



Darras Hall First School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 122265
LEA Northumberland
Inspection number 281209
Inspection dates 26 September 2005 to 27 September 2005
Reporting inspector Janice Stephenson

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

Type of school	First	School address	Broadway, Darras Hall
School category	Community		Ponteland
Age range of pupils	4 to 9		Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01661 823857
Number on roll	429	Fax number	01661 860447
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Rev. Kevin Watson
Date of previous inspection	1 June 2000	Headteacher	Mr Peter Tincombe

Age group 4 to 9	Inspection dates 26 September 2005 - 27 September 2005	Inspection number 281209
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Darras Hall First School has 429 pupils. It has an Early Years Centre for children aged 3 to 5, which is supported through external funding. The school is popular and situated in an affluent area. Children's attainment on entry is above the expected level for their age. Less than one per cent of the children take free school meals. A small number of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Recently there have been significant changes in staffing, and in March 2005 a new headteacher was appointed.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. It judges itself this way and the inspection agrees. It gives good value for money. Pupils achieve well overall, although the school knows that progress is not as consistent as it should be. Standards are consistently high in English and mathematics and many pupils exceed the levels expected for their age. Children in the Foundation Stage settle quickly into school and make good progress. Personal development is outstanding. Pupils thoroughly enjoy their work. They feel safe, valued and well cared for, and they gain a very good understanding of healthy living and secure skills for later life. These high standards stem from a strong ethos, good quality in teaching and the curriculum, and full parental support. Some teaching is outstanding and inspires pupils to learn very quickly. The qualities of this teaching are not spread widely enough through the school. Leadership and management are good, though staffing changes mean that some subject leaders lack experience in their role. The headteacher, deputy headteacher and governors know the school well and are keen to make it even better. They have a good capacity to do this and have identified the right areas for improvement. However, these priorities are not sufficiently focused on pupils' standards or informed by self-evaluation.

not applicable

What the school should do to improve further

- Make better use of the school's system which monitors pupils' progress to ensure that all of them make consistently good progress.
- Improve the effectiveness of the subject leaders in monitoring and evaluating the work in their subjects to help them to raise standards even higher.
- Ensure that the school's priorities for improvement focus clearly on standards and are linked to the findings from the school's self-evaluation.
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Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children make good progress overall and achieve well. This is the view of both the school and the inspectors. When children enter the school, their overall attainment is above that expected for their age. By the end of both Year 2 and Year 4, standards in reading, writing and mathematics are well above average. In both years, the number of pupils who attain levels above those expected for their age is very high, particularly in mathematics. Significant reasons for these consistently high standards are:

- Pupils have very good speaking and listening skills and are very keen to learn. They learn from each other as well as from their teachers because they listen very attentively and express their understandings and views relevantly and very clearly.

- The school sets challenging targets for achievement and expects learners to do as well as they possibly can. This expectation extends across different needs. As a result, pupils with special educational needs and those from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve well, and pupils with particular gifts and talents achieve very well. Standards in art, for example, are outstanding.

The school has a good system for tracking pupils' progress and setting targets for them. However, the system shows inconsistencies in the progress learners make. Not enough is done to give focused support where the tracking system shows that pupils' progress has stalled.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Children say that they enjoy school very much. They often talk with excitement and enthusiasm in their lessons. Behaviour is exemplary and inspectors agree with staff that children are polite, courteous and a credit to the school. All staff create a strong ethos that promotes exceptionally good achievement in personal development. The school judges this aspect of its work to be good but inspectors found it outstanding. Overall, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Children learn effectively about other cultures through exciting work that they do in lessons. The African displays around the school are a testimony to this.

Children have a very good understanding of economic well-being and this is reflected in the high standards that they attain in English and mathematics. Pupils co-operate well and work effectively in teams. All pupils know how important it is to be healthy. Some have snacks of apple and cheese and most drink water in classrooms. Careful guidance and effective child-protection arrangements ensure children feel safe. Children contribute to the community through their charity work and by looking after each other in the playground. The school council talks confidently about the part it played in the provision of playground equipment and in establishing the school's anti-bullying policy.

Attendance is above average, but inspectors agree with the school that, if fewer holidays were taken in term time, it would be even better.

Grade: 1

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Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching is good and some lessons are outstanding. The school makes the same judgement and knows that the best lessons, such as an excellent Year 4 mathematics lesson, inspire children to think accurately and quickly because teachers use a range of approaches. Such lessons make clearly planned links between subjects

and fully engage and interest learners. Very effective questioning both supports pupils' learning and assesses their understanding. For example, in an excellent reception class lesson, the teacher continually changed her approach to enable different children to learn at their best rate. However, high quality teaching such as this is insufficiently used as an example to improve teaching across the school.

All teachers encourage children to talk about their learning and share their understanding with each other. In good lessons work is matched carefully to the needs and interests of children. However, in these lessons teachers are not as skilled at using their assessment of current learning to move pupils on to the next steps. This slows the progress of some pupils.

The school agrees that teachers could also make better use of the information they have from tracking pupils' performance over time to identify groups of pupils who would benefit from additional support to boost their achievement.

Grade: 2

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school's judgement that the curriculum is good. This is because it matches the needs of all learners and so helps them to achieve well, particularly in English and mathematics. The high quality of display around the school and of work in books reflects its breadth and impact. The creative subjects such as art, as well as the very impressive range of after-school clubs, successfully enrich learning opportunities for all pupils. When teachers plan work that links subjects together, learning becomes more relevant for children and they make greater progress. This practice is, however, inconsistent across the school.

The curriculum provides very effectively for personal development and, as a result, pupils know how to co-operate and behave well. Although children in the Foundation Stage have been in school for only a very short time, they work and get on together very well. The curriculum for these children gives them good opportunities to succeed in personal, social and emotional development. It builds their learning step by step so that they make good progress.

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school that this aspect of its work is good. This is because all staff know their pupils well and strive to provide a good level of care and support for all of them. Child protection procedures are effective and clearly understood by staff. Pupils are very aware of how to stay safe and are very confident to approach adults in the school if they have concerns. Pupils talk openly about what they do when incidents of bullying or name-calling occur. They very confidently state that these are very rare and unacceptable, and that they would seek the support of an adult. Pupils

are encouraged to be friendly and kind towards each other, and all different groups of children work and play together extremely well.

Good individual plans lead to good support for pupils with learning difficulties. The school's revised marking policy means that most pupils now receive good feedback about their work. The progress of all pupils is tracked and monitored, but better use could be made of this information to target support more effectively so that the rate of progress for everyone is more consistent across classes and year groups.

Grade: 2

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school that leadership and management are good. The headteacher has a clear understanding of the direction the school should take and is determined to move the school forward. The deputy headteacher supports the headteacher well and is knowledgeable and well respected. Together they are good role models and promote a good team spirit. They are very clear about where the school needs to improve, and all the priorities they have identified are the same as those found by inspectors. This is evidence of the school's good capacity to improve. Over the last eighteen months, there have been significant changes to staffing. Following his appointment in March 2005, the headteacher re-organised the school's management structure. Some of the leadership team are therefore new to their posts and have not yet had enough time to develop their skills and expertise. Governors are very supportive of the headteacher and are effective critical friends to the school. They successfully challenge the leadership to improve the school further.

The leadership of the Foundation Stage is good. The coordinator values and respects the contribution of all team members. Management structures are good, and so all staff contribute well to children's learning.

Self-evaluation systems are good but they do not yet take into account the views of everybody connected to the school. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have accurately evaluated the quality of teaching and learning. However, these evaluations do not always shape approaches to school priorities. The school improvement plan contains too many action points and is not sufficiently focused on improving outcomes for pupils, in particular, standards.

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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?	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	1	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	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	2	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?	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	2	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	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

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Darras Hall First School
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28th September 2005

Dear Children

Thank you for your help in our recent inspection of your school. The inspectors thought that you were very polite and extremely well behaved. We agree with your headteacher that you are a credit to your school. That is why everyone talks about your school in a positive way.

You told us that you think your school is good and we agree with you. The teaching is good and your teachers and your helpers make your work interesting so that you enjoy your learning very much. Some of the lessons we saw were really exciting and inspirational, and this helped you to be enthusiastic and keen to learn even more. Your teachers also help you to learn how to take responsibility. The members of the School Council told us how they helped to get the playground equipment and mirrors in the toilets that everyone wanted. We think that your school is a safe, friendly and welcoming place and that all your teachers and other adults care for you very well. This helps you to feel confident and self-assured so that you can concentrate on your learning. We were impressed by how much you know about staying safe and being healthy.

We have asked your headteacher to make your school even better by using the information that they have about your work to give you some extra help when you need it. We think (and your headteacher agrees) that the school also needs to improve the way it finds out what works well and what needs improvement. We also want more teachers to become good leaders, and, with the help of the headteacher and the deputy headteacher, we are sure they can.

We thank you again for your help and also thank your parents for their views and opinions.

Yours sincerely

Jan Stephenson
Lead Inspector

Annex B