

Simonside Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108454
Local Authority	Newcastle upon Tyne
Inspection number	309696
Inspection dates	1–2 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Gordon Potter

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	209
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sue Hollingsworth
Headteacher	Miss Kath Held
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2004
School address	Bedeburn Road Westerhope Newcastle upon Tyne Tyne and Wear NE5 4LG
Telephone number	0191 2860776
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average size school. The vast majority of pupils are of White British origin. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well above average. An above average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and a below average number have a statement of special educational need. Very few pupils are from minority ethnic groups. The school serves an area of very significant social deprivation.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Simonside Primary School is a good school which is rapidly improving. It is at the heart of the community. It gives its pupils good care and support so they are happy, and show good behaviour and enthusiasm for their lessons. Clear target setting has been effective in enabling pupils to make good and rapidly improving progress. Parents strongly appreciate the way teachers help their children to feel safe and secure in school and make lessons interesting.

Effective action has been taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning which is good and making a major contribution to the improvement in pupils' progress. A developing strength of learning is the way pupils are encouraged to assess their own work. However, teachers do not always support learning by telling pupils clearly enough what they need to do to improve their work. The curriculum is enhanced by an excellent range of activities, although in Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 it is not always clear how work becomes harder as the children grow older.

Year 6 pupils who took tests in 2007 entered the school with levels that were well below those typical for their age. They left with standards which were below average representing for many pupils at least satisfactory progress. However, evidence from the inspection and from the school's own detailed tracking data indicates that standards have risen and are broadly average by Year 6. Pupils' achievement is now good across school.

Good relationships and sensitive support from a caring staff promote good levels of pupils' personal development. Pupils know that there is always someone to turn to if they need help. Attendance is below average. It is slowly improving but some children, especially the youngest ones, do not attend regularly enough. Pupils' behaviour is good and contributes to their enjoyment of school. They readily take on responsibilities, such as being school council members or playground helpers. The school council was proud to have been involved in the appointment of the new headteacher. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep healthy and stay fit, as the school strongly promotes these qualities. The school's strong focus on developing pupils' academic and personal development, including a growing awareness of business enterprise, gives them a good preparation for their future economic well-being.

Leadership and management are good. The innovative leadership of the headteacher and deputy headteacher, ably supported by management at all levels, has already had a significant impact on raising pupils' achievement. Together they have motivated staff to make lessons exciting and relevant, and encouraged pupils to behave well and to work hard to improve their work. There is strong teamwork and the headteacher encourages all teachers to develop their leadership roles. There is a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The highly effective action already taken shows that the school has a good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The effectiveness of provision in the Foundation Stage is good and children make good progress. Children enter the Nursery class with skills well below what is typical for their ages, especially in communication, language and literacy, knowledge and understanding of the world and in emotional and social development. The school has identified this and has developed staff expertise to improve these areas so that children make good progress across all areas of learning. Children are well nurtured and cared for in a safe and stimulating environment. They work and

play well together and are confident to talk about their work. There are strong links with parents and outside agencies and adults get to know the children before they start school. The indoor curriculum is well planned with a good range of activities that excite and support new learning. However, there are restrictions in the access to the outdoor areas that limit children's learning experiences. Staff have a clear understanding about how young children learn. Good planning is based on detailed assessment although there is less clear planning of continuity and progression across the Foundation Stage for activities where children have choice.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve attendance.
- Use feedback more effectively so that pupils know what to do to improve their work.
- Develop the curriculum in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Improved provision throughout the school means that pupils' overall achievement is good. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make equally as good progress as their peers. The results of the national assessments for Year 2 show that standards are below average but represent good progress for the pupils when their starting points and the diverse nature of their needs are taken into account.

Detailed school data indicate that standards in English, mathematics and science by Year 6 have risen and are now broadly average. As a result, pupils' achievement is good. The results of the past two years' Year 6 national tests have shown below average standards, with the strongest performance in science. Standards in English and mathematics were somewhat weaker. Standards have improved and this is apparent in the unvalidated results for the 2008 Year 6 national tests.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils are friendly and mix well together. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, including an appreciation of other cultures. They have a good appreciation of right and wrong and their behaviour both in class and around the school is good. They thoroughly enjoy school and are keen to learn. Attendance is below average. However, because of strong intervention by the school, there is a trend of improvement. There are good links with the community, including initiatives to improve the environment. Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of keeping safe and adopting a healthy lifestyle, especially in their choice of meals and in their enthusiasm for exercise. There are good opportunities for pupils to exercise responsibility, for example, as members of the school council and as play leaders. School council members were involved in the appointment of the new headteacher. Pupils leave school with average basic skills which, allied to their developing understanding of business enterprise, prepare them well for the next stage of their learning.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Good planning by teachers ensures that all pupils are appropriately challenged and so make good progress. Teachers use a wide range of strategies and resources, including information and communication technology (ICT), to excite and engage pupils. As a consequence, pupils' behaviour and attitudes are good; they feel highly valued and are eager to learn and progress as well as they can. Pupils are encouraged to become independent learners and to work collaboratively with others. Particularly effective is the use teachers make of questioning and dialogue to extend pupils' thinking and to check that they have made progress. Teachers have encouraged pupils to assess their own work against clear success criteria and this has helped pupils to improve the standard of their work. However, teachers' feedback to pupils is inconsistent across the school and does not always tell them what they need to do to improve their work. Teachers are ably assisted by classroom assistants whom they deploy very effectively to work with particular individuals and groups of pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good with strong provision for literacy, numeracy and ICT and well directed personalised support where necessary. Pupils are encouraged to see the links between learning in different subjects and this has had a positive impact on their writing. Strong provision for physical education and an increasing focus on creative subjects enhance the pupils' enjoyment of school. Pupils benefit from learning Spanish and how to play a musical instrument. The many activities and visits enjoyed by the pupils motivate them to improve their writing and to develop their understanding of their own and other cultures. The school's link with a school in China has enthused pupils, although opportunities are missed to involve them directly in projects with the school. The curriculum in Key Stage 2 offers clear continuity and progression for pupils' learning. However, in Key Stage 1, progression is less clear and occasionally opportunities are missed to offer activities that support those pupils who are still working to the early learning goals. There is an excellent range of extra-curricular activities which many pupils enjoy. Pupils speak with enthusiasm of the field trips they make and the wide variety of sports and clubs available to them such as guitar club and gymnastics.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. All teachers know the pupils well and care deeply for them. There are excellent relationships with outside agencies to ensure that the needs of all pupils are addressed. A very large majority of parents are supportive of the school and what it does for their children. The provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for vulnerable and looked after pupils is good so that needs are quickly identified and addressed, and the impact of intervention measured. The safety of pupils is paramount and all safeguarding measures are in place. The development of the social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) curriculum and the programme of personal, social and health education contribute to their good and improving personal development. Good transition arrangements ensure that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, except between the Reception Class and Year 1. Reports to parents are informative but lack information about how pupils can

improve their work. The school has rigorous tracking and assessment procedures which tell pupils at what level they are working and what their targets are. This has had an impact on raising attainment. However, pupils are less clear about what they need to do to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The focused leadership of both the headteacher and her deputy has ensured that provision in terms of teaching, curriculum and care, guidance and support is good and rapidly improving. The impact of this is being seen on standards and achievement, and in pupils' improved behaviour. The school is very strongly placed to improve further. All leaders provide very clear direction to ensure that all pupils achieve equally well. They are empowered to make changes and know they are accountable. The school's development plan is a very useful working tool. It makes an accurate assessment of the school's current position and tracks initiatives and their success. It is clearly linked to providing professional development for staff and this has improved the quality of teaching. The school is very effective in using outside agencies to enhance provision. Governance is satisfactory because it is supportive of the school. However, it needs to re-establish its monitoring role more strongly.

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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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
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

3 July 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Simonside Primary School, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE5 4LG

On behalf of the team, thank you so much for making us welcome when we inspected your school. Simonside Primary School is a good and improving school. The staff care for you extremely well and help you to learn because they make your lessons fun and exciting.

We were pleased to see that you work hard and do your best. You come to school on time and all of you behave well in lessons and in the playground. We think that your behaviour is good. We found that you are very polite and helpful, and we enjoyed talking to you about your school. You told us that you enjoyed coming to school and that you liked your teachers. You said you appreciated the activities the school provides for you, like the visits to outdoor centres and sporting activities. Your parents and carers like the school very much, especially the way your teachers care for you and help you to enjoy your learning.

We have asked your teachers to do three things to make your school even better.

- Give the children in the Foundation Stage more choice in what they do and make it easier for them to work outside.
- Ensure that you know what you need to do to improve your work.
- Help you to improve your attendance.

We are asking you to do something too.

- Make sure you attend school regularly; you have a good school and you enjoy being there, but some of you are absent too often.

You can help by always doing your best. Thank you for all your help and I wish you every success in all you do in the future.

Yours sincerely

Gordon Potter

Lead inspector