



Mowden Infants' School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114182
LEA Darlington
Inspection number 279328
Inspection dates 14 February 2006 to 15 February 2006
Reporting inspector Mrs Jennie Platt

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Infant	School address	Bushel Hill Drive
School category	Community		Darlington
Age range of pupils	4 to 7		County Durham, DL3 9QG
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01325 460933
Number on roll	181	Fax number	01325 357548
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs D Turner
Date of previous inspection	1 May 2000	Headteacher	Mr C Taylor

Age group 4 to 7	Inspection dates 14 February 2006 - 15 February 2006	Inspection number 279328
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average size school situated in a socially and economically advantaged area. Few pupils take a free school meal. A very low number of pupils are from minority ethnic groups and none need support because English is not their first language. The number of pupils assessed as having additional learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below average. The school, which has a good reputation for supporting pupils with learning or physical difficulties, has an above average number of pupils with a formal statement of special educational need. The school does not have nursery provision but most children attend a pre-school unit which is on site. Attainment on entry to school is above average. The school is involved in several national initiatives and has an Investors in People Award and healthy school status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school that it provides a good quality of education. Value for money is also good. Pupils make good progress and standards are high when pupils leave school. Children in the Foundation Stage get off to a good start because of the richness and variety of activities. They achieve well and are working beyond the level expected by the end of the Reception class. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers plan interesting lessons to capture pupils' interest. Assessment systems are not sufficiently established in writing so that higher attaining pupils can be further challenged. The curriculum is good, focusing on fun and learning through practical activities. Pupils' personal development is outstanding. Pupils really enjoy school and grow in maturity and independence, but because they are not set targets do not know what to do to improve. Attendance is excellent. Leadership and management are good. The school has an accurate picture of its strengths and weaknesses, but subject leaders do not use the information to set targets that are clearly linked to raising standards. High standards have been sustained since the last inspection and with the strong teaching team the school's capacity to improve is good.

not applicable

What the school should do to improve further

- Involve pupils more in their own learning by setting them individual targets.
- Improve assessment in writing and check that tasks really challenge the higher attaining pupils.
- Extend the role of subject leaders so that they make more use of available information to set targets that are linked to raising standards.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement and standards are good. Results of national assessments in Year 2 have been consistently above the national average and standards remain high. The number of pupils reaching above average levels is high in reading and mathematics but less so in writing. This is linked to a lack of information about current standards in writing so that tasks are not always sufficiently challenging for the higher attaining pupils who could make even better progress. The school has accurately identified pupils seen as academically gifted and is in the process of seeing how their needs can be fully met. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) have improved since the last inspection with new resources and pupils now confidently work at the level expected for their age. Children get off to a flying start in the Foundation Stage. From an above average starting point they make good progress and leave the Reception classes with standards that are higher than expected. Many children are working at early National Curriculum levels. Pupils with additional learning needs make good progress. An outstanding feature of the school is the support for pupils with formal statements of special educational needs, who often make excellent progress to reach

the level expected for their age. This is because they are so well supported by all staff and are fully included in all aspects of school life.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development and well-being are outstanding. Parents are very pleased that their children love school. Consequently, attendance is excellent. Pupils are open and friendly, courteous and well mannered, and behaviour is excellent. For their age, pupils sustain concentration for a long time and work hard. They have a thorough understanding of how to keep safe and healthy and take full advantage of learning in the fresh air, especially in the Foundation Stage. Pupils willingly help others as members of the school council or by befriending pupils who go to the friendship bench. These caring skills are extended to supporting the community especially through raising funds for others. The high standards in basic skills and the focus on independence prepare pupils extremely well for the future.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupils have a very firm grasp of the difference between right and wrong. Pupils show a genuine respect for the environment and appreciation of nature. In the Foundation Stage, children are introduced to other cultures through visits and imaginative role play. This is extended in Years 1 and 2 so pupils have a real understanding of cultures and beliefs different from their own.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good throughout the school. Teaching is lively and pupils find learning fun. Stimulating resources are prepared well in advance so lessons run smoothly. Drama is a strong feature in lessons and pupils make imaginative use of dressing-up clothes to act out stories. Early letters and sounds are thoroughly learned because of the use of puppets and actions which capture pupils' interest. Probing questions encourage pupils to think for themselves. This is evident in numeracy lessons and pupils confidently explain their methods of calculation. Occasionally, teachers do not explain what pupils are to learn. As a result, pupils are confused and learning is less effective. Teaching is good in the Foundation Stage because staff work well as a team and provide a good mix of teacher-led and free choice activities that extend skills and enhance independence. Support for pupils with additional learning needs is most effective because staff are guided by good individual education plans. Assessment is satisfactory overall, and good in reading and mathematics, where information is used effectively to raise standards by grouping pupils by ability. However, writing is not regularly assessed so teachers do not always set tasks that closely match ability. This restricts progress, particularly for higher attaining pupils. When marking work teachers do not make it clear how pupils can improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum is interesting and varied and successfully stimulates learning. In the Foundation Stage, experiences are rich and exciting and the pupils benefit from the emphasis on communication, literacy and creativity. This richness is sustained in Year 1 in sessions when pupils move around tasks, sampling a range of imaginative activities. However, the lack of adult support in one lesson made it difficult for the teacher to teach the science group effectively as well as sustaining overall management. Literacy and numeracy are promoted well in other subjects. The stimulating outdoor area in the Foundation Stage is used imaginatively across all areas of learning. Occasionally, too many activities are available which make it difficult for staff to interact to extend learning. The curriculum is enriched by visits and visitors. During the inspection the pupils gained considerable social and acting skills working with a visiting drama group.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. A good range of checks are in place to keep the pupils safe. Child protection procedures are clear and plans are in place to extend training to all staff. Underpinning the provision is the staff's commitment to their pupils. Pupils have overwhelming confidence in all staff and trust them to resolve any worries. Children settle happily when they start school because of caring relationships and close links with the pre-school group. Pupils with additional learning needs are especially well supported. Staff are given very helpful guidelines about the specific needs of these pupils so that they can offer the best support. Parents appreciate that the school caters for their needs as well as their children.

The school is starting to involve Year 2 pupils in their learning by giving them individual targets to improve their writing. As yet, this approach is not used widely, so pupils are not always clear how to make their work better in other years or subjects.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has maintained a good balance between academic work and enjoyment, and high standards have been sustained. Professional development is good and staff have many additional qualifications which enhance their contribution to the quality of education. Substantial collaboration, including parents and pupils, leads to success in identifying the school's strengths and weaknesses which closely match the outcomes of the inspection. For example, the school is adjusting assessment at the end of the Foundation Stage to improve the tracking of pupils' progress and are aware that assessment in writing needs attention.

Subject leaders effectively share their experiences so the school keeps abreast of current changes. However, they do not make enough use of the assessment information

available when setting school targets. As a result, targets are not sufficiently linked to raising standards and it is unclear how success will be measured. Management of pupils with additional learning needs is good and the school has very close liaison with other agencies to enable staff to offer well informed guidance.

Governance is good. Governors are especially helpful in checking on spending and health and safety issues. Inclusion is given high priority. Historically governors have been insufficiently involved in monitoring. However, they now play a more active role in self-evaluation with meetings to monitor all aspects of the school. This increased focus on critical analysis and the strong team of teachers means capacity to improve is good.

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?	2	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	2	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	1	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	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	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?	2	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	3	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	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	Yes
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

Mr C Taylor

Mowden Infants' School

Bushel Hill Drive

Darlington

County Durham

DL3 9QG

16th February 2006

Dear Children

Thank you for the friendly welcome you gave the inspectors when we visited your school. It is very clear you enjoy yourselves and we were grateful for the way you chatted to us about your school.

We liked these things the most.

Your behaviour is excellent and you really try your very best to please your teachers.

You told us you enjoy everything in your school and are happy because teachers make lessons and activities interesting. We agree with you.

Your attendance is excellent and you work hard and make good progress.

The headteacher, staff and governors manage the school well.

We have asked your teachers to look at the following things to make your school even better.

Pupils in Year 2 told us you have targets to improve your writing. We would like to see all pupils have targets in writing and other subjects.

We would like the school to keep closer records of the progress you make from starting school to the end of Year 2.

The managers of your school set targets to make your school better. We would like these to be more linked to raising standards.

We enjoyed watching you take part in the drama workshop and hope you have many more exciting experiences during your time at school.

Best wishes

Mrs J E Platt and Mrs J Lock (Inspectors)