

Firthmoor Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132207
Local Authority	Darlington
Inspection number	301355
Inspection dates	18–19 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Christine Inkster HMI

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	296
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Watson
Headteacher	Mrs Alfreda Lindley
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2003
School address	Ingleby Moor Crescent Darlington County Durham DL1 4RW
Telephone number	01325 244001
Fax number	01325 244555

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Firthmoor Primary School is situated on the outskirts of Darlington. It is a larger than average sized primary school formed from the amalgamation of the nursery, infant and junior schools which previously occupied the site. There are currently 296 pupils on roll, including 60 pupils in the nursery. A higher than average proportion of pupils are entitled to free school meals. The area around the school has recently undergone a period of change and consists mainly of local authority housing. Most pupils live in the immediate vicinity of the school although some travel from other areas of Darlington. A higher than average number of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities although the number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is similar to that found nationally. The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The school has been recognised as an 'Investing in Children Service' and has also recently been awarded an 'Excellence in Performance Award' by the local authority.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Firthmoor Primary School provides its pupils with a satisfactory and improving education. The headteacher and senior team are providing effective leadership by successfully tackling long standing weaknesses in the progress made by pupils and the standards they achieve. The senior leadership team has only been recently established, following a period of staff changes and they are relentless in their determination to improve. They have implemented a number of new and appropriate strategies to raise standards although the impact of their work is not yet reflected in test results. The middle leaders have too few opportunities to check and assure the quality of teaching and learning. The senior leadership team have the support and commitment of the staff and enjoy the confidence of the large majority of parents.

Children enter the school with skills and abilities which are very low, particularly in the area of language and communication. Children make good progress during their time in the Nursery and Reception classes but many do not achieve standards appropriate for their age by the time they enter Year 1. Pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 1 and 2, but standards achieved by seven year olds are significantly below the national average. The school's leadership has recently introduced important changes to the way in which it identifies pupils who are underachieving. These pupils receive good support and this has resulted in them making better progress. Consequently, standards in mathematics and science at Key Stage 2 improved markedly in 2006 and are now broadly average, but English results remain inadequate for most pupils. Pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress due to the good support they receive.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall and a proportion of lessons are good. Teachers are very aware of each pupil's needs and work well with support staff to ensure that the diverse range of needs in each class are met. Every opportunity is taken to build up the confidence and self-esteem of pupils resulting in positive attitudes towards their work. Some teachers are beginning to involve pupils in opportunities to assess their own progress but marking is not consistent across the school. The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory with some aspects which are good. On occasions, the curriculum is well planned around a central theme and this provides stimulating and interesting opportunities for learning. There are very good links with other countries using information and communication technology (ICT) and visits and visitors are used well to enrich pupils' learning and experiences. Whilst there is a clear focus on basic skills, poor literacy skills are preventing some pupils from gaining full access to the curriculum.

The personal development of pupils is good and they enjoy coming to school. The majority of pupils behave well and have positive attitudes towards learning. They say they feel safe and well cared for. They report that incidents of bullying are rare and if they do occur, they are dealt with effectively by staff. Those who have learning or emotional needs are well provided and cared for. The majority of parents are supportive of the school, although some believe the behaviour of a minority of pupils is a concern. However, one parent echoes the feelings of many when saying, 'I cannot express how much they all care about the children's education and welfare. It is one of the best schools my children have attended'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in literacy and numeracy at both key stages.

- Further develop the role of the middle leaders so they have more opportunities to improve the quality of teaching and learning and raise standards.
- Improve the quality and consistency of marking and feedback to pupils in order for them to have a clear understanding of what they have to do to improve.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next Section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The majority of children join the nursery with skills and knowledge that are very low in several areas including language and communication, personal and social skills and knowledge and understanding. Most make good progress in the Foundation Stage, but many pupils do not reach expected levels by the time they join Year 1. Pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 1 and 2 but standards attained by seven year olds are well below average in reading, writing and mathematics. Over time, standards at Key Stage 2 have been significantly below average. Recent changes to the curriculum and improvements to teaching and learning are however helping pupils to make better progress. In 2006 this has resulted in a greater proportion of pupils achieving national average in mathematics and science although standards in English remain weak and in need of urgent improvement. Effective teamwork between teachers and support staff ensure that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress. Pupils who are taught in small nurture groups make good progress because work is very carefully planned to meet their specific needs. Girls perform better than boys in all subjects at Key Stage 1 and in English at Key Stage 2. The school has taken steps to make the curriculum more relevant to the boys' needs and they are beginning to make better progress. The school has made improvements to their procedures for monitoring the progress of pupils and staff are now in a better position to identify any individuals or groups of pupils who are not making enough progress and to provide additional support to help them improve.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well being are good, as is their spiritual, moral social and cultural development. Pupils know what is right and wrong and are very mindful of the feelings and care of others. The school has developed strong links with schools in other countries and pupils benefit from using video conferencing to communicate with them. Pupils greatly enjoy their work and particularly enjoy visits to places of interest which supports their learning. Pupils show high levels of responsibility. In lessons and around the school most pupils behave very well and the school is happy and calm. In one or two classes, however, a small minority of pupils demonstrate poor behaviour, which affects their learning. Behaviour is good at lunchtimes due to the effective care and supervision provided by teaching assistants. Pupils say they feel safe in school and can approach a member of staff if they have a concern. Pupils thrive on the responsibilities offered to them to help others as when serving as school councillors, monitors or buddies. Pupils like school and they show good attitudes to learning. Attendance is satisfactory and has improved significantly in recent years. The majority of pupils attend more regularly and arrive at school on time due to the very good support given, particularly by a teaching assistant, who has recently been recognised as 'Teaching Assistant of the Year' for her work on inclusion and attendance. Pupils are regularly involved in fundraising events for

charity and enjoy opportunities to sing to elderly people in the area. Pupils are aware that if they work hard and develop their skills in literacy and numeracy, this will enable them to use their knowledge in the next phase of education and eventually in gaining employment. Pupils show a good awareness of how to have healthy lifestyles and the school has achieved the Healthy School Award as well as an FA Charter Standard Award for football.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory with some significant strengths. Where teaching is better, pupils respond well to good questions asked by the teacher and concentrate hard in lessons. Teachers use ICT effectively to stimulate pupils' learning and promote good thinking skills. Pupils benefit most when work is clearly matched to their level of ability. Teachers and support staff work very hard to ensure that, by raising pupils' self esteem and having high expectations of their attitudes to work, all pupils are able to benefit from lessons and other opportunities, often beyond the school day. Teachers have good relationships with their pupils and use encouragement and praise effectively to increase their confidence. Some teachers are beginning to introduce opportunities for pupils to assess their own progress over time, for example, during an ICT lesson when pupils completed a sheet indicating their understanding of their work. Whilst there are examples of effective methods in marking pupils' work, its overall quality throughout the school is inconsistent. In some classes there is too much use of heavily structured worksheets that do not allow pupils to take responsibility for the layout and organisation of their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum provided for pupils is satisfactory with some good features. There is a particular emphasis on improving pupils' basic skills to enable them to make the most of the opportunities provided. However, poor literacy skills are preventing some pupils from gaining access to the full curriculum. The curriculum for the youngest children in the Foundation Stage has now been modified significantly so that it more accurately matches their needs. There is some innovation in the way the curriculum is planned to incorporate teaching and learning across many subject areas from a central focus on literacy. For example, after reading 'The Sheep Pig', pupils in Year 3 began a topic based on a 'Country Fair', including work from most subjects of the curriculum. Occasionally the curriculum is planned so that all pupils from all year groups are involved in workshops around a central theme. A good example is that of the Spanish week. Each day, pupils worked on specific aspects of Spain that gave them knowledge and understanding of its history, culture, geography and language. During the week, pupils proudly reported on their work and achievements to other classes. The school makes good use of visits to local and more distant environments in order to increase pupils' understanding and enrich their experiences. Similarly, there is a good range and diversity of visitors to school who share their expertise, enthusiasm and speciality in areas such as music, theatre and history. Now that teachers have more confidence in the reliability of ICT equipment, it is being used more effectively in lessons across all subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The pastoral care and support for pupils is good. Staff know pupils and their families well. Parents value the help which the school provides to overcome the difficulties their children have in respect of learning and behaviour. Pupils of all ages say they are safe and secure in school. Those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well. There is good support for pupils' personal development and this helps to develop their self-esteem and confidence. The procedures for safeguarding and child protection are in place and the policies and strategies for risk assessment have been nominated for a national award. The school works very effectively in partnership with other agencies to promote the well-being of pupils. Staff are beginning to use assessment and tracking procedures effectively to raise standards. While these measures are not yet fully in place, rates of progress are beginning to improve. Nonetheless, evidence in pupil's workbooks shows that marking is inconsistent across the school and does not provide all pupils with sufficient information about how to make progress in their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher has gained the confidence of staff and governors and has a clear vision for the school's development. She leads the school well and together with the senior leadership team, they have developed a positive ethos of teamwork and cooperation. Senior leaders have a good understanding about what needs to be done and whilst they acknowledge that there is still much to accomplish, they are taking effective steps to raise achievement. The school has satisfactory, but increasing capacity to improve and the strengths now evident in the leadership team are promoting better achievement. The school development plan is directly targeted at those areas which require improvement. However, the role of some middle leaders is not yet fully developed and they have not had enough opportunities to monitor the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects. Governors are supportive of the school and have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are successfully developing their role in challenging the school and are increasingly holding the staff accountable for the quality of education they provide. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

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Annex A

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?	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

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
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	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	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?	3

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?	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

20 June 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Firthmoor Primary School, Darlington, DL1 4RW

Thank you for making Mrs Evans, Mr Watson and myself so welcome when we visited your school to see how well you are learning. We enjoyed hearing your views and listening to you talk about the work you are doing. Please would you pass on my thanks to your parents and carers for returning the questionnaires and say we took all their views into account. Firthmoor Primary School provides a satisfactory and improving education for its pupils. It is clear that you take pride in your school and that the adults look after you very well. Mrs Lindley, the governors and staff all want to help you to do better and so they have introduced lots of new ideas to help improve the way you learn. They have organised many interesting and exciting opportunities, for example, during Spanish week and on school visits.

We have asked the teachers to:

- help you do even better in your work, particularly in English and mathematics because your results are not as high as they could be
- make sure they mark your work effectively so that this will help you know what you have to do to improve
- ensure that you are making as much progress as you can, by regularly looking at your work and observing how well you do in lessons.

You can help by:

- making sure you come to school every day
- behaving well so that everyone has an opportunity to do their best
- working very hard, particularly in English and mathematics.

Thank you for all your help and I wish you every success in all you do in the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Christine Inkster

Her Majesty's Inspector