



Inspection report

Simonside Primary School

Unique Reference Number 108454
LEA Newcastle Upon Tyne

Inspection number 269347
Inspection dates 23 – 25 November 2004
Reporting inspector Brian Padgett HMI

Inspection carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, and was deemed section 10 under the same act.

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|-----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Type of School | Primary School | School address | Bedeburn Road |
| School category | Community | | Westerhope |
| Age range of pupils | 3 – 11 | | Newcastle upon Tyne |
| | | | NE5 4LG |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | Telephone number | 0191 2860776 |
| Number on roll | 298 | Fax number | 0191 2716790 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body | Chair of governors | |
| Date of previous inspection | March 1999 | Headteacher | Ms Kath Held |

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| Age group | Published | Reference no. |
| 3 - 11 | December 2004 | 269347 |

Introduction

The inspection was a pilot of the new arrangements for inspection announced by Ofsted in its consultation paper of February 2004. It was carried out with the support and co-operation of the staff of Simonside Primary School and of the local education authority. The inspection was led by an HMI with a team of two inspectors and an independent lay inspector.

Description of the school

The school is situated in the Newbiggin Hall Estate, north west of Newcastle. About a half of the children have a free school meal, which is a very high proportion. Nearly all are white British, with just a few children from ethnic minorities, who have English as an additional language. Three year-olds entering the nursery have levels of skills and knowledge that are well below average, especially in language and in their social development. About one in every five children has special educational needs (SEN). They have a range of learning difficulties, including problems with behaviour.

The school was a first school originally, educating children to Year 4. It became a full primary school in 2002. It is part of a cluster of local schools that receives extra funding through the government's Excellence in Cities initiative.

Key for inspection grades

| | |
|---------|--------------|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding |
| Grade 2 | Good |
| Grade 3 | Satisfactory |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate |

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Overall effectiveness of the school

This is a good school with several outstanding features. Teaching is effective and often very effective. Children make an excellent start in the Foundation Stage and all achieve well throughout the school. Children's personal development is good and the vast majority develop good attitudes to learning. The staff are caring and supportive, particularly of disadvantaged children and those with SEN, and the school has excellent links with other schools and the community. The school is well led. The headteacher checks children's progress rigorously and has a very accurate view of the school's performance. It provides good value for money.

Grade: 2

Improvement since the last inspection

The school has made good progress since the last inspection. It was very effective as a first school and no key areas were identified for improvement. Standards have been maintained in the infants, and the school has made good progress in providing for the older children in Years 5 and 6. There have been clear improvements, for example the school is open and welcoming of parents and pupils' views, and teachers plan for, and measure, pupils' progress more carefully. Teamwork amongst staff is exceptionally strong.

Grade: 2

Capacity to improve

The school is well equipped to improve even further. There is no complacency within the leadership and management. The headteacher and senior staff know the school's strengths and weaker points very well, and identified them accurately in the school's self-evaluation. They have high expectations and seek out areas for further development. Staff are committed and hard working, and the school makes very good use of partnerships outside the school to provide additional resources and opportunities for children.

Grade: 2

What the school should do to improve further

The school should continue to implement its plans to:

- raise standards by the end of Key Stage 2 by improving provision for children in Years 5 and 6, listening to their views and, where appropriate, acting on them;
- provide a broader range of extra curricular activities, especially sport, across the school; and
- develop provision for the more able children.

All of these points are identified in the school's existing improvement plan, and are currently being implemented.

Achievement and standards

Children consistently reach average standards at Year 2, and this represents good and sometimes very good achievement for most. Very good progress is made by children in the Foundation Stage: in learning basic skills; in social skills; and in settling down to work. By the end of Year 2, children achieve much better than their counterparts in other schools in similar circumstances. Achievement at Year 6 is at least as good as in most similar schools, although standards are well below average. Standards are lower than those seen nationally because few children achieve the higher level. Results of national tests vary from year to year, and there is little difference between the achievement of boys and girls. Children with SEN do well because teachers plan appropriate work for them, and they often have special help in lessons.

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being

Children's personal development is good, and this helps them to lay secure foundations for the next part of their education and for life beyond school. Most children develop very good relationships with the staff and with other children. Their attitudes to learning and their behaviour are often very good and they work hard in lessons. They particularly enjoy lessons that involve the interactive whiteboards, and they enjoy lessons in history and music. The great majority of children are polite and friendly. They are keen to take responsibility and, as well as undertaking jobs around the school, they make a positive contribution to the development of the school through the school council. They work successfully as "buddies", helping children who feel left out. Attitudes fall off slightly with older children in Years 5 and 6; a factor known to the school. A small minority of older

children have poorer attitudes, because they are more aware of their rights than their responsibilities.

Some children have behavioural SEN. They make good progress overall, and benefit from the care they receive and the close partnership between school, support agencies and home.

The children know about what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. They eat fruit snacks at break, and enjoy physical education (PE), including keep-fit lessons for the older children. They are keen to have more opportunities to take part in competitive sport. However, although their knowledge is developing, much of what is eaten at school, for example, in packed lunches, indicates that their practice in eating healthily lags behind their awareness of what is good for them. Attendance is below average. However, there are few unauthorised absences, and there are rigorous systems for promoting attendance and punctuality.

Children's spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good. They are growing in confidence, self-esteem, and respect for the views of others. Assemblies are effective in promoting moral messages and have strong spiritual elements. Children's moral and social development is good, as they respond to the example set by the teachers and support staff. Children's knowledge and understanding of their own culture and those of others is good, and is celebrated in many displays around the school.

Grade: 2

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good, and often very good. Very good relationships between teachers, teaching assistants and children underpin the teaching and learning. Teachers are hard-working and very committed to the children and the school. They have good subject knowledge, particularly in teaching the basic skills; they plan well and check up rigorously on how well children have learned. In learning basic skills, children work to targets that are regularly reviewed. Every effort is made to make learning interesting and relevant. The new interactive whiteboards are proving very effective. In music, PE and history children really enjoy their learning. An important element of some of the best teaching is the effectiveness with which teachers and teaching assistants work together. This enables children to make very good progress, especially where the range of ability is very wide. Teaching assistants and support staff are well briefed, particularly when they work with pupils with SEN. The identification of children with additional learning needs occurs early in children's school life, and their progress is rigorously checked and reviewed.

Grade: 2

Curriculum and other activities

The curriculum is good, and all children experience a broad range of relevant activities. The Foundation Stage provides a rich environment where children learn through play and where each child's needs and progress are meticulously planned for and met. The emphasis in the main school is, appropriately, on literacy and numeracy, and fulfilling the requirements of the National Curriculum, but the school also takes pupils on a wide range of visits, and frequently invites visitors into school to make learning more relevant and interesting. The school is actively seeking to raise standards by developing the curriculum, for example, through the increasing use of information and communication technology (ICT), and by developing the creative and physical curriculum, to increase motivation. The range of extra curricular activities is quite limited at present, particularly for the older children, but plans are in place to improve this situation.

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support

The quality of care, guidance and support for pupils is good. Parents are quick to praise the school in this respect, and the vast majority of children believe they are well cared for. Care extends effectively for the physical wellbeing and safety of children, and the educational progress they make. The school has a welcoming and family ethos. The headteacher and special needs co-ordinator liaise closely with a range of service providers to ensure the care and support of vulnerable children, work with attendance officers being a good example. Guidance for learning is good within the school, and marking of children's work is improving as it is a current focus for development. The giving of homework is less consistent, and parents of older pupils were less satisfied with this aspect of the home-school partnership.

Grade: 2

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the school are good, with some very good features. The headteacher and senior management team have the children's academic achievement and personal development at heart, and these priorities are clearly shared by teachers and support staff, so that the staff as a whole has a unified sense of commitment to all the pupils. The senior team is particularly effective in involving and working with other partners, such as the local authority, and other schools and agencies, to ensure the inclusion of all children. The partnership with parents is strong. The school actively seeks the involvement of parents, for example through family learning initiatives, and as a consequence of its close

involvement with parents, the school is fully rooted in its community. The headteacher has developed rigorous systems for tracking children's performance. She has a very good grasp of how well the school is doing, and this enabled her and the staff to put together a very accurate evaluation of the school's performance in all its aspects. Leadership and management amongst the staff are well developed. The co-ordination of SEN is very good, and subject managers play an active part in checking children's progress and observing teaching in their subject. Curriculum leadership is good, and the school is making good progress towards ensuring that lessons are geared more closely to the needs of the children. For example, children are organised into groups according to their needs, and these groups change depending on the progress they make. Governors have been supportive of the school in the past, and have discharged their duties effectively. However, at present, the composition of the governing body is changing significantly, and important posts are unallocated. The school's resources and their use are good, and although the school's accommodation is only adequate, with classrooms awkwardly distributed, it is very clean and provides a stimulating learning environment.

Grade: 2

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