



# Alderman Leach Primary School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 132204  
**Local Authority** Darlington  
**Inspection number** 293983  
**Inspection dates** 11–12 January 2007  
**Reporting inspector** Moira Fitzpatrick

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary	<b>School address</b>	Alderman Leach Drive
<b>School category</b>	Community		Darlington, County Durham
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11		DL2 2GF
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01325 380792
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	325	<b>Fax number</b>	01325 357052
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Mr Bryan Thistlethwaite
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Catherine Thompson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 April 2002		

<b>Age group</b> 3–11	<b>Inspection dates</b> 11–12 January 2007	<b>Inspection number</b> 293983
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

The school serves an area of mixed council owned and private housing. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage, with less than 5% from minority ethnic groups – mainly Chinese or British Asian. There are three children who speak English as an additional language and who are at an early stage of fluency. The percentage of pupils receiving free school meals is about average, so too is the percentage who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. When children join the Nursery, they have attainment that is broadly average although they are not strong in communication, language and literacy and mathematical development.

The school has undergone considerable upheaval in recent years. Firstly, in 2000 with the amalgamation of the infant and junior schools, then two years ago the school moved into new accommodation, which was not fully completed at the time of the move. There has been considerable staff turnover in that time, which has stabilised in the last two years.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

Alderman Leach is a satisfactory school and it provides satisfactory value for money. After a period of staffing turbulence and instability since the last inspection, the school has now established itself in new buildings and is benefiting from stable staffing and a new senior management team.

Pupils reach average standards by Year 6 and achievement is satisfactory. However, there are still a few pupils, usually lower and higher attainers, who do not consistently make the progress of which they are capable because their needs are not being fully met. The school has recognised this and has new measures in place to track learning and provide support when pupils are found to underachieve. The school's care for pupils is good and pupils say they feel safe and secure. Pupils' personal development is satisfactory and improving as the school's provision strengthens. Pupils' behaviour is consistently good. They show an increasing ability to take on responsibility, suggest improvements to the school and make a contribution to the wider community through charitable fundraising. They know about healthy lifestyles and an increasing number cycle to school. Pupils enjoy school and the majority attend well. They are prepared satisfactorily for the next stage of learning.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. It is especially good in Years 5 and 6 because teachers have a good knowledge of what to expect of pupils and they know how well they are progressing. Elsewhere in the school, strategies for assessing pupils' progress and matching work to pupils' ability are less effective. The school's curriculum provides a sound basis for teachers' planning in English and mathematics. Enrichment activities are good and effectively develop pupils' special talents and interests. While the quality of provision and standards in the Foundation Stage are satisfactory, planning for mathematical development and communication, language and literacy does not make it clear how skills are to be developed and extended. The school is seeking advice to improve planning in the Foundation Stage in the current term.

The leadership and management of the school have stabilised after a prolonged period of change and some long term staff absence, and are now satisfactory. The recently appointed deputy headteacher works very well with the headteacher to provide clear direction for improvement. The development of middle managers, which slowed because of staff turnover, is now progressing well. Currently, they have limited first hand knowledge of what is happening in lessons because they do not have opportunities to visit classrooms. This means they have difficulty identifying how to guide teachers or to see how changes are working in practice. They are better informed of how to raise standards because of available assessment information. Despite having a number of barriers to overcome, the school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection. Procedures to evaluate what is working well and what needs attention in the school are satisfactory. As a result, the school has a clear understanding of what needs attention and is soundly placed to continue to improve.

## What the school should do to improve further

- Improve accuracy in the assessment of pupils' work and use assessment to consistently set work at the correct level of challenge for all groups.
- Develop the monitoring and evaluating role of middle managers.
- Ensure Foundation Stage planning provides activities in communication, language and literacy, and mathematical development that match the age of these children.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 3

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall and they reach average standards by Year 6. A few higher and lower attaining pupils do not make as much progress as they should between Years 1 and 6 because assessment information has not spotted their underachievement. The school's new tracking procedures are now picking up underachievement quickly so that appropriate interventions can be put in place.

From an average starting point children in the Foundation Stage make satisfactory progress. By the end of Reception, the majority reach the learning goals set for them, except in communication, language and literacy and mathematical development, which are lower than other aspects when children start school. Children make good progress in their personal and social development. Most pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 1 and 2. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 2 show broadly average standards in reading, writing and mathematics although fewer pupils reach the higher levels than is usual by the age of seven.

Results in national tests in Year 6 have been average for the last four years, though the overall progress of pupils from their Year 2 results has been below average. This is because assessment failed to address underachievement, especially of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the higher attaining pupils, and this reduced the overall progress of the group. Nevertheless, the vast majority have made satisfactory progress. There is no difference in the attainment of boys and girls. The new, improved assessment systems show that all pupils are now making satisfactory progress. While the school did not fully meet its targets for the expected level in national tests in 2006, it exceeded its targets for pupils reaching the higher level in reading, writing and mathematics, demonstrating some effectiveness of the new measures it has put in place.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory with some good aspects. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Pupils are considerate towards one another and very welcoming to visitors. Pupils say they feel safe and secure in school. Many enjoy school and when they talk about their work, they are keen to describe what aspects of lessons they like and what holds their interest. They appreciate and value what is provided for them after school. Attendance is satisfactory. A growing

number of pupils cycle to school and have a clear awareness of the potential dangers and physical benefits. They know how to keep healthy and take regular exercise. Although pupils understand the need for balanced diets, this is not always evident in the choices they make. Pupils are willing to take on responsibilities from a wide range of opportunities; for instance, older pupils support younger children in the playground and manage the organisation of the laptops for teachers. This aids their understanding of how to live in a community. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Moral and social developments are strengths and contribute to the harmonious community. Cultural development is satisfactory although when pupils speak of cultural differences and similarities, their knowledge is restricted to matters relating to different faiths and not how beliefs affect the way people live. By Year 6, pupils are adequately prepared for the next stage of their learning.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Teachers' good relationships with their pupils ensure that they feel secure in making their contributions to lessons. Where lessons promote good progress, they are well structured and time is used well. In these lessons, teachers share the learning intentions with pupils and provide interesting and challenging activities for them to learn independently. Pupils respond well to this form of organisation. Where teaching is less effective little progress is made because teachers do not match work to the pupils' needs or challenge them to work independently. Teaching is consistently good or better in Years 5 and 6. In these years, pupils respond well to the high level of challenge, the interesting activities and the high expectations that teachers have of them. School data show that the rate of learning accelerates in these classes. A weakness in teaching is a lack of accurate knowledge of the National Curriculum levels of attainment for specific age groups. This sometimes leads to expectations that are too low for groups of pupils who are then not challenged to make the best progress of which they are capable. Teachers have responded well to recent training in assessment and are aware that there is more to be done to improve and refine their knowledge.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 3**

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets all statutory requirements. The school has rightly concentrated on improving the English and mathematics curriculum and this has raised standards in the basic skills. For example, developments to the curriculum for writing, including regular assessment of pupils' progress, are proving successful, as demonstrated in the 2006 Year 6 results. Developments to the rest of the curriculum are planned to increase its appeal to pupils, and to provide more opportunities for the use of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills in other subjects. Regular visits to local places of interest effectively extend learning

beyond the classroom. There is a good range of after-school clubs, which give pupils opportunities to develop special interests and talents. The Foundation Stage curriculum is satisfactory overall, though occasionally some planned activities especially in mathematics, language, communication and literacy do not match the children's stage of development. The school has already recruited external support to improve the planning for the Foundation Stage. The provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good because the school works well with parents and other agencies to ensure that these pupils have full access to the curriculum.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The care, guidance and support provided by the school are good. The majority of parents agree that their children are well cared for and supported. The staff provide a good quality of care and are rigorously committed to promoting their health and safety and safeguarding pupils. Risk assessments are prepared in detail and regularly updated. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified early and good arrangements are put in place to support them. Good contact with parents and other agencies ensure that their special needs are met. The school works hard to improve the attendance of a few pupils whose attendance reduces the overall average. As a result, there has been some improvement in the last term. The monitoring of pupils' progress is satisfactory. The new system is allowing senior managers to spot underachievement and take action to improve support. The system of setting curricular targets for all children is promoting skills in mathematics and English. The system is not yet embedded and its benefits on standards cannot be fully assessed.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

Leadership and management are satisfactory and are improving with recent appointments and developments to the role of middle managers. They are at an early stage of involvement in working to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and ensure better and consistent progress amongst groups of pupils. The effective headteacher has managed considerable staffing and accommodation issues in recent years, successfully sustaining a stable and secure environment for pupils' learning. New appointments have strengthened the senior management team and increased the drive for improvement. The school's self-evaluation is satisfactory. The school is aware of its most significant strengths and weaknesses and has set the correct priorities for improvement in its current improvement plan. Changes already in place include improving accuracy of assessment and establishing an effective system for monitoring pupils' progress and identifying and responding to underachievement quickly.

Governors have been supportive of the school in its recent developments. The chair of governors has a good working knowledge of the school and an understanding of what is needed to help it improve. A large budget surplus is earmarked correctly to improve the outdoor environment and to extend ICT facilities. The school has

satisfactory links with parents, who are supportive of the school and value the opportunities they have to comment on how the school is developing. A few would like to see improvements to communication between the school and home. The school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection and has a satisfactory capacity to improve.



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## Inspection judgements

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

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
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

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
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	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

### The quality of provision

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

<sup>1</sup> 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

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	3
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?	No

## Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Alderman Leach Primary School

Alderman Leach Drive

Darlington

County Durham

DL2 2GF

15 January 2007

Dear Pupils

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently.

It was a pleasure to see you all settled and enjoying your lessons. Thank you too for telling us about your school and how you would like to see it improve.

You told us that teachers care for you and look after you well and we agree. We think your school is providing a satisfactory education for you at present and that most of your learning is satisfactory too. We agree with Year 5 and 6 pupils that you learn at a fast rate and that your lessons are exciting and fun. Keep up your hard work and continue to be a good example to the rest of the school. You have managed well with your learning despite quite a number of changes since you began at the school. Your resilience and determination are something to be proud of and take with you to your next school.

Those of you who are on the school council and those who act as buddies in the playground are doing a good job in making the school a better place. The work you do shows other children that it is possible to make a difference if you are prepared to try. We wish you luck with your plans to improve toys and games in the playground.

To help your school get even better and make sure you all learn as well as you can, we think you could have your progress checked more and be given information about how to improve. The children in the Foundation Stage really enjoy themselves and we think their activities could be even better.

We would like to thank you again for the help you gave us and send our best wishes to you all for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Moira Fitzpatrick, Mrs Joan Elton and Mr Geoffrey Watson

Inspectors