



Diamond Hall Junior School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 108759
Local Authority Sunderland
Inspection number 288181
Inspection dates 30 November –1 December 2006
Reporting inspector Keith Bardon

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

Type of school	Junior	School address	Well Street
School category	Community		Sunderland, Tyne and Wear
Age range of pupils	7–11		SR4 6JF
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0191 5537630
Number on roll (school)	363	Fax number	0191 5537631
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Margaret Snaith
		Headteacher	Mrs Kim Bennett
Date of previous school inspection	1 September 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This school serves a disadvantaged area approximately two miles from the centre of the city. Approaching one in five pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The majority of these pupils have English as an additional language but there are no pupils who are at an early stage in learning English. An average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and disabilities. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is a little below average. A new headteacher and deputy headteacher have been appointed since the last inspection

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it might reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to achievement and standards.

The school is improving but not yet fully effective or providing sufficient value for money. Good provision is made for pupils' personal development and well-being but academic progress is not promoted well enough. Teaching and learning are satisfactory but this has only become the case quite recently and there is a legacy of underachievement which is taking time to eradicate. The headteacher, senior staff and governors are focused on raising standards and are implementing plans to bring about the necessary improvements. The foundations of effective learning are being laid and the benefits are beginning to show in pupils' attainment, but it is still early days. Standards are too low and pupils do not achieve enough. This is particularly the case in mathematics but also in other subjects. The quality of teaching is satisfactory but there are examples of both good and weak teaching. As a result, the progress pupils make in different lessons and classes varies widely.

Pupils say that they enjoy their lessons. Attendance has improved this year and is similar to the national average. Most pupils behave well in class and around school. They know how to lead a healthy lifestyle and willingly help teachers and each other. Pupils use computers competently, but weaknesses in numeracy put them at a disadvantage for their future learning. The school cares for pupils very well and they feel safe and secure in its pleasant and welcoming atmosphere. Vulnerable pupils are monitored closely and supported extensively by staff. These and many other pupils benefit from the good links the school has forged with outside agencies. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those with English as an additional language play a full part in the life of the school. Pupils have told their teachers that they would like clearer guidance on how to improve their work and this is recognised by the school as an area for improvement. The school is working hard to increase the involvement of parents and an effective partnership is developing. Almost all parents have a very positive opinion of the school.

Procedures for checking how well the school is performing provide useful information which is analysed carefully. Developments are planned thoroughly with a high level of staff involvement. The contribution staff make to school management is satisfactory and increasing as they acquire the skills needed to carry out their responsibilities effectively. The school has the capacity to make further improvements because the headteacher and senior staff have a clear understanding of what needs to be done and are making a concerted effort to achieve it. Governors support the school and are developing their ability to hold the school to account.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase pupils' achievement and raise standards, particularly in mathematics.
- Ensure that all pupils benefit from consistently well taught lessons and maintain a good rate of progress as they move through the school.
- Ensure that all those individuals with a management responsibility have the necessary skills to make an effective contribution to school improvement work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Pupils' achievement is inadequate. Pupils start school with attainment that is often a little below that which is typical for their age but have been leaving Year 6 with standards that are well below average. The school accepts that this is not good enough and is making a concerted effort to improve matters. After being very low for a number of years, national test results improved in 2005, but made no further improvement in 2006. Many new strategies are being employed to raise standards but the underachievement is deep-seated and it is taking time to eliminate. In the meantime, standards remain too low, particularly in mathematics where pupils' confidence with numbers and calculation skills are poor. Most improvement has been made in reading and writing and standards in English are moving closer to the national average. Pupils use computers competently and their attainment in information and communication technology (ICT) meets expectations for their age. The individual support pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities receive helps them make satisfactory progress towards their individual targets. The achievement of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds follows a similar pattern to that of other pupils and is insufficient overall. However the support they receive for language development enables them to make satisfactory progress in spoken English.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of pupils are good. They speak very warmly about the school and have positive attitudes to learning. Attendance has improved substantially this year and is satisfactory. The atmosphere in classrooms is good and pupils are happy and generally keen to get involved and answer questions. On occasions pupils are a little reluctant to participate initially and lessons get away to a slow start. Behaviour in lessons and in the playground is good and pupils relate well to each other and to adults. Bullying and racist incidents are rare and effectively tackled when they occur. Good support for vulnerable pupils helps them to integrate successfully and to learn happily alongside other children. Pupil's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. A strong feature is their respect for the world faiths represented in the school. An effective focus on healthy living and participation in sport and exercise gives pupils a good base for making key lifestyle decisions. They value highly the many extra activities the school provides outside lessons and the opportunities they have

to take responsibility, for example as buddies and school council members. Pupils acquire useful skills for the future but weaknesses in their numeracy pose a potential problem for later in life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Relationships are good and in most lessons pupils concentrate well and try hard to meet teachers' expectations. Lessons generally flow well and teachers guide pupils through the steps in their learning carefully. Reviews at the end promote pupils' sense of achievement. Lesson planning is detailed and most teachers recognise the next steps to take to move learning forward. Learning objectives are identified clearly and shared with pupils but quite often these are too broad to give the lesson a sharp focus or to provide pupils with a precise understanding of what they are expected to achieve. On a few occasions the teaching fails to engage the pupils and classroom management is poor. Pupils' attention is allowed to wander and teachers' expectations of what they will learn are too low. In contrast there are good lessons in which lively teaching and challenging activities generate fast progress and high levels of pupil interest. Teachers' subject knowledge is generally satisfactory, but where it is lacking, particularly in mathematics, pupils' understanding is not fully developed and at times they are given incorrect information. Support for pupils, particularly those with learning needs, is effective although sometimes teaching assistants are not fully engaged with them when the whole class is being taught at the same time.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets statutory requirements, which is an improvement since the last inspection. The curriculum for English is helping to raise standards but the mathematics curriculum has weaknesses and does not provide sufficient support and guidance for teaching and learning. The whole school's curriculum has been reviewed and teachers are strengthening the links between different subjects which is making learning more meaningful. Vulnerable pupils, those with learning difficulties and those who speak English as an additional language, benefit from well structured support strategies which ensure they have full access to the curriculum. The curriculum successfully provides for pupils' personal, social, health and citizenship education through a carefully planned programme which includes much enjoyed project weeks. It promotes spiritual and cultural development well, particularly through the arts with music a prominent feature. Good use is made of the locality and of visitors into school. Out-of-hours activities such as the enterprise project enrich the curriculum and support teamwork and collaboration. A good range of sporting options encourages pupils to lead a healthy lifestyle.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Attention to pupils' welfare is a very positive feature of the school's work. Any pupils who are at risk are identified early and appropriate help is provided. An example is the outstanding work done in the nurture club. This enables vulnerable pupils to develop personal skills in a very supportive family atmosphere before school and at lunchtime. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are in place and reviewed regularly. Under the careful guidance of the newly appointed assistant headteacher, close attention is paid to pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. Effective systems are used to track their progress and support programmes provided when they need them. Good links with other schools, organisations and support professionals ensures that pupils receive the help that they require. Good liaison with parents keeps them fully involved in setting and reviewing their children's targets. Pupils have targets in English and mathematics to help guide their learning but they are not consistently applied or fully woven into everyday learning so that pupils are sometimes confused about their purpose. Marking is inconsistent. The best provides very clear information about what has been achieved and what the next steps to improve are. However not all teachers mark work in this way.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has focused the school on addressing its weaknesses and there is a determination among staff that the school can and will overcome its difficulties. The headteacher recognises that the school has still 'some way to go' before becoming fully effective, but development is picking up pace as confidence grows. Due mainly to the progress made in the last two years, improvement since the last inspection is just satisfactory. Procedures for measuring how well the school is performing are satisfactory and the information they provide is evaluated realistically. Senior staff work closely as a team although the contribution they make to leadership and management varies substantially between individuals. At other levels, several staff are still developing their management skills and the joined up thinking that links provision to outcomes is not yet fully in place across the school. The deputy headteacher has established much better procedures for monitoring pupils' progress, giving teachers a far clearer picture of how their teaching is influencing learning. The school's capacity for future improvement is satisfactory. Governors' ability to support and challenge the school is improving and is satisfactory. However, systems that enable governors to monitor the work of the school for themselves are only just being put in place.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Diamond Hall Junior School

Well Street

Sunderland

Tyne and Wear

SR4 6JF

30 November 2006

Dear Pupils

Thank you very much for the very friendly welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. Although we were with you for only two days, we thoroughly enjoyed finding out about the work you do, and a special thanks to those who talked with us about the school.

There were lots of things we liked about the school. It is clear that you are happy at school and that everyone gets on well, but we felt that at times you could be learning more. In some lessons you make good progress because teachers give you things to do that are challenging and fun but in other lessons the activities are less interesting. You have told your teachers that you would like a clearer understanding of what you are expected to learn and how to improve and we agree with you that this is important. Most of you try hard in class, behave well and are kind to others. Occasionally you could help to get lessons off to a quicker start by joining in and trying to answer the teacher's questions right from the very beginning. Adults look after you well and it is good that you feel safe and cared for. There is always help for those who need it and we were quite envious of the clubs and after school activities you can choose from. We were pleased with the way you help your teachers and impressed with the contribution the school council and buddies make to school.

We also looked at what the school the school might do next. These are the things we suggested:

- Give you opportunities to learn more and to achieve higher standards, particularly in mathematics, before you go to secondary school.
- Look for ways to make lessons even better so that everyone has good opportunities to learn all of the time.

You can play your part by always listening carefully to your teachers and working hard to meet the success criteria they set for you. You can help in mathematics lessons by thinking carefully about what the numbers mean, trying to work things out for yourselves, not being afraid to experiment with numbers and learning your multiplication tables and other number facts.

Keith Bardon

(Lead inspector)