



Kirk Merrington Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114074
Local Authority Durham
Inspection number 289800
Inspection dates 24–25 January 2007
Reporting inspector Alan Keenleyside

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	South View
School category	Community		Kirk Merrington, Spennymoor
Age range of pupils	4–11		County Durham, DL16 7JB
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01388 816230
Number on roll (school)	80	Fax number	01388 816230
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Cllr Ernie Foster
		Headteacher	Mrs Helen Williams
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2001		

Age group 4–11	Inspection dates 24–25 January 2007	Inspection number 289800
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This smaller than average sized school, south of Durham, is attended by pupils from the immediate area and beyond. The small number of pupils in the school results in mixed key stage classes. The areas served by the school have below average indicators of socio-economic circumstances and all the pupils are of White British heritage with English as their first language. The proportion of pupils in receipt of free schools meals is below the average as is the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school holds several awards including Healthy School's accreditation.

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 that provides good value for money. A high proportion of parents/carers returned their inspection questionnaires and the vast majority of them strongly supported the school and the quality of education it provides. One parent wrote, 'My child enjoys school immensely, the staff are approachable and the children are all polite and well behaved.'

Foundation Stage provision is good because teaching, the quality of resources and outdoor provision are good and children achieve well. The Foundation Stage curriculum is good overall, offering a broad range of learning opportunities. This is a significant improvement from the last inspection. By the end of Year 2, pupils reach above average standards in reading, writing and mathematics. However, in reading a small number of girls did not achieve as well as the others in 2006. Good progress continues in Key Stage 2 and the majority exceed the expected levels of attainment in Year 6. The school has rightly identified the need to target the more able pupils at both key stages and to provide more opportunities for them to develop their writing skills in other subjects. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities progress well. Pupils are confident and mature, easily engaging adults in conversation. They enjoy coming to school because they say the teachers make learning fun and that they are always willing to help. Pupils have good opportunities to become responsible through a range of activities such as helping younger pupils during meal times or breaks.

Pupils succeed well because teaching and learning are good overall and the outstanding ethos promotes a good climate for learning. The school is successful in supporting mixed age classes although the merely satisfactory teaching in Key Stage 1 impinges on some pupils' learning and behaviour. Pupils including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, play a full part in the lessons because they are well supported by teaching assistants. Teaching in Key Stage 2 is consistently good. Curriculum provision is good. Staff make sure that there is an extensive range of interesting, exciting and meaningful learning opportunities. As a result, pupils are very happy in school. Parents are rightly pleased with the progress their children make and the good care and attention they receive in the school.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. They feel safe and behave exceptionally well in the vast majority of classes. The excellent ethos of the school reflects the way in which pupils conduct themselves. Leadership by the headteacher and the governors is effective and there is a clear and exciting climate of improvement driving the school forward. They evaluate accurately the school's effectiveness and know clearly what needs to be improved. This gives the school good capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure all teaching is consistently good or better.
- Increase the opportunities for the more able pupils to write more widely in both key stages.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' achievement is good. Due to very small cohorts some caution is required when interpreting national test results for each year. What pupils can do when they start school varies considerably, but taken overall, attainment on entry is average. By the end of the Reception year, standards are above average and this represents good achievement for the pupils. In 2006, results in the national tests at Key Stage 1 improved in writing and mathematics and although reading is well above the national average, standards in this subject dipped slightly due to underperformance of the more able girls.

Pupils do well in Key Stage 2 and reach high standards. In science, standards have fluctuated a lot over recent years whereas in English and mathematics they have consistently risen so that by 2006 standards are well above average. This shows just how well the pupils can achieve when teaching is really good and there is determination to improve standards. Although more able pupils at both key stages achieve well, they are capable of achieving much more than they do at present in writing. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well by skilled staff. As a result, they make good progress towards their clear and appropriate personal targets. Pupils are well prepared for adult life because of their good acquisition of basic skills. Since the last inspection, standards in information and communication technology (ICT) have improved and pupils are now working better than expected in this subject.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development is good. The school is an orderly community and behaviour is very good. The pupils feel safe in school because of the very high standards in behaviour. They know that all staff care for them and they have very good attitudes to learning in most classes. Pupils enjoy their education and as one Year 5 pupil said, 'Teachers make learning fun'. Attendance is satisfactory and no better due to the number of pupils taking holidays during term time.

The provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development is good. Pupils are given many responsibilities to care for younger pupils, or play a part in the smooth daily running of the school and, as result, their social development is outstanding. The curriculum promotes an awareness of other faiths and cultures and encourages the pupils to reflect on the impact of art, music and literature through inviting storytellers, artists and musician to work in the school. Pupils work together well, develop good basic skills and are well prepared for their future education and economic well-being. For example, older pupils on the effective school council manage the sale of healthy snacks at break times ensuring a profit, which goes towards purchasing resources for the school such as play equipment for break times. The pupils' understanding of what is required to live a healthy lifestyle is well developed through their awareness of the importance of physical exercise.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning is good overall. The school is generally successful in supporting mixed key stage classes and mixed year groups. This works very well in the mixed Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 class and in the Key Stage 2 class where teaching is consistently good. However, this is less successful in the mixed Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 class where teaching in the Foundation Stage is good whilst that at Key Stage 1 is more variable but is satisfactory overall.

Classrooms provide a stimulating environment. Lessons are clearly planned and structured, and this helps teachers to keep the lessons moving along at a brisk pace. They explain carefully and clearly what pupils are going to learn and what pupils need to do if they are to succeed in the lesson. The pupils listen attentively and behaviour is very good in most classes. Many pupils are eager to answer the teachers' questions. Teachers have good subject knowledge, but there are not enough opportunities for children to develop writing skills within other subjects.

Relationships between the teacher, other adults and the pupils are very good. Teachers know their pupils well, marking and assessing work regularly. The best lessons are faster paced, challenging, and have a range of activities, which capture the pupils' interests. For example, a discussion on animal rights or the whale that recently visited the River Thames. Where teaching is merely satisfactory, the level of challenge is inappropriately pitched and pupils become disinterested. In these lessons, behaviour sometimes slows the pace of learning for all pupils. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from the help they receive from adults and learn as well as the others because their individual educational plans match teaching objectives set for them in lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good, offering a broad and balanced curriculum, which meets all statutory requirements. The provision in the Foundation Stage comprises a good blend of guided and independent activity. Its curriculum and resources have been restructured since the appointment of the headteacher, and this is having a positive effect on pupils' confidence and personal development. The school provides a good range of thriving clubs and activities, including sports clubs, ICT, music, art and Spanish, which enrich the curriculum for many pupils. Links with foreign schools and other cultures, for example Japan and China, broaden pupils' horizons and their understanding of other ways of life. The work in each subject is planned to ensure that pupils build knowledge and skills. The school places great emphasis upon the teaching of basic skills in literacy and numeracy to good effect. Playground 'buddies', together with the school council, make very good contributions to the school's life and excellent ethos that permeates throughout the school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides good care, guidance and support for all pupils. Good procedures for child protection, health and safety, and safe staff recruitment are in place. The school's supportive ethos ensures that the pupils feel happy and secure and this creates a positive climate for learning. Pupils know that any concerns they have will be taken seriously, so they are confident about asking for help if necessary. Academic progress is carefully tracked and individual and group targets are used well to guide pupils towards higher achievement and standards. While marking is conscientious and encouraging overall, in Key Stage 1 it doesn't always tell pupils enough about how they can achieve a particular target or improve their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good with some outstanding features. The headteacher's very strong leadership and management are pivotal to the school's success. She has had a very good impact upon school improvement, promoting a positive climate for learning that all pupils thrive in and enjoy since her appointment three years ago. One parent wrote, 'She is like a breath of fresh air.' The school has successfully created an environment where raising standards is at its heart and in which teaching and learning continue to improve. All areas of leadership and management are regularly and rigorously monitored. The school's self-evaluation is accurate, although in the quality of teaching it is a little modest. There is a strong sense of teamwork and morale is high. The headteacher ably supported by the deputy headteacher checks carefully on the quality of teaching and learning, spotting areas of weakness and taking effective action to raise standards. For example, the school correctly identified that the achievement of more able pupils in writing required some improvement by extending the range of activities to engage and enthuse pupils. Effective action has already been taken and this is beginning to impact on the Key Stage 2 national tests in English for 2006. The governing body is well informed, knowledgeable and challenges and supports the leadership team well. Governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities and make a good contribution in moving the school forward by working in close partnership with the headteacher. The shortcomings identified by the previous inspection have been addressed, illustrating the school's good capacity for further improvement.

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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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
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?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

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	1
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	1
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
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	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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

Kirk Merrington Primary School

South View

Kirk Merrington

Spennymoor

County Durham

DL16 7JB

24 January 2007

Dear Children

I had a great time when I recently visited your school. Thank you for making me so welcome. I really enjoyed talking to you and finding out about what you enjoyed doing. You are very proud of your school and rightly so.

Some of things I really liked were:

- your very good behaviour and positive attitude to work is helping you to grow into sensible students who want to learn and find out
- the staff take very good care of you and make sure you are healthy and safe; and
- you have an effective headteacher who works with all the staff to make sure you do as well as you can.

However, your school could be even better.

- I am asking the teachers to try and give you more opportunities to practise writing stories and articles, which show how imaginative you can be.
- Make sure all lessons are good or better.

You probably guessed that I enjoyed my two days in your school.

Yours sincerely

Alan Keenleyside

Lead Inspector