

Tow Law Millennium Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114055
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	289794
Inspection dates	27–28 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Gianna Ulyatt

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	85
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	
Headteacher	Mrs Lisa Jackson
Date of previous school inspection	1 June 2002
School address	Wear Street Attlee Estate Tow Law Bishop Auckland County Durham DL13 4LF
Telephone number	01388 730283
Fax number	01388 730260

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	27–28 March 2007
Inspection number	289794

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average school situated in an isolated and rural former mining town. The area is predominantly disadvantaged; unemployment is high. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well above average. There are no pupils from minority ethnic groups. The number of pupils who have a statement of special educational need is double the national average. More than half the pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Attainment on entry to the school is well below that which is typical of four-year-olds.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school with good features. Value for money is satisfactory. The inspection confirms the school's evaluation of itself in most respects. The school, through excellent links with a range of agencies, plays a central role in the development of care to support the emotional needs and well-being of pupils in the context of school, family and the community. Parents appreciate the support the school gives their children and write, 'The school has really helped to improve my child's confidence.'

Pupils' personal development is good. Relationships are very good and pupils enjoy coming to school. They are keen to take on responsibility and contribute well to their school community through the school council. 'Buddies' make sure everyone has a friend and feels safe at playtimes and lunchtime. The good emphasis on personal, social and health education ensures that pupils understand how to stay safe and be healthy.

Standards are below average but pupils' achievement is satisfactory. When children start Reception their level of attainment is well below expectations for this age group. They make satisfactory progress in the Foundation Stage and their attainment is well below expectations by the start of Year 1. Progress is good in Key Stage 1, although standards remain below average by the end of Year 2, reflecting the high number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Results in the Year 6 tests in 2006 were below average. Progress in mathematics and science is better than in English, with writing being the weaker element. Pupils are prepared satisfactorily for their next stage of learning.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. They are good in Key Stage 1 and in upper Key Stage 2 because teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and they match the work to individual needs. In other classes, teachers do not use the information they have about pupils well enough. The result is, the progress pupils make is uneven and there is variability in the level of challenge for pupils especially in writing.

The curriculum is satisfactory with a good range of enrichment activities. These add much to pupils' good personal development, including their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Planning takes account of the mixed-age classes, but is not always adjusted enough to match the extensive ability range. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported soundly in class but the provision in withdrawal groups is often uninspiring and not practical enough to motivate pupils and address their specific needs. The school provides good levels of care for its pupils and the required safety and safeguarding procedures are in place.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has correctly identified a number of areas needing development. These priorities are based on effective arrangements for checking the school's performance and provide an accurate picture of each aspect of the school's work. As a result, well targeted action is currently being undertaken to raise standards. Staff wholeheartedly support the drive to improve standards and contribute significantly to the school's good capacity for improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English but especially in writing.
- Improve provision for pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

- Ensure that assessment information is being used throughout the school so that the work provided matches pupils' ability and challenges them.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are below average but pupils' achievement is satisfactory. The children's attainment when they start school in the Reception class is well below the level typical for their age; children make satisfactory progress in the Foundation Stage, except in their personal, social and emotional development where progress is good. Attainment is well below expectations by the time children start in Year 1.

Pupils usually reach below average standards and make good progress in Key Stage 1. However, in the Year 2 tests in 2006, the school's results were well below average. These results reflect satisfactory achievement with the cohort having two thirds of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The difference in attainment between girls and boys is directly linked to the number of boys with learning difficulties, being significantly greater than girls.

Year 6 results in the 2006 national tests show that standards were below average. Nonetheless, pupils reached their targets and achievement was at least satisfactory given their starting points. Half the pupils in this cohort had learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The trend shows an improving picture but standards in mathematics and science are rising at a faster rate than those in English, with writing being the weaker element. The current Year 6 is maintaining the improving trend and school assessment and inspection evidence shows that the pupils' progress is at least satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Pupils enjoy school because they say 'lessons are fun' and 'friendships are good'. The school offers enticing awards for attendance and punctuality which are now satisfactory and improving. Pupils have a clear understanding about how to live a healthy lifestyle. They eat plenty of fruit every day and thoroughly enjoy vigorous physical activity. The Healthy School award and the ActiveMark are testament to the school's commitment. Pupils contribute well to school life and willingly help out with routine jobs. Older pupils help younger ones to learn table manners at lunch time; outside, there is always a 'buddy' around to make sure playtimes are fun for everyone. The school council is well involved in making decisions, including the recent improvements to the playground for younger pupils. Pupils feel safe and secure in school and use the 'buddy box' when they need to express a concern. Pupils collaborate with others in lessons and to work together productively; for example, when discussing mathematical problems. Children in the Foundation Stage work well together and show good concentration skills during practical activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Throughout school, very good relationships instil confidence in the pupils and encourage them to focus on their work. Teachers ensure that

pupils improve their vocabulary and give them good chances to discuss ideas in lessons with a partner. Lessons are well planned so pupils know what they are going to learn. Although teachers have an accurate view of what each pupil knows, understands and can do, they do not consistently make the best use of this information when planning the next stage in learning. As a result, the rate of progress is uneven because pupils do not always have tasks that match their ability. In Years 5 and 6, where assessments of pupils' learning are used particularly well to set high expectations, pupils are well challenged and are well motivated to learn. In the Reception, children concentrate well when supported by adults, but opportunities to fully promote independent learning do not challenge children enough. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported soundly in class but the work completed in withdrawal groups is not inspiring or practical enough to motivate them. Marking of work helps pupils understand how to improve in English, but less so in mathematics.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory with good enhancement. All subjects of the National Curriculum are included in the timetable, alongside personal, social and health education. Planning takes account of pupils of different ages being taught in the same class, but activities are not adjusted enough to match the wide range of learning needs. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported through a range of intervention programmes. The school is beginning to change the curriculum to include a more creative approach. Visiting musicians, who use Indonesian instruments to teach, broaden pupils' horizons. Pupils speak with great enthusiasm about the newspaper produced using information and communication technology and about special topic days, including the Victorian day and the multicultural day. The curriculum is well enriched through a good variety of educational and recreational visits. Pupils thoroughly enjoy the after-school activities; such as gymnastics and sporting clubs, which promote healthy lifestyles. The visits to local places of historical or geographical interest contribute well to adding relevance and understanding to what pupils are learning in class. The Reception curriculum is satisfactory and there is a suitable range of outdoor resources to support children's learning out of doors.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Safeguarding systems meet national guidelines and risk assessments are in place to ensure the health and safety of children. The welfare, pastoral and emotional support for pupils is good and pupils confirm that they feel safe and are happy to come to school. Reception staff visit children in their homes before they come to school and this helps them settle well. Links with external agencies provide good support for vulnerable pupils and enable them to make good progress particularly in their personal development and self-confidence.

The support and guidance provided for pupils' academic progress are good. Teachers provide pupils with criteria for how they can be successful in each lesson. They monitor the progress of each pupil each term, but do not always link this information rigorously enough to their planning. Those who need additional help are quickly identified and given the support they need to ensure they make satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership, management and governance are good. The headteacher provides thoughtful and determined leadership. This has ensured that as new staff settled into the school, teaching is more consistent, standards are beginning to rise and pupils are making better progress. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have worked with the whole staff to initiate an effective system to monitor pupils' progress term-by-term. Although teaching, achievement and the curriculum are only satisfactory, the headteacher has accurately analysed what needs to be improved. The actions that are underway are having a clear and positive effect on the curriculum, on aspects of the teaching, and on pupils' progress in lessons. The headteacher collaborates with all staff when making important decisions about school development. All wholeheartedly support the thorough improvement plan, which is tightly focused on raising standards. Issues from the last inspection have been addressed and the school has good capacity for further improvement. Governors are well informed. They meet regularly and support the school well. They show a good awareness of standards and pupils' personal development. They weigh up complex issues carefully and have, for example, spent additional funding to provide extra support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities because some of them do not make quick enough progress. Some governors volunteer their time on a regular basis to help out in school. The school works hard to avoid being isolated and has excellent and productive links with a range of professional services, the local community and other schools to improve pupils' education and well-being. Parents' views are very positive. They appreciate the way they are invited to school assemblies to celebrate their children's achievements.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
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	2
How well learners enjoy their education	3
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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
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	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

27 March 2007

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of Tow Law Millennium Primary School, Wear Street, Tow Law

Bishop Auckland, County Durham, DL13 4LF

Thank you for making me very welcome when I visited your school recently. I enjoyed talking with you. I was very pleased to see how well you behaved in lessons and in the playground. I can tell you feel safe and secure when you are in school. I was very impressed with the way you look after each other and help younger children to eat their lunch.

Teachers know you very well and care very much about you. They try to match the work to your individual ability. They are going to look more closely at the results of your assessments, so they can check that everyone is making the right amount of progress. You are improving well in mathematics and science, but your writing could be better. I have asked the school to look at ways to make the work you do in small groups outside your classrooms more fun.

I wish you very good luck for your future and remember, the harder you work, the better your chances will be in life.

With best wishes,

Gianna Ulyatt

(Lead inspector)