

Mowden Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114184
Local Authority	Darlington
Inspection number	289826
Inspection dates	14–15 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Graeme Clarke

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	245
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Elizabeth McAllister
Headteacher	Mr Brian Watkinson
Date of previous school inspection	1 April 2002
School address	Conyers Avenue Darlington County Durham DL3 9DE
Telephone number	01325 380820
Fax number	01325 482872

Age group	7–11
Inspection dates	14–15 March 2007
Inspection number	289826

© 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 two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average size school which serves a locality that is broadly above average in socio-economic terms. Most pupils are from a White British background with a very small number from other heritages for whom English is not their first language. Very few pupils are entitled to free school meals. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Mowden Junior School provides its pupils with a good education and several aspects of its work are outstanding. An overwhelming majority of parents are delighted that their children enjoy school and feel safe; they are also pleased with their children's progress. One parent's comment sums up their views well, 'My son is flourishing'. Nevertheless, a sizeable minority feel more could be done to seek and take parents' opinions into account.

The headteacher successfully promotes a climate for learning within which every child matters and there is outstanding equality of opportunity for all. He ensures that there is a good curriculum and high levels of care and support so that pupils' personal development and well-being are good. The school fosters pupils' good cultural, social and moral development from when they join in Year 3. Their spiritual development is satisfactory. Pupils' enthusiasm and cheerfulness, in and out of lessons, show that they really enjoy school. They are very aware of the need to keep healthy. They take part energetically in physical activities, and their enthusiasm for the 'Bike It' initiative stems from their desire to improve fitness and act safely on the road. They behave impeccably by acting politely and considerately to one another and adults, by following routines well, and by settling quickly to work. Pupils make a good contribution to their community. Through their 'Playground Pals' initiative they actively promote friendship, safe conduct and anti-bullying tactics. The Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark award recognises pupils' very high levels of literacy and numeracy skills, which contribute well to their preparation for moving on to the next stage of their education.

Pupils' attainment when they join the school is well above the average. Over their four years in school, they make good progress and achieve well because teaching and learning are good. The 2006 results of national tests for Year 6 pupils stand out. Pupils left the school with very high standards in all subjects compared with the national average. Results improved on those of 2005, most notably in English. Taking their starting points into account, girls achieve outstandingly well and boys do well, but not quite as well as girls. Teachers provide activities that successfully hold pupils' interest and challenge them to think. In turn, pupils work industriously and enjoy their accomplishments. However, teachers do not make full use of the available information about pupils' attainment to help them all achieve even higher standards.

Good leadership and management by the governors, headteacher and leadership team ensure that the school derives good value from its resources. All are involved in identifying strengths and areas for development. Since the last inspection, new initiatives have improved standards in English, especially for boys, and information and communication technology (ICT). The school has a clear sense of direction and its capacity for further improvement is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Take steps to raise boys' achievement.
- Ensure that the recently developed procedures for tracking pupils' progress are fully used by teachers to promote learning.
- Improve communication and consultation with parents.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils join the school with well above average levels of attainment in their Year 2 statutory assessments. They make good progress so that by the end of Year 6 their standards in English, mathematics and science are very high. Results in 2006 exceeded the school's targets at the expected Level 4 and the higher Level 5. Standards in English improved on those of 2005 and rose to be very high again as a result of determined efforts by the school to foster boys' interest and to deal with lower than expected attainment in writing. Mathematics and science results have been consistently very high in recent years.

Girls' progress and achievement are particularly noteworthy because, given their starting points, they did significantly better than predicted and achieved very highly. Although the boys made good progress, overall they did not achieve quite as well as the girls. This is an issue the school recognises and has begun to address it successfully. Pupils with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those, for whom English is an additional language, very successfully play a full part in school life and, as a result, achieve well and make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Many opportunities and activities ensure that pupils' cultural, moral and social development is good. Their spiritual development is satisfactory. Visiting speakers and educational visits increase their knowledge of other faiths and cultures, although pupils have relatively few opportunities to broaden this aspect of their development. Behaviour in the classroom is impeccable and pupils are polite and considerate when moving around school. Pupils' attendance is very good and well above the national average. They clearly enjoy school. They show positive attitudes and enthusiasm for learning; they willingly work hard. Pupils feel safe in school and know where to seek help if troubled. They are knowledgeable about how to keep healthy and fit. They understand the need for regular exercise and a relatively high number cycle safely to school each day as part of the 'Bike It' initiative. Many like and take part in physical activities such as football, hockey, cricket and Scottish country dancing. The recent 'Healthy Eating Week' has raised awareness of healthy diets. The school is actively pursuing, but has yet to gain the Healthy School award. Pupils make a valuable contribution to their school and local communities and are justifiably proud that their work on the Pedestrian Heart project is displayed in Darlington town centre. Their high level of basic skills stands them in good stead for moving on to secondary school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall, and some is outstanding. Very good relationships between staff and pupils foster good attitudes to learning. The inclusion of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in mainstream lessons is a strength of the school and effective support helps these pupils to make good progress. Pupils diligently follow clear routines and settle quickly to work. At the start of many lessons, teachers share learning goals with the class so pupils know what is expected of them. However, at the end, teachers rarely discuss how well these objectives have been met to reinforce the purpose of the lesson. The

best lessons are planned well; pupils' interest and involvement is sustained by a lively pace, good use of the interactive whiteboard and work that matches all abilities well. Pupils are helped to demonstrate and explain their knowledge by skilful questioning that taxes their understanding. The teaching of mathematics to sets of pupils with similar ability is noticeably helping all achieve well. For example, pupils in a Year 5 upper set enjoyed rising to the challenge of investigating Fibonacci numbers in a 'real-life' situation. However, in some lessons the same tasks are presented to all pupils and there is insufficient explanation given to enable pupils to work out how to solve a problem; this slows progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum meets national requirements. An emphasis on English, mathematics and science leads to very high standards of attainment. Furthermore, there are frequent opportunities for pupils to hone their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. Thematic work links several subjects successfully and pupils particularly enjoy practical activities in physical education, art and design, design and technology and science. The recently revamped personal, social, health and citizenship programme is enhanced by successful activities such as cycling proficiency and working with the school nurse on relationships and drugs awareness. All these contribute well to the pupils' personal development. The curriculum is enriched through many visits, such as to local museums and residential outdoor-pursuits centres, and by visitors such as members of world faiths, musicians, and artists. Many pupils voluntarily take part in after-school activities, and although the range is limited, sports and Scottish country dancing are popular.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Every child knows that they matter and that they are well cared for. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils: child protection; health and safety; and risk assessment are in place and meet statutory requirements. Pupils' feel very safe at school and have confidence that staff will deal with anything they are concerned about. Teachers provide very helpful guidance on what has been done well when they mark pupils' work. Often they comment in writing or in discussion to let pupils know what they need to do further. Pupils find these targets in literacy and numeracy useful for knowing how to improve. There are recently implemented procedures for using data about pupils' performance to track their progress. However, this information is not yet being fully used by teachers when planning pupils' work.

Good links with outside agencies support all pupils and especially those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The majority of parents are very supportive of the school. The reading priority project that brings in volunteers, many of whom are parents, contributes to the development of the pupils' reading skills. Most parents are very pleased with the progress of their children but a minority feels that consultation could be improved. Satisfactory liaison arrangements with the nearby infant and secondary schools ease transition into and out of the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Good leadership and management help all pupils thrive and enjoy their work. The headteacher's effective leadership sets the tone for high quality care and creates a very positive climate for learning. Except for a dip in English results in 2005, the school has worked well to maintain standards that are consistently very high, year-on-year. A new senior staff team is working to improve achievement further. Governors emphasise their role in raising achievement by the way they work. Having received reports from the headteacher and senior leaders, they rigorously discuss and openly share their perceptions of the quality of education and all aspects of school life. Senior leaders work well together to analyse and make good use of assessment information to track pupils' progress and to evaluate the quality of most of the provision accurately. They have overestimated the extent of some aspects of pupils' personal development and their use of performance information to improve learning. Nevertheless, they properly identify key areas for development and have successfully put in place training activities aimed at improvement. The school has successfully addressed issues raised at the last inspection about its development planning and is continuing to improve its evaluation procedures to make them more effective. A rapid response to the dip in English results in 2005 successfully improved the teaching of reading and standards in writing to the previous very high level.

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

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	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	1
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	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
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.

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	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

Mowden Junior School

Conyers Avenue

Darlington

County Durham

DL3 9DE

16 March 2007

Dear Pupils,

Mrs Beckett and I really enjoyed our visit to your school last week. Thank you for helping us when we came into your classrooms and your assembly to see you at work. You were very polite and really helpful. We enjoyed talking to you and we were especially impressed with those of you on the school council whom we met. It was great to see how much you enjoy coming to school and how much you contribute to school life. I know the staff are all very proud of you.

Your school has a very friendly atmosphere. We are pleased you feel safe and happy because all the adults in the school look after you very well. You are exceptionally well behaved and have very good manners. Many of your lessons are good and some really stand out. We were very impressed with your hard work and the way you like to take part. You obviously enjoy all the practical activities. You are doing well in English, mathematics and science. Two years ago some pupils did not do so well in English. Last year the school found ways to make English more interesting and results in the Year 6 tests were much higher last year. The girls in Year 6 did exceptionally well. We have asked the school to find more ways to help the boys do as well as the girls. We have also asked your teachers to use the information they get from marking your work and tests when they plan lessons for you and to help you know how to do even better. Finally, we have asked the school to seek your parents' views more often and share information and opinions with them.

Some of you will leave at the end of this year to join a new school. You have many opportunities at Mowden Junior School to learn about life and these will stand you in good stead for the future. I hope that you all do really well.

Yours sincerely,

Graeme Clarke

(Lead inspector)