

Springfield Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114174
Local Authority	Darlington
Inspection number	311506
Inspection dates	28–29 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Andrew Scott

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	270
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sarah Robinson
Headteacher	Dame Dela Smith
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2004
School address	Darlington Education Village Salters Lane South Darlington County Durham DL1 2AN
Telephone number	01325 254000
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This average sized primary school serves an urban area with social and economic disadvantage. Almost all pupils are from White British families. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is slightly below average, but this fluctuates considerably among year groups. The school forms part of a hard federation formed in 2005 with a special school and a secondary school. In 2006, the three schools moved to the same site and custom-built accommodation, known as the Education Village. They share an executive director, governing body and senior and specialist staff. Some provision overlaps, including some of the Foundation Stage activities which are integrated with the special school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Springfield is a satisfactory school with good features. Its rebirth as an integral part of the exciting new Education Village has been successful although, understandably, it is taking some time to develop fully. Pupils' standards have dipped a little recently but are already beginning to rise as the school settles and because of good leadership and management. The resolute and visionary leadership of the headteacher has united and enthused staff, and created an excellent new learning environment.

Pupils' achievement throughout the school is satisfactory. Their sound progress through the Foundation Stage is continued in Key Stage 1. In Year 2, standards have fallen in recent years and are below average, especially in reading and writing. In mathematics, standards are average. Until recently, continuity in learning has been disrupted because of staff turnover and absences. It is a similar picture in Key Stage 2, but for different reasons. In the past, standards have been above average but fell to average in 2007, and were below average in English. This was due to a high proportion of pupils with learning and/or behavioural difficulties, and the number of pupils who had only recently transferred to the school. Inspection evidence and the school's assessment data show that pupils' achievement is now improving.

Teaching is satisfactory, with some better practice in Key Stage 2. In most classrooms, the purposeful atmosphere and clear objectives ensure that pupils are eager to learn and know what they need to do. The curriculum is closely linked to basic skills and teachers are beginning to use work in all subjects to strengthen them, especially in information and communication technology (ICT). Teachers do not make enough use of assessment information to assure a high level of challenge for all pupils. Consequently, the level of challenge in lessons is too variable to help pupils make consistently good progress. Support for less able pupils is often good, especially in Key Stage 2, but teachers do not expect enough of all pupils. A school priority is to improve the opportunities for independent learning in the Foundation Stage, but all teachers tend to lead lessons too much, without giving pupils enough scope to develop their own learning skills.

The care and support for pupils are good. Formal arrangements for safeguarding and the informal everyday care give pupils security and peace of mind. Pupils benefit from the rich variety of experiences within the Education Village and beyond, such as the 25 metre swimming pool, drama workshops and Christmas hamper delivery to local residents. Pupils clearly enjoy coming to school. They take advantage of the sports facilities to increase fitness and understand the need to eat healthily. Despite occasional incidents, behaviour is generally good and pupils are responsible. Overall, their personal development is good and they are suitably equipped for the next phase of their education.

The school has a very good understanding of its strengths and weakness. Its self-evaluation is honest and accurate, so its priorities for improvement are mostly the right ones. One current initiative is to develop the role of subject leaders, so that they can improve standards further. Governors play a full role in the school's development and appropriately support and challenge the school's senior leaders. Most parents are pleased with the school but a few have some persistent concerns that weaken their relationship with the school. The inspection team found no cause for concern and believes that the school is in good shape, is in good hands and is moving forward positively.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children enter the Foundation Stage with skills and abilities that are below those typical of three year olds. Satisfactory teaching enables children to make satisfactory progress through the Nursery and Reception classes. Nevertheless, they do not reach the levels expected of five year olds by the time they enter Year 1, especially in language development. Children enjoy a safe and well-resourced environment, so that they feel secure and enjoy the various learning experiences in the classroom and outside. Even so, they do not have enough scope to learn through their own exploration. The provision is managed satisfactorily, but the assessment of children's progress has been inconsistent. The school has already begun to address this.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise pupils' standards, especially in English.
- Make full use of assessment data to provide consistently high challenge for all pupils.
- Encourage pupils to develop and use their own learning skills in lessons.
- Improve links with parents.

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

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory throughout the school and standards are average.

From starting points lower than typically found, children make satisfactory progress

In recent years, standards have been falling by the end of Year 2 mainly because of staffing instability and absences. They were below average in the 2007 national assessments, especially in reading and writing.

Through Years 3 to 6, progress is satisfactory overall, but variable because stronger teaching enables pupils to make good progress at times. Year 6 standards overall were average in the 2007 national tests but were below average in English, particularly because of weaknesses in writing. Standards in recent years were above average but fell in 2007 mainly because of the high proportion of pupils who had learning difficulties and/or behavioural difficulties or who were comparatively new to the school. Pupils in both the current Years 2 and 6 are on target to improve standards this year. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress. They do better in Years 5 and 6 because of intensive support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Pupils enjoy coming to school and have positive attitudes to learning. Their attendance has improved recently and is now satisfactory. They get on well together and cooperate readily in lessons. Behaviour is essentially good, although there is some misbehaviour. Isolated incidents of bullying are swiftly dealt with and pupils have confidence that staff will help to resolve them.

Pupils develop well spiritually and culturally through such activities as the 'Steam Shed' and workshops in film and animation.

Pupils have a sensible approach to a healthy lifestyle. They appreciate the need to have a balanced diet, and respond well to the sports activities on offer. Pupils are actively involved in the broader school community; school council members feel that they are listened to and value their roles. 'Carols on the Village Green' and a garden project with a local engineering firm typify the good links with the local community. Preparation for the secondary school is satisfactory, but not better because of the limitations in some of the pupils' basic skills, especially in writing.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Lessons are well structured and focused on key skills so that pupils learn appropriately and progressively. The working environment in lessons is positive so pupils are attentive and respond well to their tasks. They sustain interest even when the pace of learning flags or when the work is undemanding. Learning objectives are clear and resources, such as puppets, are used effectively to reinforce learning. Teaching is sometimes better in Key Stage 2 because teachers' expectations are higher and work is livelier. In a Year 5 lesson, mental practice of times tables was combined with physical exercise to galvanise pupils; the lesson started with real impact and continued to bowl along.

Too often, though, assessment information is not used well enough to ensure that all pupils are fully challenged. Lessons and special group sessions usually allow for the needs of pupils with learning difficulties. For most pupils, learning is steady rather than swift because they work within their comfort zone. In addition, teachers tend to give pupils too much direction and do not encourage pupils to develop their own learning skills well enough. Assessment and marking are good overall but, with the recent changes in staff, are occasionally not fully effective.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory, with considerable enrichment. Having identified shortcomings in its provision, the school is devising a broader, more creative and inclusive curriculum but this will not be fully functioning until 2008. At present, provision is in a state of flux and lacks cohesion, although it is more effective in Key Stage 2. The school is also currently upgrading the Foundation Stage curriculum.

The Education Village brings vital benefits, especially through its excellent resources and accommodation. Swimming for all, extensive ICT facilities and soft play areas for the youngest children are available; there is even a Forest School with its outdoor classroom, although this has yet to be fully exploited. Teachers' expertise from the special and secondary schools is used to boost, for example, technology and the arts, as well as helping to address behavioural issues. There is ample promotion of cultural and multi-cultural awareness.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care and support for pupils is good. Inclusion is central to the school's philosophy and pupils are clearly valued. Pastoral care is good. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported and benefit from specialist resources such as the sensory room. Statutory requirements for safeguarding pupils, including child protection, are met; there are efficient systems for risk assessments and the management of educational visits.

The school has effective procedures for monitoring pupils' academic progress. As a result, pupils have clear learning targets in English and mathematics, reinforced by detailed marking. These initiatives are quite recent and have yet to impact fully upon standards.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is well led and managed. The enthusiastic, dedicated and clear-sighted leadership of the headteacher and senior leadership team provides a powerful vision, and they work closely and effectively as a team. Well supported by the local authority, their combined expertise has already produced many benefits not least in the creation of the Education Village itself. The school is now engaged in improving the contribution of subject leaders to the raising of standards.

The school's self-evaluation is very good. Senior staff and governors are well aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are honest and objective in their appraisal, and produce very good action plans for improvement. Current initiatives, such as curriculum development, are very apt.

Governance is good. Governors work closely with the school; they are supportive yet challenging. At monthly meetings, the school's progress is scrutinised and standards top the agenda. Links with parents are satisfactory. The school has worked hard to improve communication through newsletters, open days and events, but accepts that there is still work to be done to involve parents more closely with the school. A small minority of parents are very unhappy with key areas of the school, especially with its leadership. The inspection team found no evidence to support their views.

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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
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	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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	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 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	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?	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	3
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	3
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

30 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Springfield Primary School, Darlington, DL1 2AN

I am writing to thank you for the part you played in the recent inspection of your school. My colleagues and I enjoyed our time with you, and seeing your exciting new building. You must be very proud of it. Your comments were very helpful for us and helped us to get to know your school in the short time we had.

We think your school gives you a satisfactory education. Standards are average although, as you know, they are not as good as they could be in English, especially writing. You enjoy being in school and we were pleased that you have managed to improve your attendance. You are keen to work in lessons, and behave well most of the time even when lessons sometimes do not interest you as much as you would like. Teachers make learning clear and help you improve through their marking and by setting you targets, but we know that work is not always hard enough for you. Sometimes, in lessons, you are not given enough chance to do things for yourselves.

You develop well as individuals. You are sensible and responsible around school. I was very impressed by one boy who thoughtfully closed some gates that had been left open. You enjoy all the new benefits of the Education Village and are becoming healthier by using the sports facilities and eating wisely. You have a good knowledge of the local community and the wider world, and the school has plans to improve this. Together with all the staff, your headteacher is doing a really good job in developing your school. There is still some way to go before everything is right, but we have every confidence that this will happen, especially with your help.

It is important that your standards improve. You will find that teachers will be concentrating on your basic skills, especially in reading and writing. I am sure you will want to help by reading as often as possible and working hard on your spellings and other skills. Teachers will also be giving you more challenge in lessons so you will be working harder and more quickly. The school will be working more closely with your parents to support your learning, and you could play a vital part in making this happen.

I wish you all every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Scott

Lead inspector