

Bullion Lane Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114209
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	311515
Inspection dates	3-4 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Nigel Cromeey-Hawke

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	357
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Ann Collin
Headteacher	Mrs Marian Walker
Date of previous school inspection	1 April 2004
School address	Bullion Lane Chester le Street County Durham DH2 2DP
Telephone number	0191 3882482
Fax number	0191 3873015

Age group	3-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average primary school, with nursery provision, in an area of significant social deprivation. Nearly three times the national average of pupils are eligible for free school meals and the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is within the highest category nationally. Almost all pupils are from White British families and there are no pupils whose home language is not English. The school provides extended services for the community and has Basic Skills Quality Mark, National Healthy Schools Status, Activemark and Artsmark Gold awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school, striving to further improve the education and care of its pupils. One parent commented that 'I wouldn't want my children to go anywhere else', whilst another described the 'fantastic staff and environment'.

Significant improvements over the last 18 months in the way the school checks on the progress of groups and individual pupils and in the quality of teaching have had a major impact upon improving pupils' progress. These good practices enable the school to quickly identify those at risk of underachievement and provide them with the support they need. Targets for whole school improvement are challenging and these are being responded to well by both teachers and pupils. Children from a wide area enter the school but nearly half move to different schools before the end of Nursery. Those that stay achieve well overall through the school. Standards have mirrored national levels at Key Stage 1 for the last two years. Recently improved progress in writing has been considerable, but pupils' limited skills continue to detract from their learning. Pupils are currently performing well in Key Stages 1 and 2, with most reaching, and many exceeding, the challenging expectations the school has set. More able pupils, however, are not always fully challenged. Standards are therefore broadly average and overall achievement across the school is now good.

New assessment and target-setting strategies are being used effectively by teachers to ensure a high proportion of good teaching across all areas of the school. Good academic guidance through the pupils' self-assessment and teachers' marking is helping pupils to understand what they need to do to improve. Pupils are confident in this knowledge, keen to explain their learning needs to adults and are responding well to teachers' raised expectations. Parents are supportive of the school and recognise the impact it has upon the personal development and well-being of their children. This is shown in improved attendance. The diversity and richness brought to the school through its extended curriculum also contribute well to pupils' understanding of the world, enjoyment and moral and social values. The emphasis upon healthy living, the arts and sport ensures pupils are well prepared for later life. Work with external partners is a real strength of the school and both enterprise and information and communication technology (ICT) skills have been well developed as a result. Financial awareness has been fostered via a credit association which is helping a group save towards an exchange with an Australian school. Pupils say they feel safe in this stimulating, caring and supportive environment.

Leadership and management in the school are good. The headteacher has brought an energy and level of expectation to the school that has transformed it, according to staff, parents and governors. Subject leaders are now grouped in teams and carry out 'surgeries' to discuss pupils' progress and share good practice. These are robustly monitored, as are most areas of teaching and learning. The good self-evaluation means that the school knows what it is doing well and what it needs to do to improve further.

The school now has a full governing body. Governors have undertaken relevant training and are well informed about the strengths and needs of the school. They carry out their support and challenge functions well. The school has a common vision and the energy and commitment of all contributes to a good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children enter the Foundation Stage from a very wide catchment area. When they arrive in Nursery, the skills and knowledge of most children are very low compared with those typical of this age group. They make good progress in the Nursery but many move to different schools at the end of Nursery, particularly the more able. The children who transfer to Reception build upon well below levels of development and make good progress, but by the end of Reception their overall development is still below expectations for their age, particularly in language. Children make good progress because they enter a warm and stimulating environment, well organised to promote their future development and independence. Staff are well trained and work effectively as a team, planning and developing interesting activities, both inside and outside the classroom. Teaching and learning are good. Staff are particularly skilful when intervening in children's play, promoting language and understanding as they do so. They observe their children well and adapt quickly to changing needs and interests. In this way, all children are well supported and all grow in confidence. Parents are most enthusiastic about the Foundation Stage unit; they know their children feel happy and safe; they appreciate regular information about progress and learn how to support and extend their child's development. Leadership and management are good and there have been many improvements since the last inspection. These include better balance between activities led by adults and those chosen by the children, equal access to facilities and consistency of approach across the unit.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure more able pupils are fully challenged.
- Further improve writing skills for all pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are broadly average and achievement is good. Standards at Key Stage 1 have risen over the last few years to meet national expectations, but higher levels were not achieved in reading and mathematics in 2007. Standards at Key Stage 2 have also risen and are now broadly in line with national expectations in mathematics and science but have remained below in English for some years. The whole-school focus upon improving English, and especially writing, is currently showing good indications of success but more needs to be done to build levels of overall literacy. There are robust systems for assessment and the tracking of progress. School attainment targets are challenging this year and current school analysis shows both Year 2 and Year 6 are on course to meet and in some cases exceed last year's results and reach national expectations in English as well as in mathematics and science. Extension work to ensure that more pupils reach the higher levels in all subjects needs further development. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make up approximately one third of the school's roll. They make good progress because they are well cared for, guided and supported.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being are good. Pupils behave very well in classrooms and around the school and display positive attitudes to learning. They feel safe and secure in school. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development are good. They have especially good opportunities

to develop their knowledge and understanding of other cultures through their work on the 'Cultural Hubs Project'. They learn to work well together, as shown in lessons and assemblies. Pupils enjoy coming to school and speak positively about what they do in lessons and in the many and varied activities and visits that the school provides for them. They have a good understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle and engage well in sport and physical activity. Pupils are eager to accept responsibility and both the school council and buddies system are effective in contributing to the smooth and safe running of the school. Pupils give willingly of their time and efforts in support of charities and are involved in local community projects and the church. Levels of attendance have improved significantly recently, reflecting the considerable efforts of the staff to raise standards and provide rich and interesting experiences for learners. Authorised absence has improved as a result of work undertaken by the school with parents. Exclusions are low and well managed. The imaginative 'Eclipse Photography' project and drama projects demonstrate the school's commitment to using the arts and technology and have been significant in developing pupils' confidence and promoting their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are consistently good across the school following significant work undertaken to share good practice. Lessons are monitored regularly, all staff receive continuous training and a rigorous system for tracking progress enables children to build on previous learning. Staff have good subject knowledge, plan their lessons carefully and give clear explanations. Pace and challenge are usually good with highly committed teaching assistants effectively supporting pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Occasionally, the more able pupils are not extended. ICT is well used in lessons and pupils are very competent in their use of technology. Relationships between pupils and staff are always good and these result in positive work attitudes. Some outstanding lessons were seen during the inspection, when the challenge and pace of learning caused real excitement. In a small minority of lessons, explanations were unclear, activities were rushed and there was little time for pupils to reflect consequently, learning was slower. The school's recent focus on improving writing structure and style is beginning to help improve writing skills.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and meets the needs of learners well. It is inclusive through its good support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Planning is a strength of the school and the broad and balanced curriculum is combined with a variety of arts and sports activities, visits and visitors, to provide a stimulating diet for pupils. This contributes to their positive attitudes to learning and their good personal development. The school works especially hard to develop pupils' understanding of the world outside and the cultural dimension is particularly strong. So too is enterprise education and the use of ICT. The recent emphasis upon improving literacy skills is beginning to support learning across all areas of the curriculum and the rate of progress is improving across all subjects. The richness of the curriculum and pupils' response to it is reflected in their work on display around the school and in the resources they have developed for showcasing their own story telling in local schools and regional theatres.

The school provides a wide range of out-of-hours courses for both pupils and parents and is involved well with the community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. The school has good procedures in place for safeguarding; child protection training has been undertaken and all risk procedures and policies are in place. The school has worked hard over the last 18 months to create a calm, orderly place where learning is celebrated. This is reflected in the good attitudes to learning of the pupils. Much work has been undertaken with parents to highlight the school's expectations and the impact of this is being seen in improved attendance and parental involvement in the life of the school. Academic guidance is good and pupils regularly assess their own work against lesson criteria. Pupils are keen to reach their own targets and know what they need to do to improve. Systems for tracking pupils' academic and personal progress are rigorous and are used to plan appropriate lessons and match resources to needs. Skilled teaching assistants and other helpers, including parents, give good support to those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school has very good links with outside agencies to provide specialist support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher energises the school and is moving it forward significantly. She has a vision of an inclusive school that meets all pupils' needs, challenges pupils to look at the wider world and develop in them the skills and understanding to deal with it. This is shared by the highly committed staff. Self-evaluation is good and takes account of parent, pupil and staff views. The headteacher has skilfully created around her both leadership and subject teams that are building up their knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the school through good monitoring practices. They are thus able and willing to respond to identified needs and to increased challenge. As a result, recent improvements, particularly in writing, and more robust targets have improved progress. Good assessment practices in English, mathematics and science are being developed in other subject areas. Staffing has been creatively used to focus upon teachers' strengths and non-teaching staff are used well and trained to support learning, especially of those with learning disabilities and/or difficulties. The development of ICT as both a subject area and means of communication has been pursued energetically and is now a strength of the school. All other areas from the last inspection have been dealt with well. Work in partnership with a wide range of others, both in this country and abroad, is outstanding and has promoted pupils' personal well-being and academic success. The governing body carries out its support and challenge functions well and, together with the increased involvement from the parent body, is helping to move the school further forward. The school's capacity to improve further is good.

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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?	1
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	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?	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	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

7 April 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Bullion Lane Primary School, Durham, DH2 2DP

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave me and my team when we visited your school. You were very friendly, polite and enthusiastic about what you do. You told us a lot of interesting things about your school and you are clearly very proud of it. We spent a lot of time finding out how you learn in your lessons, looking at your work and talking to your teachers and the headteacher. We think that Bullion Lane Primary is a good school.

These are the main things we found that are good about your school:

- you have a headteacher with a clear idea of what the school should be like
- you have a hardworking and dedicated staff who carefully look at and measure everything that goes on in the school, and so they know what needs to be done to help you learn
- you have a wide range of subjects, activities, visits and visitors that make learning interesting for you
- the quality of care and guidance is good and shows how everyone in the school is looking after you.

These are the things your school is going to do to make it an even better place to learn:

- help you all do your best, especially those capable of reaching the higher standards
- work with you more on improving your writing.

You can help by telling your teachers how you learn best and if you have any difficulties. You can also help by continuing to attend school every day, behaving well and working hard, as you do at the moment.

Yours sincerely

Nigel Cromey-Hawke

Lead inspector