



Forest of Teesdale Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114100
Local Authority Durham
Inspection number 289806
Inspection date 1 November 2006
Reporting inspector Christine Graham HMI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Forest-in-Teesdale
School category	Community		Barnard Castle, County Durham
Age range of pupils	4-11		DL12 0HA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01833 622220
Number on roll (school)	15	Fax number	01833 622220
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Kath Toward
		Headteacher	Mrs Carole Connolly
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

Forest-of-Teesdale Primary School is a very small, rural school. Pupils are taught in two mixed age classes. There is a wide range of ability within the school and a high proportion of pupils need extra support with some aspect of their learning. Pupils live on farms or in small hamlets and most are brought to school in taxis. All pupils are of White British heritage. There is no village and the area is relatively isolated. Under European guidance the area is classed as an area of rural deprivation because of its distance from local services. The school has a Healthy School Award, an International School Award, the Basic Skills Quality Mark, heritage and environmental awards and is applying for Eco 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

Forest-of-Teesdale Primary School is a good school because it is well led and managed. The personal development of pupils is outstanding. The headteacher maximises the advantages that pupils gain from attending a small school and does all that she can to minimise the disadvantages. Pupils are articulate and mature. They participate well in all lessons and offer thoughtful and interesting comments. They appreciate all that the school does for them and show a high level of care and concern for others. They take on responsibilities within the school and undertake these with evident enjoyment. Even the youngest children are able to work independently and evaluate the progress they are making. Pupils are not only well prepared for their future economic well-being but are also developing an awareness of their responsibility for the area in which they live. The school maintains its good relationships with parents through regular telephone calls and has good links with the community. A playgroup is based in school one afternoon a week. However, the age and size of the school can pose problems. Whilst measures to safeguard pupils are in place, minor repairs are not always undertaken promptly and the assessments undertaken to ensure that pupils stay safe do not always take into account changing circumstances and conditions. For instance, the Key Stage 1 classroom is perfectly safe for children of four years old but can be hazardous for a toddler at playgroup. Pupils benefit from as much interaction as possible with pupils in other settings. While some of this is achieved through visits and joint working, much is achieved using information and communication technology (ICT). Good partnership work with other schools locally, nationally and internationally helps staff to keep up-to-date with current practice and different ways of working. Teaching is good overall and some is better than this. Children in the Reception year are taught for most of the time in the Key Stage 1 classroom; however, careful planning allows the teacher to meet the needs of all pupils and they make good progress. The Reception children work with the playgroup for one afternoon a week. While this provides good opportunities for social development and allows the class teacher to work solely with Key Stage 1 pupils, the Reception children receive too little structured teaching at this time. As they move through the school, pupils continue to make good progress. By the end of their time in school, they reach standards which are in line with or above those achieved nationally. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress because of the good teaching and support they receive. Although data about the school indicate that pupils make satisfactory progress, evidence seen during the inspection confirms that pupils make good progress given their starting points. However, some of the work set for pupils in English and mathematics does not always provide enough challenge and some pupils could achieve even more. The self-evaluation provided by the school was accurate. The school regularly monitors all aspects of its work and has a very clear view of strengths and areas for improvement. Plans made to improve the quality of education are well thought out and regularly evaluated to ensure that they are effective. Capacity for further improvement is good and the school provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the level of challenge in mathematics and English.
- Ensure that repairs are undertaken promptly and that potential risks in new activities are identified.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

When children join the school their abilities vary from year to year. Not all pupils attend a nursery and this, coupled with some geographical isolation, can have a negative impact on their development. Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage and by the end of the year they are confident learners who can do as much as others of their age. Pupils continue to make good progress in Key Stage 1. The excellent teaching they receive, coupled with a well planned curriculum, ensures that pupils achieve well. Most reach the nationally expected Level 2 at the end of Year 2 and some reach the higher Level 3. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress because the plans made for their education are regularly assessed and record what has already been achieved. Pupils continue to make good progress in the Key Stage 2 class. Although data about the school indicate that the progress made by pupils is satisfactory, evidence seen during the inspection shows that, by the end of their time in school, pupils make good progress with all aspects of their learning. The standards reached by pupils in national tests at the end of Year 6 are usually in line with or above those achieved by pupils nationally.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development and well-being of pupils are outstanding. The headteacher and staff provide a wealth of opportunities for pupils and this is the foundation on which all else is built. Pupils have a very good understanding of life in a multicultural society. They have worked closely with a school in London, visiting and performing in a joint concert, and they are about to begin a project working in partnership with local schools and those in South Africa and Kenya. The school receives Email diaries from HMS Bulwark, a warship which is currently on a peace keeping mission. Pupils sent thoughtful notes and letters to the crew after watching emotional scenes of the ship setting off on its tour of duty. The school 'dog' joined the ship on its voyage and his travels, coupled with the gifts and photographs given to the school by the crew, provide moving and very real evidence of life in other countries. Children care about each other. They are confident, mature and extremely thoughtful with very high self-esteem. All pupils talk positively about the advantages of attending such a small school. They recognise that friendships must be sustained and they sort out minor quarrels quickly because they need each other. They value this and appreciate the security it brings. Ministers from local churches regularly visit the school and pupils demonstrate good spiritual and moral awareness. They talk confidently and freely about moral issues and were keen to offer their ideas on what heaven might be like. The school is working

towards Eco School status and pupils talk knowledgeably about composting and the need to care for the earth's resources. They know that they are the future guardians of this beautiful area and take this responsibility seriously. Pupils have expressed their concerns about environmental issues to politicians and the media and take this message home to parents. Pupils follow a healthy diet at home and at school, and have a number of opportunities to exercise during the day. The problems associated with the school building are overcome because pupils are very aware of how to keep safe. Classroom furniture is made of plastic and pupils move things around carefully and responsibly as rooms are used for different activities. Attendance is good. Pupils say that they enjoy coming to school because they like to play with other children. The school recognises this and does all that it can to maximise opportunities for social interaction. Pupils explain their thoughts and opinions confidently, giving due consideration to the opinions of others. They are well prepared for their future economic well-being. There are regular talks by adults about the jobs they do and pupils recognise that good ICT skills will help them to continue working and living in the dale while having regular contact with people in other areas. Some pupils already attend to their own economic well-being by raising and selling lambs. This is a close knit school. All pupils participate in decision making and their views are acted upon. Not one pupil could suggest anything which might be improved in the school, but some thought a few more children might be useful when they play team games!

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall, although in Key Stage 1 they are better than this. The innovative appointment of staff means that some specialised teaching is provided and, as a result, work in art and design and technology is of very good quality. There are two permanent classes in the school but pupils frequently work in a variety of other groupings to ensure that their needs are met. Teachers plan carefully to meet the needs of three or four year groups and all pupils are taught to be independent learners. There is whole class teaching of new knowledge or skills and work for individuals is carefully planned to meet specific needs. Day-to-day assessment is accurate and detailed and pupils receive very good oral feedback on current achievement. Pupils are taught well and the individual support they receive ensures that their understanding increases during each lesson. They can evaluate their own work and improve it without prompting from staff. They make good progress in English and mathematics but as they move through the school teachers rely heavily on published schemes of work to meet their individual needs. Although carefully matched to their abilities, this does not always provide appropriate challenge to individuals. While pupils meet their own and their teachers expectations, opportunities to further extend their skills are sometimes missed. The work of groups is carefully planned to support those who need further help and pupils with learning difficulties make good progress. Pupils are articulate because they are taught to be so and get frequent opportunities to share their thoughts and ideas with partners or the whole group. They

are careful listeners and have been taught how to politely disagree with others or extend their thinking. They answer questions confidently and offer ideas and opinions. Opportunities to work with pupils from other schools and to lead working groups of younger pupils increase the involvement and participation of older or more able pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. The headteacher and staff look outwards and through their own development ensure that all that is good in current practice is offered to pupils in the school. All new initiatives are carefully evaluated and are only adopted if they will improve pupils' learning. Geographical isolation is overcome and pupils benefit from an enjoyable and meaningful curriculum which is firmly rooted in the area in which they live. An appropriate focus is given to embedding ICT throughout the curriculum and pupils sustain relationships with contacts in other schools through Email. Participation in the School Sport Partnership provides opportunities for pupils to experience a wide range of sports, develop individual skills and take part in multi-sports festivals. Extra-curricular activities are provided on one evening a week and all pupils attend. Pupils go on residential visits and learn survival skills in a carefully controlled environment.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils receive good care, guidance and support. Staff and pupils work closely together so staff are able to deal quickly with even the slightest upset or problem. There are effective systems to maximise communication with parents because most are not seen on a daily basis. Parents think well of the school and appreciate all that it does. Even the school taxi drivers are included in the information which is sent out from school in order to increase community involvement. However, staff are conscious that this closeness can have a negative impact on some pupils and at times individuals are allowed to sit back and reflect rather than always having to be an active participant. The culture of the school is founded upon rights and responsibilities. Pupils understand that they must take their responsibilities seriously and they do. Pupils receive good academic, social and moral guidance and this, coupled with the very good support they receive, helps them to become thoughtful and well rounded individuals. All the formal arrangements for safeguarding pupils are in place and are reviewed regularly. However, the age, size and location of the building bring their own problems. Risks are not always re-assessed when resources are used for a different purpose and occasionally items are not repaired quickly enough.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher provides inspirational leadership. She is well supported by the staff and governors and has

ensured that the school provides pupils with a rich and very effective education. She ensures that the school is part of the wider world by working in partnership with a number of very different schools in England and further afield and provides innovative solutions to overcome the problems associated with being a small school in a relatively remote area. The headteacher sees the small size of the school as an opportunity rather than a disadvantage. She views the school with a critical eye and is aware of the need to adapt to current practice and regularly review progress. She combines a heavy teaching commitment with effective leadership skills and believes that her teaching commitment improves her management role. However, the many calls upon her time occasionally mean that small but important matters connected with the repair and use of the building are not attended to quickly enough. School self-evaluation is rigorous and there is an annual meeting with all staff and governors to review progress. Although the second-in-charge is only in school for a small amount of time, this is more than compensated for by her very good local knowledge and the fact that she is always available when needed. Together, the staff team do much to ensure that this very small school offers all the opportunities that would be found in much larger establishments. Subject leadership is shared between a very small number of staff but this does nothing to lessen the rigour with which the work of teachers is monitored, subject teaching improved and new ideas and initiatives taken on. Governors are committed to the school and share the high aspirations of the headteacher and staff. They participated in the writing of the school's self-evaluation. This was accurate and demonstrated that this is a school which knows itself well.

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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?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
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	3
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

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?	1
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	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	1
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

The Children

Forest of Teesdale Primary School

Forest-in-Teesdale

Barnard Castle

County Durham

DL12 0HA

1 November 2006

Dear Children

Thank you for being so helpful when we visited your school this week. Mrs Ling and I were very impressed by many of the things we saw. We were particularly pleased to see how well you learn. You are all very keen to answer questions and you work together very responsibly in pairs and groups. You explain your ideas well and give thoughtful answers. We liked the way you evaluate your work and correct your mistakes before your teachers tell you to. We think you make good progress because your teachers plan the work you do very carefully and give you lots of opportunities to learn about the world in which you live. You go to a very small school but you have lots of really exciting visitors, trips and events.

We think you are very mature and responsible. We were delighted to see how well you take care of each other and how responsible you are when you do jobs around the school. We could see that you know how to keep safe and healthy and we really enjoyed our lovely school lunch. You told us all the things that you like about the school and we could see how much you appreciate the things that the staff do for you. We know that you enjoy art and design and technology and that you produce some excellent work.

There were only two things that we thought the school could improve. As you get older, you often work from books in mathematics and English. Although this does help you to make progress, the work is sometimes a little easy for you and you don't work hard enough. We think you could make even better progress if you were challenged a little bit more. The other point is to do with the building. It is quite old and, although you look after things well, sometimes they do break down. We want the school to see that they are repaired quickly. The classrooms are used for a lot of different things and, although they are safe for you, they are sometimes not so safe for the little children who attend the playgroup. We have asked Mrs Connolly to make sure that the toddlers cannot hurt themselves. We had a lovely day in your school. We could see how much you enjoy your education and how much you learn. We will be sure to watch you on television in a few weeks time and it will remind us of our visit. We wish you well for the future.

Best wishes

Christine Graham

HM Inspector