an effective team of senior leaders who are skilled in checking the quality of teaching and in giving teachers helpful guidance on the action they need to take to improve their practice.
- However, middle leaders are less skilled in analysing the quality of teaching and the impact it has on the learning and progress of different groups of pupils. Analysis of the school's records of lesson observation and work sampling indicates that while leaders can recognise strengths and weaknesses in teaching, they are sometimes reluctant to make a rigorous enough judgements. As a result, there is too little teaching that is inspiring or outstanding across the school.
- The headteacher has been successful in uniting staff in the quest to improve the school even further. Consequently, all staff share the headteacher's ambitious vision to ensure high achievement for all pupils. The school provides a caring and supportive learning environment. However, this has not ensured that all pupils behave as well as they could or take enough pride in their work.
- Although the school's view of its own performance is too optimistic, the current school improvement plan is clearly focused on the key areas of raising pupils' attainment and improving teaching and has the appropriate priorities to reach these goals. The criteria used to enable leaders to know how successful they have been are easily measurable. However, new, rigorous targets for pupils' progress have not been in place long enough to ensure all pupils make good progress and achieve well.

- The management of teachers' performance is now robust and is helping the school to improve both teaching and pupils' achievement.
- Although the school's curriculum requires improvement, it is enriched by visits out of school and special events such as 'Our Maths Super Learning Day' which pupils enjoy. It helps to support their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, including an enjoyment and appreciation of music. A good example of this was seen in a singing lesson in Key Stage 2 where pupils made rapid progress in consolidating their repertoire of short songs. They rose admirably to the challenge of singing together in harmony when practising 'When the saints come marching in'. Opportunities to extend their skills are stronger in reading and mathematics than in writing. This is because not enough time is allocated to extending pupils' writing skills across the curriculum.
- The school receives a substantial amount of pupil premium funding which has been used to improve pupils' basic skills, particularly in writing. There is a commitment to promoting equal opportunities and to tackling discrimination.
- The school has developed a clear plan for using their allocation of sports partnership monies. This includes further training opportunities for teachers which are beginning to improve the quality of physical education teaching and the health and wellbeing of pupils. As a result of action taken, pupils are making faster progress in developing gymnastics skills.
- The vast majority of parents support the school. Attendance for feedback meetings about their children's progress is good. Regular newsletters and an attractive and informative website keep parents up to date with special events.
- The school has a growing range of partnerships which are supporting the school's improvements by the sharing of expertise and good practice.
- The local authority has provided valuable support for the school in arranging effective mentorship for the new headteacher and in providing training opportunities for teaching staff.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body are highly supportive of the school and understand the key priorities for improvement. From close scrutiny of the school's data they are aware that performance is not as good as similar schools. Governors strongly support the headteacher in managing the performance of teachers, ensuring that good teachers are rewarded and that, where teaching is weaker, the ensuing problems are tackled. Governors are aware of the difference that the pupil premium monies are making to pupils' progress and know that the achievement of pupils and the standard of teaching must continue to improve. The role of governors linked to curriculum areas is developing well through regular meetings and reports. They have a clear understanding of the action to be taken to further strengthen leadership. The governors attend appropriate training and ensure that the school fulfils its statutory requirements in safeguarding.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	108454
Local authority	Newcastle Upon Tyne
Inspection number	431772

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	197
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Neil Pont
Headteacher	Louise Thompson
Date of previous school inspection	11 January 2011
Telephone number	0191 286 0776
Fax number	0191 271 6790
Email address	admin@simonside.newcastle.sch.uk

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