

Birtley East Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108337
Local Authority	Gateshead
Inspection number	301795
Inspection dates	3–4 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Andrea Lyons HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	166
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Pat Gilbert
Headteacher	Mrs Kate Rickeard
Date of previous school inspection	1 September 2005
School address	Highfield Birtley Chester le Street County Durham DH3 1QQ
Telephone number	0191 4102551
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Birtley East is a school of average size situated in an area of considerable social deprivation. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is double the national average, and the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is high. The number of pupils from a minority ethnic group is very low, as is the number who have English as an additional language. Children generally start Nursery and Reception with skills which are lower than expected for their age, particularly in communication and creative development. The school has gained several awards in the past few years including the Healthy Schools Award. When the school was inspected in September 2005, it was judged to require special measures.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance of section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Birtley East provides a satisfactory standard of education with a number of good features. It has improved dramatically since the previous inspection. It has the capacity to improve still further because the school is now clearly moving in a positive direction and leaders and staff have the skills to extend and accelerate existing improvements.

The quality of teaching in particular has improved out of recognition and is now solidly good, with some outstanding features. This is because staff are well deployed so that their skills match the ages and abilities of their classes. Teachers have developed a range of key teaching skills, such as assessment, planning, and questioning, to a good standard. These improvements to teaching are well implemented and monitored throughout the school, so that pupils now make consistent progress. The curriculum is satisfactory with some good features. It has improved with a strong emphasis on developing basic skills as well as providing opportunities for creativity, which stimulate the interest and motivation of pupils. There are opportunities for enrichment through visits, visitors and a variety of out of school clubs, which cater for the needs and interests of pupils.

The school has worked hard to redress the difficulties that many pupils previously experienced, and over the last year the majority of pupils made satisfactory and often good progress. Some pupils, particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or those with poor basic skills, make good or sometimes outstanding progress in a short time. However, higher ability pupils often make inconsistent progress because there is not yet an effective school-wide approach to meeting their needs. Many pupils, particularly younger ones, now attain the standards which would be expected for their age, and standards at the end of Key Stage 2 have improved. Results in the national tests remain below the national average, but meet or exceed the school's challenging targets. Standards in English are lower than in other subjects.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory, with some good features. This reflects the hard work of the school to improve care, support and guidance, which are satisfactory. The school has established sound systems to promote pupils' well-being and, although these are comparatively recent, most are showing positive results. However, arrangements to set and monitor individual pupils' targets are not yet sufficiently established to have the desired impact.

The school's culture and atmosphere are extremely positive, with high expectations of all pupils and staff. This is reflected in its new motto, 'Aiming Higher'. The headteacher provides exemplary leadership and management, with a very clear vision and determined drive for improvement. She ensures that all staff and pupils take responsibility for improving and enjoying learning. She has promoted a positive change to the school's culture across a range of areas, such as pupils' behaviour, staff involvement in improving provision, and timely intervention to address individual pupils' needs. Plans for future development are ambitious and achievable but are insufficiently supported by written planning for the longer term. The headteacher is well supported by a senior team, which ensures that school developments are fully shared by all staff. Senior and middle managers have played a significant part in developing school-wide management systems and improving the quality of teaching, but do not take sufficient responsibility for the strategic direction of their areas of responsibility. The governing body

provides a satisfactory level of support and challenge. There are good plans for their further involvement, but these have not yet had an impact, and they are not sufficiently involved in longer term strategic planning. The local authority has provided a good level of support. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards further, particularly in English and for more able pupils.
- Develop a more detailed long term strategic plan for continuing school improvement.
- Improve pupils' awareness and use of target setting.

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

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Children enter school with skills which are below those typical of their age, particularly in aspects of language and communication and creative development. They make satisfactory progress in Nursery. This accelerates and is good in the Reception class because of the high quality of teaching they receive. This academic year, most pupils have reached the expected standards for their age by the end of the Foundation Stage. Pupils make satisfactory progress during Key Stage 1, although standards have been consistently below average over several years. However, current Year 2 pupils made good progress from their starting points and standards in writing have improved as a result of effective strategies put in place to raise achievement.

Results at Key Stage 2 have been below the national average over several years but have improved in mathematics and science since 2004. This is due to a whole school focus on developing calculation and problem solving skills in mathematics and investigation skills in science. However, results in English have been more variable and dropped significantly in 2006. The school is aware of this and has begun to monitor progress in reading and writing more closely in order to identify those pupils who are underachieving.

In the past, many pupils made inconsistent progress because of poor teaching or disruption to their learning in particular year groups and some pupils' work still shows the effects of this. However, most pupils now make consistent and at least satisfactory progress. Some groups of pupils make good progress because the work provided meets their specific needs, for example, through booster groups as well as targeted support in classrooms. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good or sometimes outstanding progress and achieve results higher than those found nationally due to the good support they receive. However, higher ability and gifted and talented pupils make inconsistent progress because there is no systematic school-wide approach for meeting their needs.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

The school has worked hard to promote pupils' personal development and it is now satisfactory with some good features. Behaviour is satisfactory. It is good in lessons and pupils settle down well to their work. Playtimes are positive occasions, with pupils cooperating well with each other. Pupils appreciate the support of the playground buddies. Pupils are sometimes

undisciplined when moving around the school. The behaviour of a small group of older pupils, which is not yet good enough, is improving because of the firm and effective support the school provides. Pupils' preparation for their future lives is satisfactory. They have a satisfactory level of basic skills. Pupils are developing skills of organising themselves to work in groups. They gain clear benefits from very good opportunities to consider real life issues and prepare for their future lives; for example, in a Year 6 mathematics lesson where pupils compared different financial deals for mobile phones. Attendance is satisfactory. Pupils enjoy their learning and respond very well to special projects such as the recent 'creativity days'. They understand the key principles of keeping safe and healthy, although they are not managing to carry out healthy eating consistently in their daily lives. The school council is proud of the decisions it makes, which have an impact on daily life, such as the organisation of football at playtimes for different year groups. Pupils' contributions to their own school community are good. The production of the attractive new school logo reflects pupils' commitment and interest in whole school issues. Contributions to the community outside of the school are not as strong. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching is good. This is now a clear and well-established strength of the school. Lessons are well planned and based firmly on pupils' previous learning. Teachers employ a wide range of activities, which are well matched to pupils' ability. Pupils show interest and enthusiasm, particularly in the many lessons which have good links across curriculum areas, and the popular 'creativity days'. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning, for instance, through displays of 'what we know, what we need to know and how we are going to find out' which are created by pupils themselves. They vote on the topic for their class 'creativity day'. Effective marking and lists of skills displayed in 'learning ladders' show them clearly what they need to do next to improve. As a result, pupils have developed more perseverance on tasks and consistently say that they enjoy their learning.

On the minority of occasions where teaching is satisfactory rather than good, this is because teacher talk dominates the lesson, and there are too few opportunities for pupils to experience a range of visual, practical and physical activities.

Relationships between staff and pupils are good and there is a cheerful and purposeful atmosphere in classes. Teachers' skilful questioning is used effectively to extend pupils' learning and assess their progress. Very good teaching in Reception class gives children an excellent start to their education across all areas of learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum has recently improved considerably in both its range and its focus on key skills. It is now satisfactory overall with some good features. The curriculum is well planned to give pupils a range of interesting things to learn about with a clear focus on developing their key skills. Computers are used well to enhance and extend pupils' learning, and effective links are made between literacy and numeracy and other areas of the curriculum. The recent 'creativity days' resulted in some good quality work on exciting topics and creative activities and increased the motivation and interest of pupils.

Pupils have good opportunities to participate in a wide range of enrichment activities and after school clubs. As a result of recent improvements to the provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, they are making good progress. The curriculum is planned to take account of their specific needs. In the Foundation Stage, the curriculum enables children to develop their skills in interesting and enjoyable contexts and there are satisfactory opportunities for learning within the classroom and outdoors.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The headteacher has worked very effectively to ensure that key policies and systems are in place to support and guide individuals, for example, with regard to behaviour management. These are at a relatively early stage but have begun to have a clear and positive impact on academic and personal development. Target setting systems are now evident through the school, although some pupils are not always confident in their use. Safeguarding systems are firmly in place. Pupils say that they feel confident to go to a range of different adults if they are worried. Key staff have forged good links with external specialists to support pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school is effectively extending its links with the local secondary school to provide a smooth transition for Year 6 pupils, including making sure that teaching styles are similar. The school has good systems for finding out pupils' views and it responds well to issues that they raise.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory with some good features, and exceptional leadership and management from the headteacher. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school, which is based upon high expectations for all pupils and staff. She knows the school very well and uses this knowledge effectively to improve the standards and the culture of the school through prompt, well-focused and often imaginative action. This has resulted in dramatic and far reaching improvements in the school; for example, in the more robust and creative curriculum, effective assessment and monitoring and, above all, in the quality of teaching. She involves pupils and staff very closely in school development; for example, through regular questionnaires and pupil interviews. This, together with staff's existing high level of commitment to pupils, has resulted in a real sense of a thriving and developing school community.

The headteacher has deployed staff and resources very effectively to gain maximum benefit for pupils, both through planned programmes of change and response to unforeseeable circumstances. For instance, the school has suffered with a high turnover of supply staff in some year groups recently. The headteacher managed this well, through effective redeployment of core staff and the creation of high quality additional support groups. This has minimised as far as possible the detrimental effect on pupils. Similarly, effective management of the unexpected lack of a full time co-ordinator for literacy at times over the past year has meant that day-to-day developments for individual pupils have continued well. Despite this, the pace of whole school improvement in English has inevitably reduced.

The headteacher is well supported by a committed and increasingly skilled senior management team, who ensure that improvement priorities are fully shared by all staff, and that staff's own

evaluations of progress inform further developments. The school is developing policies and systems to manage a range of issues systematically, such as behaviour and target setting. Although these are at a comparatively early stage, they are already showing positive results, although target setting is less well established than other areas. School self-evaluation and planning are highly effective on a short term basis. Long term plans are ambitious, well structured and achievable but insufficiently detailed.

The governing body provides a satisfactory level of support and challenge to the school. There are good plans for their further involvement in the immediate future, but these have not yet had time to make an impact, and the governing body is not sufficiently involved in long term strategic planning. The local authority has provided a good level of support to the school.

The school provides satisfactory value for money.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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	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	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
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

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?	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	2
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	2
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

5 July 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Birtley East Community Primary School, County Durham, DH3 1QQ

Thank you for welcoming us so well to your school. We felt that it was an exciting place to be, with your creativity days, visits to Seven Stories and a theatre group in the hall. You told us that you enjoy your learning. We could see that you do by your attitudes and the quality of your work.

We think that your school has improved out of all recognition since it was inspected nearly two years ago. It was placed in special measures then. This meant it needed some help to improve. Now, it has become satisfactory with many good features. This is a real achievement by all children and staff in the school. Well done!

We think that the teaching in your school is good and that Mrs Rickeard is outstandingly good as your headteacher. Your behaviour is generally good. We have asked all the staff to look at a few things to improve the school even more, for example:

- To improve how well you do in English
- To improve the progress made by pupils who are more able in different subjects
- To help you make the most of your targets.

You can help by trying really hard with your English and asking for help with your targets if you don't understand them.

Thank you again for your welcome and your help. It has been a pleasure to meet you.

Good luck for the future.

Yours faithfully

Andrea LyonsChristine InksterMaggi Shepherd

Her Majesty's InspectorHer Majesty's InspectorAdditional Inspector