



West Pelton Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114004
LEA Durham
Inspection number 279294
Inspection dates 23 May 2006 to 23 May 2006
Reporting inspector Mr Andrew Bennett HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to inspect any school in England. The inspection is to be treated as a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary	School address	Stanley
School category	Community		County Durham
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		DH9 6SQ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0191 3700238
Number on roll	67	Fax number	0191 3700238
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Keith Potts
Date of previous inspection	1 October 2000	Headteacher	Mr John Heron

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
4 to 11	23 May 2006 - 23 May 2006	279294

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. The inspector held meetings with the headteacher, the chair of governors and another governor, spoke with non-teaching staff and classroom helpers, pupils and parents, scrutinised a range of documentation and pupils' work and visited every classroom.

Description of the school

West Pelton School is situated in a former mining village in a semi-rural area of County Durham. It is much smaller than most primary schools; the roll has fluctuated since the previous inspection but has fallen overall. The pupils are taught in three mixed-age classes. A significant number of pupils join or leave the school other than at the usual times.

About half of the pupils are entitled to a free school meal, which is a very high proportion. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties is above the national average; many lack social, emotional or behavioural skills normal for their age. All but one of the pupils are from a white British heritage and all speak English as their first language. In recent years, the school has won an achievement award twice and the Basic Skills Award three times.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

West Pelton is a good school, with many outstanding features. It has the potential to become an outstanding school in all respects; as a governor commented, 'we don't want to be complacent ... we want to stay fresh.' Provision for the pupils' self-development and well-being is first-rate. Every adult in the school takes part in nurturing mixed-age groups of pupils, encouraging them to articulate their feelings and ideas. The headteacher is quite clear that 'Every child has something to say'. Every week, groups of pupils meet to consider a topic raised in assembly and then comment on its relevance to their lives in and out of school. Thinking about anger management, for example, resulted in a series of questionnaires and discussions and eventually to advice that is displayed near the quiet area so that agitated pupils can remind themselves of the support available, as well as how they can help themselves. This pastoral programme has had national recognition and it is no surprise that a governor described as 'amazing, the level of responsibility children throughout the school are able to take.' A notable outcome is the deep-rooted understanding that has been built between the school and its community. Some elderly residents, for example, who use part of the premises as a weekly drop-in centre, have become involved in hearing readers. They are unanimous in praising the pupils' gratitude – 'They come running ... they're always pleased to see you.' Pupils enjoy coming to school and feel safe there; some make striking comparisons with other schools they have attended. The many questionnaires returned by parents to the inspector strongly support that positive view. Given this, it is a shame that a few pupils have poor attendance records; attendance is now improving thanks to the school's perseverance and tenacity, but is barely in line with the national figure.

The headteacher, 'fantastic' in the eyes of several parents, is committed to developing the pupils' communication skills through raising their levels of literacy and oracy. For many pupils, this aspect of their learning is as much an emotional safety valve as an exercise in improving academic skills. There is no doubt that most pupils make particularly good progress in English, especially in writing, and these skills – together with the emotional literacy that develops alongside them – might be used to even better effect in other subjects to raise standards generally. The pupils make good progress, but their learning could be even better if the commitment evident in much of their English work could be triggered more consistently. Although most pupils have a good general understanding of the quality of their work, some marking is less detailed and helpful than it might be. The presentation of the pupils' work is not always as impressive as the content.

The headteacher's leadership is clearly the most significant single factor behind the school's success. A visionary, his planning is rooted firmly, nevertheless, in what is desirable and achievable. The school has enjoyed unusual stability among teachers and governors. It knows itself well at every level and managers have the confidence to decide whether new initiatives, local or national, sit comfortably with the school's philosophy and ethos. Modern technology, for example, is used sensibly where it can enhance more traditional teaching methods. The chair of governors recognises that

the headteacher 'chooses his priorities very carefully' and that, if a problem should arise, he is 'able to deal with it without banging his drum.' Indeed, this calmness and humility is typical of the whole school community and goes a long way towards explaining the affection in which all the teachers are held by pupils and parents. Recent falling rolls have resulted in some redundancies but this has been handled sensitively and without rancour so that the pupils' education has not suffered. Indeed, the process has been seen as an opportunity to think about how pupils can be grouped effectively and how to make best use of the additional space now available within the building. The school, although small, gives good value for money when its achievements are set against the deprivation it has to counter in the lives of many pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Numbers in each cohort are small, so there is considerable variation in what pupils already know, understand and can do when they join the school. Overall, their attainment on entry is below what would be expected nationally. By the end of Year 6, however, standards in English, mathematics and science are broadly in line with the national figure. Most pupils make good progress, particularly in English. For the last two years, West Pelton has been in the top 10% of schools nationally when measuring the pupils' progress. Pupils enjoy working hard and achieving success, one Year 4 girl commenting, 'I like tests, because the tasks show me how to get better at maths.'

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

This is one of the school's undoubted strengths. West Pelton Primary School helps pupils understand their feelings and actions and how these affect other people. They care for each other and for members of the community. As one parent said, 'This is the safest environment many of the children have known, and they come on as a result.' A pupil in Year 3 said, 'it's perfect, really' and explained how every child knows there is always an adult who will listen to them or a friend who will help them.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good; the youngest children in particular respond enthusiastically to challenge. 'You know when you've done good work,' said a Year 1 pupil, 'because the teacher gives you stickers and tells you what is good.' Teachers often provide tasks that encourage pupils to work together and learn from each other. Displays of work around the school are thought-provoking and helpful so that there is a sense of shared purpose and continuity within the curriculum.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Links with the local comprehensive school, a specialist sports college, provide a range of physical activities for the pupils. The school responded to concerns about external facilities by installing an adventure trail. Celebrations involving the community are a regular part of school life. Pupils show enterprise skills, for example in raising funds to pay for a visit to Corbridge. They enjoy all of this but value also what is central to their development – in the words of a Year 5 pupil, ‘We do a lot of writing and reading and sums and things because we need that for when we’re grown up. There’s lots of fun here but we do what we have to.’

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

‘Outstanding’ hardly begins to describe the sensitivity and inclusiveness of the school’s care systems. A Year 6 pupil said, ‘Everybody knows you here. I hope not, but at a big secondary school I might just be a number.’ Everyone, children and adults alike, values the independence and responsibility they are given through the pastoral group meetings. Formal academic support has developed well; the headteacher rightly says, ‘We’re about profiles and overall achievement ... children understanding what they can do.’

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher is an inspirational leader who, in the words of one governor, ‘conveys his passion to everyone.’ Everyone who works in the school has a sense of purpose and realism, noted by the parent who said ‘The teachers are all really approachable and down to earth – and I mean every one of them.’ The headteacher’s view of school improvement is straightforward and focused – ‘It’s constantly looking at what you’re doing and wanting to do it better.’ All issues from the previous inspection have been successfully addressed and the school improvement plan sets out appropriate priorities. The school has the capacity to improve.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	NA
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

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The Pupils

West Pelton Primary School

West Pelton

Stanley

County Durham

DH9 6SQ

23 May 2006

Dear Pupils

I loved visiting your school and seeing the good work that you do. You certainly enjoy your lessons and the other activities. You have lots of sensible ideas about making the school even better, such as suggestions about improving the playground and having a quiet corner. I was very pleased to see how well you all work and play together and how thoughtfully you treat each other and visitors.

Mr Heron and all the other adults in the school want to give you the best education that they can, and I think they are very successful. I was touched when so many of you told me how much you appreciate their kindness. You are lucky to go to a school which listens so much to you, and that takes such good care of you. All your teachers give you work that helps you learn what you need as you grow older.

What would make your school even better? If everyone made a special effort to attend school every day, it would be easier to remember what you have learnt and use it to help you learn more. I think that if you work really hard all the time, you could do as well in other subjects as in the wonderful writing that so many of you produce. I have suggested to the teachers that they could give you a little more advice about improving your work when they mark your books.

You are lucky to be at a very special school. I hope you continue to be happy there, and in your future lives.

My very best wishes to you all.

Andrew Bennett

Her Majesty's Inspector