

INSPECTION REPORT

EBCHESTER CE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Ebchester, Consett

LEA area: Durham

Unique reference number: 114214

Headteacher: Mr R Coombes

Reporting inspector: Dr B Male
19406

Dates of inspection: 5th – 6th December 2000

Inspection number: 192655

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Infant and Junior School

School category: Voluntary Controlled

Age range of pupils: 5 to 11 years

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Shaw Lane
Ebchester
Consett
County Durham

Postcode: DH8 0QB

Telephone number: 01207 560349

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr G D Gibson

Date of previous inspection: 10th March 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

This Church of England Primary School takes pupils from 4 to 11 years old and is maintained by the Durham Local Education Authority. The school occupies 1960s buildings close to the church in this rural village near Consett. At the time of the inspection there were 87 pupils on roll in 4 classes. Most pupils start school with standards of attainment in line with those usually expected. Twenty-two per cent of the pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is in line with the national average. Twenty-one per cent of the pupils are on the Special Needs Register which is also in line with the national average. There is no pupil for whom English is an additional language.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very caring school that provides a supportive environment where pupils feel secure. Pupils make at least satisfactory progress across the school, and the standards attained represent appropriate achievement. The quality of teaching is good overall. The school is effectively managed, and the headteacher has been particularly successful in developing the pastoral and environmental aspects of the school. The school receives a very high income per pupil and provides broadly satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- The school provides a supportive environment, and pupils have positive attitudes to work
- The good quality of teaching contributes to pupils' progress
- The school has developed its outside environment very well to enhance learning
- Children with some special educational needs are integrated well into the school
- The school has good links with the community where it is well respected

What could be improved

- Standards of writing could be higher across the school
- There could be a more specific focus of teaching and resources on areas of identified need

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in March 1997, and has made generally satisfactory progress since then. Standards of attainment have risen across the school. The quality of teaching remains good overall. The good quality of the behaviour and attitudes have been maintained. The school has addressed the key issues raised by the previous inspection: the information in the prospectus now conforms to requirements; there is more challenge for the higher attaining pupils, although it could be more specific; and the role of subject co-ordinators has been improved, although some subjects were without a co-ordinator at the time of the inspection.

STANDARDS

The number of pupils in each year group is usually fewer than ten, and so it is not appropriate to publish the usual table of standards, as this would be statistically invalid. With small numbers, standards naturally fluctuate from year to year, but in general, the school's scores in national tests for eleven-year-olds have been average in English, and above average in mathematics and science. Standards have been above those of similar schools. Inspection evidence indicates that standards at the end of Key Stage 2 are not as high this

year, and are likely to be below the national average in all three subjects and below the average of similar schools. This is partly because there is a higher than usual number of pupils with special educational needs. Evidence from the rest of the school indicates that standards in general are in line with the national average.

Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 also fluctuate, but have been generally above average in mathematics and average in English.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils have positive attitudes to work. They are keen to come to school, willing to engage in their tasks, and enjoy participating in the activities of the school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is generally good around the school. Pupils play well together and act sensibly and responsibly in the dining hall and during breaks. The youngest pupils listen particularly attentively in class, although some older pupils can quickly become unsettled.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils work and play well together. Older pupils are particularly caring towards younger ones. They show a good sense of responsibility for the environment. The school gives many opportunities for pupils to take responsibility around the school, but too few within lessons, especially for the oldest pupils.
Attendance	The rate of attendance is below the national average, and a higher than usual number of pupils arrive late for school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged up to 5 years	aged 5-7 years	aged 7-11 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good	Satisfactory

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

In the school as a whole, almost a fifth the teaching is very good, four tenths good and four tenths satisfactory. This is a very positive profile. Teaching is good in the Reception and Key Stage 1 classes and at the beginning of Key Stage 2. Teachers work hard and generally cope well with their mixed age classes. The good overall quality of the teaching contributes to pupils' progress. The quality of pupils' learning is good overall.

Where teaching is very good, there is a high level of challenge to all pupils and a close focus on what different groups of pupils have already learned. Some of these lessons have a high degree of interest and involvement. The teaching of writing has not been as successful as teaching of other subjects, and comparatively few pupils are extended to the higher levels.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is broad, but heavily balanced to the core subjects of English and mathematics. The curriculum provided within the setting arrangements at Key Stage 2 is not always appropriate to the different year groups. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Pupils with some special educational needs are very well integrated to the school. The Code of Practice is followed and some individual education plans have helpful targets. Some other plans do not identify the areas of need, and support for some pupils could be targeted more precisely.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The school makes good provision for pupils' moral and social development through its normal routines and expectations. There are some good opportunities for personal development outside of the class, but few for the older pupils within lessons.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school provides a very supportive environment within a caring ethos. Assessment is used generally effectively, although lessons could build more precisely on what pupils have already learned. Arrangements for child protection are generally sound.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher manages the school effectively, particularly in the pastoral and environmental aspects. He sets a good tone for the quietly caring ethos of the school. Subjects are managed generally effectively, but some areas of responsibility have not been allocated. There could be a closer focus of monitoring on the quality of learning.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors are very supportive of the school and many are closely involved with its work. They need to develop a more precise overview of standards and to examine the budget rigorously in order to 'hold the school to account for the standards it achieves'.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school is taking some steps to evaluate its performance, but could be more rigorous in its examination of the various data and in identifying ways of addressing need.
The strategic use of resources	The school makes generally effective use of resources, but some areas of staffing and resources could be more effectively allocated. The principles of best value are appropriately applied. The school receives a very high level of income per pupil and provides generally satisfactory value for money.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children like coming to school• The school provides good support for children• Behaviour in the school is good• The standard of teaching is good• Children make good progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some parents feel they are not well informed about the work of the school

The great majority of parents were supportive of the school in the questionnaire and in their comments, but a number do not feel as much a part of the school as some others. The inspection generally agrees with the parents' positive feelings, and finds that the information provided by the school is generally adequate.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The school provides a supportive environment, and pupils have positive attitudes to work

1. The previous inspection report referred to the “caring ethos” of the school and saw this as the school’s “major strength”. The school still provides this caring ethos and pupils feel comfortable and secure at school. The headteacher sets a good tone for the quietly caring approach of the school and is responsible for the many initiatives, such as the environmental areas, that provide the school’s special characteristics.
2. Pupils are receiving a very good start in the Reception Class where relationships are very strong, and pupils are inducted very well indeed into the ethos of the school. An example was the very good “Circle Time” lesson where pupils were encouraged to discuss their feelings in a very sensitive way. This enabled the children to think about how other people feel and how they might react in different ways, rather than just thinking about themselves. The teacher sets an excellent example of listening and valuing pupils, and this is taken up well by the children.
3. Pupils work and play well with each other and there is a good spirit of tolerance. Older pupils are particularly supportive towards younger ones and they play well together in the school’s ‘family’ atmosphere. Pupils behave well in informal situations such as in the classrooms at breaks when it is too wet to go outside. Behaviour is good in the dining hall where the formal arrangements are respected by children.
4. There are some good opportunities for pupils to take responsibilities outside of the classroom. For example, the environmental areas are tended by pupils, and they help guide visitors around, pointing out the site’s features. Some pupils are even involved in making suggestions to visiting teachers about the activities that would be suitable with their classes. These sorts of experiences are very valuable to personal development.
5. Within classes, there are some valuable opportunities for personal development and taking responsibility, especially in the Reception and Key Stage 1 classes. The teaching of the oldest pupils does not always reflect the good work with those same pupils outside the classroom because they are given too few opportunities within lessons to make decisions, or select appropriate materials and methods, even though these are requirements of the National Curriculum. When the oldest pupils are expected to work in groups, such as in a geography lesson looking at questionnaire returns, they show that they can do so very well, and come to some mature agreements about how to sort data.

The good quality of teaching contributes to pupils’ progress

6. In the school as a whole, almost a fifth the teaching is very good, four tenths good and four tenths satisfactory. This is a very positive profile. Teaching is good in the Reception and Key Stage 1 classes and at the beginning of Key Stage 2. Teachers work hard and generally cope well with their mixed age classes.
7. Where teaching is very good, there is a high level of challenge to all pupils and a close focus of the learning objectives on what groups of pupils have already learned. For example, a very good Key Stage 1 mathematics lesson set a high challenge to a group

of pupils in adding 2-digit numbers in their heads whilst other pupils worked with a teaching assistant on single digit numbers. This built very well on what had already been learned, and moved at a very brisk pace to ensure challenge. In a very good history lesson in lower Key Stage 2, it was the teacher's very good questioning that produced the high degree of challenge when pupils were looking at a Tudor painting. The teacher had researched the subject very well indeed and was able to use this knowledge to link aspects of the painting to what pupils had already learned about the Tudors; this was what made the lesson so effective. Her use of questions required the pupils to make the links themselves, rather than just be told, and this enhanced their understanding. She also gave pupils time to think and come to their conclusions, and valued their responses even if they were 'wrong'.

8. Some of the very good lessons have a high degree of interest and involvement. For example, a very good Key Stage 1 English lesson generated a high level of interest and excitement when the teacher used glove puppets very effectively to draw pupils' attention to letter sounds and spellings. The use of the puppet turned what would have been a very ordinary learning experience into a very special one, and greatly enhanced the learning.
9. The quality of teaching in the Reception Class is consistently at least good and is often very good. The key feature of the teaching is the very strong relationships between teacher and pupils. She uses these very effectively to present high challenge to children whilst affording them good support. For example, in a very good speaking and listening session where pupils talked about some of their toys, the teacher asked the children to pass a favourable comment (nothing negative!) on the toys shown, but expected each child to use different words. This is a high level of challenge for four-year-olds, but one to which they responded very well. The teacher's own very clear language and explanations, and the way in which she listens and values each pupil are very important in promoting such good learning.
10. Although teaching is good overall, pupils are not always sufficiently encouraged to be independent in their learning. Such independence, in terms of selecting materials and methods, is a requirement of the National Curriculum. Lack of such independence leaves pupils with few strategies for sorting out problems when they arise, or working their own way through questions in a text book. The teaching of the oldest pupils is often particularly teacher-directed, with some high expectations in terms of knowledge but too few opportunities for pupils to engage in the discussion and activities that would promote understanding. Across the school, teachers make little use of such techniques as paired discussion, or evaluation of other's work.

The school has developed its outside environment well

11. The surroundings of the school has been very well developed to provide an interesting and stimulating environment, and one which is used effectively for personal development and learning. The school is very favourably situated with ample grounds and adjacent to woods and fields, but has added significantly to its environment through imaginative developments.
12. The school has created a particularly interesting woodland trail that links the school's field to the woods beyond, and has developed points of interest to make this a valuable learning experience. The 'amphitheatre' is a very interesting development exploiting the natural hillsides to recreate the feel of the ancient theatres and providing an unusual setting for drama. There is also a very pleasant quiet area, dedicated to a former pupil and providing a good setting for pupils to sit and talk quietly during breaks.

13. The school has made good use of external funding and grants to develop these areas. The opportunities are shared well with other schools who make use of the woodland trail, and provide very valuable personal development for older pupils who are involved in showing visitors around. The school's work in this area has been recognised with awards, and the headteacher has been involved in helping other schools exploit their own surroundings in creative ways.
14. It was unfortunate that the quality of the weather during the inspection did not match the quality of the environment and allow inspectors to appreciate the full extent of the development!

Children with some special educational needs are integrated well into the school

15. The caring and supportive ethos of the school is particularly effective in allowing pupils with special educational needs to integrate well into the ordinary work of the classrooms. The school has a very high proportion of pupils with statements of special educational need, and staff are particularly helpful in ensuring that their needs are met without the pupils being singled out or disadvantaged. Other pupils are also very helpful and accommodating to their needs and contribute significantly to their development. Parents are very pleased with the way in which the school has accommodated these pupils and catered for their needs. In most cases the terms of the statements are met very well, but in one instance the support required over and above that offered by the school is not yet being provided by the local education authority.
16. The national 'Code of Practice' for pupils with special educational needs is generally well met with some helpful targets set on pupils' individual education plans. In some cases the plans do not clarify the nature of the learning need, and so are less helpful to teachers. The school could do more to target its teaching resources to the identified needs, both in terms of teaching assistants or extra teachers, and also in terms of the focus of learning within lessons which does not always relate directly to the targets of the individual plans.

The school has good links with the community

17. The school is well respected within the community and has good links that enhance the curriculum. The environmental developments have raised the school's profile, brought it into close contact with other schools, and have been recognised in the winning of awards. There is good use of the immediate environment for historical and geographical studies as well as for science through the woodland trails. Good use has been made of links with New College, Durham to give the children experiences in design and technology. Pupils take part in musical and dramatic events with other schools such as the "Young World" concert in the Newcastle Arena.
18. Pupils have been directly involved in approaching local firms for sponsorship and have been very successful in doing so.
19. These outside links involve pupils as well as staff, and are very effective in broadening the pupils' outlook and experiences.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Standards of writing could be higher across the school

20. At the end of Key Stage 2, standards in writing, compared to other schools, have not been as high as in reading over the last four years. Although an average proportion of pupils attain the expected level (Level 4), very few attain the higher level. At the end of Key Stage 1, the picture has been more variable, with standards of writing sometimes higher than reading, but this is mainly because standards of reading have been very low in some years. As with Key Stage 2, too few pupils attain the higher level (Level 3). Inspection findings indicate that standards are even lower this year with very few pupils likely to attain the higher level at the end of either key stage.
21. The various elements of the National Literacy Strategy are generally taught effectively, but many pupils have trouble in incorporating all the elements into their independent writing. Many are able to write effective short pieces, but very few are able to write sustained pieces that develop ideas effectively, use imaginative or precise language, and employ the literary devices that they learn about in their reading. There are several steps the school could take to address this issue.
22. Pupils need more opportunities to engage in the sustained writing that they find difficult. Such opportunities can be found within English, or within other subjects where lessons such as history and geography can give good opportunities for empathetic writing, accounts and the presentation of arguments. The school gives a great deal of extra time for reading in its afternoon sessions, and the first half hour of every day is given to a variety of activities, some of which are writing, but these times are seldom used for sustained writing.
23. Many writing lessons are of a general nature and focus on the content of the story rather than the quality of the writing. Lessons do not always focus sufficiently on the precise requirements of the higher levels; for example, that to be Level 3, writing should be organised, imaginative and clear, with words chosen for variety and interest. In some lessons the teaching does not focus sufficiently precisely on the differing needs of pupils; for example, one Year 2 pupil is able to write imaginatively and with interesting words, but fails to attain Level 3 because of her spelling and punctuation, whilst another pupil's spelling and punctuation are fine, but the stories lack interest and imagination. The teaching within the lesson needs to address these differing needs.
24. There are few occasions on which pupils are asked to reflect upon their writing and to suggest amendments in terms of clarity and style, rather than just correct errors. The redrafting notes at Key Stage 2 focus almost entirely on punctuation and spellings, yet for most pupils these are not the features they need to improve in order to progress. Pupils work well together and could be taught to help each other in appraising and amending work.
25. In some cases, pupils' failure to employ the literary devices that are the feature of the higher levels stems from their unfamiliarity with these forms. Sometimes the examples of writing that pupils encounter in their reading books, and even in the 'big books' used in Literacy Hour, do not present sufficiently good examples for the pupils to be able to develop their own writing.
26. At the time of the inspection, there was no teacher with responsibility for managing English. Such an appointment is needed in order to reconsider the school's approach and monitor standards.

There could be a more specific focus of teaching and resources on areas of

identified need

27. The school provides a secure and supportive environment, and teaching is generally good, but there are several areas where the focus of teaching and resources could be more precise on areas of identified need.
28. Although teaching is generally good, too many lessons are of a general nature that could be taught to any class, rather than focused precisely on what pupils have already learned. Where teaching is targeted differently to different groups within a class or key stage, it is often on the basis of perceptions of pupils' 'ability' rather than assessments of what they already know and understand, and what they need to learn next in order to move to a higher level. The school is carrying out some useful assessments of pupils' attainments and there are some helpful individual targets, but these are seldom used to plan lessons precisely. Teachers need to consider their lessons precisely from the point of view of the level of challenge they present to the different groups of pupils, and be rigorous in ensuring that the challenge is sufficient. Where teaching does build directly on the previous learning of different groups, such as the Key Stage 1 mathematics lesson mentioned above, it can be very effective.
29. The setting arrangements for English and mathematics at Key Stage 2 pose considerable problems in ensuring that the curriculum is appropriate for all pupils, especially in mathematics. The National Numeracy Strategy sets out clearly the course to be followed by each year group, and this progressively builds pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. Schools with mixed age classes have to adapt this to their needs, but usually ensure that pupils work from the appropriate course. The setting arrangements adopted by the school mean that pupils from Years 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 are put together and taught as one class. This makes it even more difficult for all pupils to follow the appropriate course. Older pupils with special educational needs are taught a course appropriate to younger pupils rather than being given the support they need to access the curriculum appropriate to them. Younger pupils are being 'stretched' by missing out two years of a course and being expected to cope with work for which they have not had the appropriate grounding. It is important to give appropriate support to those pupils with special educational needs, and to give good challenge to those who are capable of high attainment, but this is not best accomplished by studying courses that are inappropriate. The range of needs and the variety of understandings in these disparate groups are so wide that it is very difficult indeed to address them through class lessons.
30. Teaching assistants are giving some very good support and carrying out some very effective teaching across the school. However, there are times, such as the first session of the Literacy Hour, when their opportunities to teach groups and individuals are necessarily limited by the whole-class nature of the activity. A different timetable arrangement would allow these times to be used more effectively for teaching. The school could also consider how the targets on pupils' individual education plans could be assisted by teaching assistants if they were deployed in this way.
31. The input that the headteacher could make into teaching and learning is not fully utilised at present. Although he is involved in the monitoring of teaching and in the planning of work, his considerable expertise could be used more directly in teaching groups or classes to release teachers for other duties. Such involvement could, for example, make the setting arrangements more viable by reducing the age spread in each group. It would also allow a more precise monitoring of pupils' progress through the school.
32. The school is now taking many more steps to consider and evaluate its performance.

The data from national tests for seven and eleven year olds are always difficult to analyse with small year groups as fluctuations are always to be expected, but there could be more rigor to the analysis of the various data available. For example, the school could valuably track pupils from their test scores at seven, to check whether those attaining, say, Level 2c are making the progress required to attain Level 4 by the time they are eleven. These expectations and targets could be made explicit to teachers and extra support arranged for those pupils on the basis of the precise knowledge gained of their progress.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

33. Raise standards of writing across the school by:
 - giving pupils more opportunity to write extended pieces in English and other subjects
 - targeting teaching to the precise requirements of the higher levels
 - creating more opportunities for pupils to improve their writing in terms of clarity and style
 - ensuring that there are sufficient models of good writing in the pupils' reading materials

34. Creating a more specific focus of teaching, and of resources, on areas of identified need by:
 - ensuring that teaching builds precisely on what different groups of pupils have already learned
 - reconsidering the setting arrangements at Key Stage 2
 - targeting more precisely the good quality support of the teaching assistants
 - utilising fully the input of the headteacher into teaching and learning
 - rigorously analysing test and other data in order to target teaching

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

35. Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	29
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	9

36. Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Un-satisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	17	41	41	0	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

37. Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	YR – Y6
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	87
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	19

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	YR – Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	4
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	18

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	13
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	5

38. Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.5
National comparative data	5.4

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.0
National comparative data	0.5

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

39. Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	-
Black – African heritage	-
Black – other	-
Indian	-
Pakistani	-
Bangladeshi	-
Chinese	-
White	73
Any other minority ethnic group	-

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

40. Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	-	-
Black – African heritage	-	-
Black – other	-	-
Indian	-	-
Pakistani	-	-
Bangladeshi	-	-
Chinese	-	-
White	1	-
Other minority ethnic groups	-	-

This table gives the number of exclusions of pupils of compulsory school age, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

41. Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.4
Average class size	22

Education support staff: YR – Y6

Total number of education support staff	2
Total aggregate hours worked per week	65

FTE means full-time equivalent.

42. Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	168,711
Total expenditure	162,501
Expenditure per pupil	2,501
Balance brought forward from previous year	9,119
Balance carried forward to next year	15,329

43. Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	84
Number of questionnaires returned	26

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	85	15	0	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	54	42	0	0	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	62	35	4	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	26	52	4	9	9
The teaching is good.	69	27	0	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	50	35	15	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	69	19	12	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	46	54	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	65	27	4	4	0
The school is well led and managed.	54	31	4	0	12
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	62	38	0	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	54	23	15	0	8