

INSPECTION REPORT

WHITTONSTALL FIRST SCHOOL

Whittonstall, County Durham

LEA area: Northumbria

Unique reference number: 122235

Headteacher: Mrs S Coulson

Reporting inspector: Mrs C McBride
2810

Dates of inspection: 11th – 12th March 2002

Inspection number: 198162

Short inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	First
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	3 – 9 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Whittonstall County Durham
Postcode:	DH8 9JN
Telephone number:	01207 560325
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Linda May
Date of previous inspection:	October 1997

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	1
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	6
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	9
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	10
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	11

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Whittonstall First School is much smaller than most other primary schools. It has 55 pupils on roll, between the ages of 3 and 9 years with more or less equal proportions of boys and girls. Of these, 9 children attend part-time in the nursery class. The school is organised into two mixed age classes with pupils in the reception and Year 1 in one class, and Years 2, 3 and 4 in the other. The headteacher teaches the older class for four days a week and on the other day, a part-time teacher takes the class. The school serves a rural area, and some pupils travel from outside the catchment. Fewer than average numbers of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school population is predominantly white with no children coming from homes where English is not the language mainly spoken. Pupils come from a variety of backgrounds and they show a full range of attainment on entry although there are more above average than below. Some children enter with below average skills in personal and social development and in language and communication. The school has a broadly average number of pupils with special educational needs who are beyond the first stages of concern (18 per cent). The percentage of pupils with statements is broadly in line with the national average. The type of pupils' needs is very varied, and includes physical, behavioural and learning difficulties.

The current headteacher has been appointed since the last inspection.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good school, which enables all pupils to achieve well, whatever their starting point. Teaching is good and support staff make a significant contribution to the quality of pupils' learning. The school is particularly successful in helping pupils reach high standards in their personal and social development. The school is well led and managed by the headteacher and governors. Together with its supportive parents, the school community forms a very effective team and the school gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils have a very wide range of learning needs, but the school enables them all to achieve well
- It helps pupils to reach high standards in their personal and social development
- The school is led and managed well; everyone in the school community works closely and they share the same aims and aspirations for its success

What could be improved

- Pupils' achievements in writing are not quite as strong as they are in reading and maths

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 October 1997. Since then it has made good headway against all the issues identified in the last inspection report and has maintained a strong position in relation to national standards over the past few years. Pupils with special educational needs receive much better support than they did and they now make good progress.

The school has improved the quality of its provision by implementing more careful procedures for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of teaching and how well its pupils are achieving. Teachers are much clearer about what they should be teaching, and the school now places more emphasis on the outcomes of pupils' learning. There are more

opportunities for pupils to show initiative and evaluate their own learning. A more careful arrangement of both the timetable and the somewhat cramped accommodation, now means that literacy and numeracy lessons are of better quality as they now take place in a quiet, calm atmosphere.

STANDARDS

The table of standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 2, based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests is omitted, as there were less than 10 pupils in the year group.

All pupils achieve well in most subjects, although given their previous attainment, some of them achieve a little less than they could in writing. For the last two years, standards in reading and mathematics have been well above those in most schools and those with a similar pupil intake. Although standards in writing are not quite as high, they are still better than those in most schools.

By Year 2, pupils are confident and competent writers, and standards are above average. This is also the case in older year groups where pupils' writing is full of good ideas and creative language. They develop writing skills well by using them in other subjects, but standards of handwriting and presentation are not high enough.

Throughout the school, standards in mathematics are well above average. Pupils have sharp numeracy skills. They can use quick, mental calculation and are good at spotting different ways to work out answers. They are confident when handling and interpreting data, such as graphs, and have a good knowledge of shape, space and measure.

The good quality of the school's curriculum also enables pupils to achieve well in other subjects and reach above average standards, for example in art and physical education.

Pupils with special educational needs achieve well. They gain confidence and make good progress in developing literacy and numeracy skills. The school ensures that its very highest attainers are challenged to achieve as much as possible.

By the end of the reception year, children's achievements are often ahead of expectations for their age group in all areas of learning. Some achieve particularly well in their personal and social development and in their language and communication skills, given their lower than average starting point.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils enjoy coming to school, get on well with their work and put a lot of effort into all activities.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. The way that pupils behave means that the school is a busy, purposeful, but orderly place to learn.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils show very mature and sensible attitudes. They look after each other and learn how to make a useful contribution to the school community.
Attendance	Satisfactory. The school's attendance figures for the latest reporting year were lower than usual. Some pupils, living on farms were absent for up to a month as a result of the 'foot and mouth' epidemic.

Relationships within the school are excellent. There is a happy, settled atmosphere in which pupils know what is expected of them and rise with great enthusiasm to meet the challenges that the school offers.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils in:	Nursery and Reception	Years 1 – 2	Years 3 – 4
Quality of teaching	Good	Good	Good

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.

Most lessons are of good quality and teaching is ensuring that all children are learning at a good pace.

At Whittonstall, teachers are faced with a very wide range of pupils' needs. Lessons are organised according to children's previous attainment and with very thorough and careful planning, they manage to support all children well. Support staff play a significant role here and work with small groups or individuals, often giving skilled tuition, which really boosts the rate of children's learning.

Rather than seeing the wide range of age and attainment in each class as a drawback, teachers use it to advantage. For example, older pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for helping younger pupils, who in turn are expected to follow the good example set for them.

Good teaching in nursery gets children off to a flying start and it is particularly successful in developing their personal and social skills and their language and communication. Teaching throughout the rest of the school builds well on this very secure foundation.

Reading and mathematics are taught well. Teachers engage pupils' interest and enthusiasm by making lessons interesting. They use plenty of resources and visual stimulation to maintain pupils' attention. There are many and varied opportunities for children to practice and develop their literacy and numeracy skills in other lessons.

Teachers are skilled at developing some aspects of children's writing at a good pace. They encourage children to express their ideas and they teach grammar, spelling and punctuation well. Although handwriting is taught successfully in the initial stages, children are not always pressed hard enough to maintain good neatness and presentation after this. Sometimes pupils need better guidance or visual prompts to help them in writing longer pieces of work.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. The school not only achieves good test results, but also offers a wide range of interesting activities in lessons and after school, which help pupils to achieve success. It has strong links with the community and other local schools, which further enrich its provision.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. There are very effective systems for ensuring that pupils' needs are quickly identified; they are well supported and enabled to achieve success.

Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	Very good. The school offers many opportunities for pupils to develop their confidence and self-esteem. They are taught that their opinions are valued and that they should respect the views of others.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good. The school knows its pupils well and takes exceptional care to ensure that they are safe and happy. Their development is monitored very closely.

The school is very successful in ensuring that its pupils have a well rounded education. As much attention is paid to developing their social skills as it is to helping them achieve high standards in the subjects of the curriculum.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The head gives a strong steer to the work of the school. She leads by example through her teaching and her vision and drive mean that action to bring about improvement happens quickly. Other teachers support the head well by carrying heavy responsibilities with enthusiasm and commitment.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good. They put the full weight of their efforts behind the school. They play a very active role in planning future developments, checking on progress and cementing the relationship between the school and the community it serves. They play a large part in the school's success.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. The school knows where it is most effective and where it could improve. Between the head, staff and governors, there is a strong determination to continually move the school forward.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The limited accommodation and extra adult help is used to good effect in securing a very supportive environment for learning.

The school ensures that it gets good value for money. It is always looking for ways in which it can be more effective and judging whether what it does results in changes for the better.

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 enjoy coming to school Behaviour in school is good The school expects children to work hard The school helps children to become mature and responsible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A small number say that they do not feel comfortable in approaching the school

The inspection findings support the parents' positive views about the school, but disagree with the issues raised by a small number. The school makes every effort to ensure that parental concerns and worries are thoroughly addressed. It is good at seeking their views and at working to establish and maintain a good partnership with them.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Pupils have a very wide range of learning needs, but the school enables them all to achieve well

1. The school is very knowledgeable about its pupils' needs and takes the view that whatever the barrier to their learning, be it temporary or prolonged, it can be overcome. Individual pupils' circumstances are therefore carefully analysed and a detailed plan of action is drawn up to ensure that support for each child is tailored to their needs. Their success also owes much to the depth to which lessons are planned and the close eye that is kept on their progress. It is to the school's great credit that some children with complex learning needs or medical conditions are successfully accommodated and make very good progress.
2. The solid base of good teaching means that pupils' rate of progress is even throughout the school and that they achieve well in vital areas. In reading for example, teachers are good at helping them to understand what they read. With younger children the teacher does this as she shares books with the class and asks them to explain what is happening in a story, or to tell her what a particular sentence or phrase means. With the older children, the teacher uses a very good range of resources to help them to visualise and re-enact scenes from stories. This ensures that they pick up on less familiar meanings. One example of this was a model that she had made to depict the main setting for the story, as the chief character falls through the roof of a cave. After exploring the model, one of the children told her, "Now I know what it means when the book says 'the ground gave way...'"
3. In mathematics, despite the wide range of attainment in classes, pupils are challenged to achieve at an appropriate level. Higher attainers, for example, are expected to take their learning further and to apply it in solving problems. In a lesson on graphs with the younger children most of the class constructed graphs, but speedier mathematicians were expected to take their learning further. They did this by working together to interpret data from a completed graph.
4. All pupils are given a chance to succeed and where necessary to make up ground. For example, those who do not attain high enough standards by the end of their reception year have additional help in literacy. This is a similar picture in Year 3, where lower attaining pupils have the chance to boost their achievement through working in small groups with a skilled support assistant.
5. A healthy balance is kept between teaching basic literacy and numeracy skills and the other subjects of the curriculum. The school provides a learning environment where all pupils can shine, develop individual talents and gain enjoyment from school. Most pupils for example, exceed national expectations in swimming by the time they leave and can swim more than 25 metres. Art work, is carefully displayed around the school. It recognises individual talent, but also shows that many pupils reach high standards in this subject.
6. The school further enriches the curriculum by enthusiastically using the local area and organisations as a resource. Its links with the cluster of local schools including the local high school, result in many benefits for the pupils at Whittonstall. Older pupils, for example, regularly visit the local high school and develop their skills in information and communication technology through using the computer suite there.

7. Children get off to a flying start in the nursery class. The family atmosphere of the class means that pupils are soon happy and settled. Although some lack confidence and social skills when they start school, they soon pick up at a good pace and achieve at least as much as would be expected for their age by the time they join the reception class. Teaching here is consistently good. For some children, language skills develop at a faster than normal rate. This is largely because adults are so skilful at interacting with children during practical activity. They introduce new vocabulary and prompt children to talk about what they are doing, pressing them gently to explain and expand their answers.
8. One of the school's stated priorities is that the needs of all children are met and in this it is highly successful.

It helps pupils to reach high standards in their personal and social development

9. This is a school in which pupils are relentlessly encouraged to become increasingly mature and independent. For their part, the children grab such opportunities with equal measures of enthusiasm and success. The forming of very good relationships, based on respect and trust, are at the very heart of what this school does best. There is an expectation of pupils that they will make decisions and increasingly take responsibility for their own lives in school. A perfect example of this is the sharp focus of School Council meetings. Pupils from each year group consider a number of issues. During the inspection, for example, pupils arranged exactly how the 'Remote Control' day would work. Having decided to split participants by class, they then thought about how younger children would cope with the activity. Finally, they decided to extend the usual playground 'buddy' system and for older pupils to 'buddy up' with the younger ones. Their next decision mirrored all that is outstanding about pupils' attitudes at Whittonstall. The headteacher asked whether the event should be competitive or not. A couple of the councillors initially agreed, but others felt that it should just be for fun. One boy chipped in "Someone might have a really good car and always win and that's not fair". They thought about this for a moment and agreed on the fun option. Such well developed negotiation skills would not go amiss in the business world.
10. Pupils develop such high levels of self-confidence because adults working in the school regularly use strategies to foster their independence. They consistently encourage pupils to listen carefully in lessons and ask them to consider the 'Why?' and 'How?' about everything they encounter. There is also an overarching expectation that pupils can and should influence their own learning environment. At the same time, the school extends pupils' personal development by offering an exciting range of extra-curricular experiences. They can join a classroom assistant in a cookery session, making mouth-watering pizzas, for example. Alternatively, they can make a wooden go-cart or a bird box, which is far beyond the range of experiences usually offered to children of this age. The extra-curricular programme brings together all members of the school family. The headteacher also rolls her sleeves up to help with sawing and gluing while pupils knead dough alongside the classroom assistant. Other members of the local community also make a very valuable contribution to these activities.
11. Older and younger pupils work and play together in exemplary style; relationships are of the highest order. The older pupils are so caring and patient as they serve their younger friends at the dinner table, for example, or look after them in their role as 'Playground Buddy'. It is taken for granted that everyone is an equally important and valued member of the school community – there is a tangible air of camaraderie in every corner of the school. Pupils know that their opinions and contributions are valued by staff. They use systematic monitoring strategies to track what pupils do

and consequently, they know the pupils extremely well. Teachers discuss and set individual targets with pupils and their parents; aspects of personal and social development are included very effectively. Such supported self-evaluation helps pupils to see how they are developing and the school also celebrates pupils' achievements in weekly awards. These are recorded in a special book and are given for a wide variety of reasons, not just for good work. A typical extract from the adults' entries reads, "I was so impressed by how kind and thoughtful he is at playtimes to the younger children". Children in the reception and Year 1 class delight in being named 'VIP of the week'. They are given the chance to talk about themselves and their favourite things. Their special books and toys are displayed. The rest of the class are invited to make positive comments about the child or ask them questions about the things that they have brought in. For the rest of the week, the child has priority place in lining up for meals or playtimes, and receives special attention from everyone. One little girl in Class 1 excitedly explained what this honour involved and beamed her pleasure to everyone else at her table. They smiled back as, being older, they had already experienced this but could tell how much it meant to her.

12. Guided by the very strong influence of the headteacher, all adults working in the school contribute to the exceptional personal and social development of the pupils; their work is greatly valued by parents. The governors, staff and parents are successful in meeting their common aim that pupils should receive a well-rounded education. As one governor put it, " Although academic excellence is a measure of success, the governors' commitment to the education and well being of the 'whole' child is paramount."

The school is led and managed well; everyone in the school community works closely and they share the same aims and aspirations for its success

13. The governing body gives the school terrific support and plays a large part in its success. They have a firm hand on developments and make sure that the school is fulfilling the aims agreed with the head and the staff. They do this through very organised and effective monitoring of what the school provides for pupils. The school aims are known as 'Critical Success Factors' and it is these, which form the basis for governors' monitoring activities. They make visits to the school and look specifically at how well one of the factors is being achieved. A recent example of this was when governors focused their attention on the quality of information provided for parents and how the school involved them in activities. A nominated governor visited the school and spent time talking with the headteacher, looking at documentation sent to parents and visiting classes. A questionnaire that had been sent out to parents was also analysed. From these activities, the governors were able to acknowledge issues raised by parents and make an evaluation of the school's success in meeting its aim. The result of all this is that parents have confidence in the school and appreciate its efforts. Individual governors also offer a wide range of practical help, and recently for example, they assisted in putting together the school brochure.
14. The headteacher leads from the front and sets a good example to all staff through the quality of her teaching. During the twelve months since she took up post, she has built further on the good teamwork and ethos of the school and strengthened the quality of teaching. This has been achieved through setting out clearly what should be taught to different groups of pupils, and by monitoring the quality of lessons. Her open and positive approach to management gives rise to an atmosphere of honest, self-evaluation among staff. As a result, they are keen to keep looking at the impact of their work on pupils' progress and strive for continual improvement.

15. Other staff make a solid contribution to school improvement by shouldering a great deal of responsibility for developing subjects. Despite having several areas to oversee, they are very knowledgeable about the strengths and areas for development in each subject, and can point to several aspects, where their input has resulted in improvement since the last inspection.
16. Practical steps are taken to ensure that agreed action from the school improvement plan is put into operation. The 'Strategic Management Planning Group' meets termly to review specific targets from within the plan and reports on their progress to the rest of the governors. This is a school where there is a strong drive towards improvement and both governors and staff allow no room for complacency to creep in.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Pupils' achievements in writing are not quite as strong as they are in reading and maths

17. Although this is the case, pupils still achieve higher standards than in most schools and keep pace with those that have pupils from similar backgrounds. Staff and governors however, have recognised this as an area where they see scope for improvement and several steps have been taken to improve the quality of teaching and raise achievement: Staff for example, have attended training to develop pupils' early writing skills, and have visited another school to observe practice and look at different methods of teaching.
18. Whilst standards in writing could be higher, some aspects are nonetheless very strong. Spelling, punctuation and grammar are accurate and a strength of their work is the way in which pupils use their writing skills in other subjects. In science for example, their recording of experiments is accurate and well organised.
19. Although these aspects are taught well, during literacy lessons, pupils are not always guided well enough in the stages and processes of writing. Often teachers record the different steps for the class, but then these guidelines are erased from the board at the end of the lesson. Pupils therefore have too little opportunity to reinforce their knowledge through looking at displays and have no visual clues left when they attempt to complete a piece of work on their own.
20. Since the last inspection, the school has improved the way in which it keeps a check on pupils' progress but there is scope for further improvement in writing. Assessments of the level pupils have reached are accurate, but need sharpening up to give a stronger pointer to where each child needs to go next.
21. Standards of handwriting and presentation are not high enough. Most children learn to write competently and form their letters correctly in the early stages of writing. After this good start however, standards slip and the work of older pupils especially, is not as neat as it could be.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

22. In order to improve the headteacher, staff and governors should :

a) Strengthen pupils' achievement in writing

The school's efforts to address this issue are already resulting in some improvement and should therefore continue. These include: participation in the project with local partner schools to target lower attaining pupils in Year 3; links with a school abroad to exchange letters and news; regular scrutiny of pupils' work, and support for lower attaining pupils in Year 1.

Further action to be taken should now include:

- Making sharper assessments of progress in writing and setting targets for improvement, which are then shared with pupils and used as a basis for marking work.
- Setting higher expectations for standards of presentation, neatness and handwriting in pupils' work.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	10
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	1

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	0	1	8	1	0	0	0
Percentage	0	10	80	10	0	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting these percentages as each lesson represents more than ten percentage points.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Nursery	YR – Y4
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	5	46
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	0	1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs

	Nursery	YR – Y4
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	1	12

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	1
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	2

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.4
National comparative data	5.6

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.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	0
Any other minority ethnic group	0

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Teachers and classes**Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y4**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	2.3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	24
Average class size	23

Education support staff: YR – Y4

Total number of education support staff	2
Total aggregate hours worked per week	53

Qualified teachers and support staff: nursery

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	0.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	9
Total number of education support staff	1
Total aggregate hours worked per week	3
Number of pupils per FTE adult	5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	1
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	1
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0.2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	0	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Financial information

Financial year	2000-2001
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	£
Total income	149681
Total expenditure	147927
Expenditure per pupil	2903
Balance brought forward from previous year	6267
Balance carried forward to next year	8021

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	56
Number of questionnaires returned	36

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	69	25	6	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	44	44	6	0	6
Behaviour in the school is good.	47	47	6	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	31	36	14	3	17
The teaching is good.	53	33	3	6	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	47	36	14	0	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	64	17	17	3	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	56	36	6	0	3
The school works closely with parents.	56	22	11	6	6
The school is well led and managed.	44	39	3	6	8
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	64	31	0	3	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	31	53	6	0	11