

High Coniscliffe CofE Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114224
Local Authority	Darlington
Inspection number	311522
Inspection date	19 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Sheila Mawer

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	109
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Laura Twedle
Headteacher	Miss Wendy Aitken
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2003
School address	High Coniscliffe Darlington County Durham DL2 2LL
Telephone number	01325 374412
Fax number	01325 374412

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- The current standards and progress being made by the pupils.
- The opportunities for pupils to plan some of their own learning.
- How well pupils are informed about and involved in assessing their own progress.
- The quality of provision in the Foundation Stage.

Evidence was gathered from lesson observations, the scrutiny of pupils' work, the school's self-evaluation, national published assessment data and records of pupils' progress over time. Discussions were held with staff, governors and pupils, and questionnaires returned by parents were considered. A range of documentation was also examined. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified. These have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This very popular small school serves a predominantly rural area; many families travel some distance for their children to attend. The social and economic background of pupils is relatively advantaged and the proportion eligible for free school meals is well below average. Nearly all pupils are of White British heritage. A below average percentage of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school is a training centre for students.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The school provides an outstanding education for its pupils and gives outstanding value for money. Its motto, 'I can if I try', shines through this highly successful school. Pupils achieve exceptionally well in their academic and personal development through first-class teaching, a rich curriculum and excellent welfare. The relentless striving for excellence by staff and governors is successfully achieved through regular self-review, development and improvement. Parents and the local community think very highly of the school. Comments from parents include, 'My child is thriving far beyond my expectations in this brilliant school. I have the highest regard for the staff who provide quality education where individuals matter.' With its excellent reputation, which is well deserved, the school is repeatedly oversubscribed.

Results of national tests at the end of Year 6 have been significantly above average since 2003. All pupils reach expected levels and between a half and three quarters exceed these levels each year. There was a dip in science in 2007. This has been addressed through a comprehensive review of the science curriculum and a stronger focus on pupils carrying out investigations. This year, pupils in Year 6 are on course to reach very high standards in English, mathematics and science. Standards by the end of Year 2 are well above average. Given that the children's skills on entry to the Reception class are mostly typical for their age, pupils make exceptional progress throughout the school. Their achievement is outstanding. Standards in other subjects are high and particularly so in information and communication technology (ICT). This has been achieved through staff sharing their expertise and effective timetabling of the ICT suite to give pupils regular access to its excellent resources.

Teaching is outstanding, which is clearly evident from the tremendous gains made by pupils of all ages. When teachers plan lessons, high achievement and enjoyment are the prime criteria for success. When lessons are judged to be less effective by senior leaders, appropriate action is taken to enable all pupils to learn successfully. Planning and assessment are closely linked, ensuring that work is matched carefully to individual needs. More able pupils do extremely well because teachers' expectations are high. Pupils confirm this when they say, 'Teachers give us work that stretches us to think hard and work things out for ourselves.' Pupils are given a great deal of autonomy in their learning. For example, Year 6 devised mathematical puzzles on the computer for Year 5 to solve. Pupils regularly carry out their own research and often plan class assemblies. In this way they develop a range of working skills and become confident and articulate young people. Along with their excellent academic skills they are being very well prepared for later life. Pupils are fully involved in setting and reviewing their own targets. Those with a statement of special educational need have child-friendly individual education plans to make it easier for them to review their progress. Pupils are expected to look at their own work and that of their learning partner to spot ways in which it could be improved. These strategies, together with very helpful marking from teachers, are helping pupils to know how well they are learning.

Personal development is outstanding in this exceptionally caring and supportive school. A very good combination of challenge and enjoyment means that pupils really love school and consider their lessons 'are fun as well as educational.' This is reflected in exceptionally high attendance levels that continue to improve. Unauthorised absence is almost unheard of. Pupils are eager to confirm that they are extremely well cared for and feel totally safe in school. Child protection procedures and all aspects of health and safeguarding comply fully with government requirements. Lunchtime is a special occasion for pupils and staff. Everyone sits together to

enjoy a healthy meal. Pupils are very knowledgeable about the importance of health and fitness. A group produced their own video on getting healthy at High Coniscliffe. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupils behave impeccably and are highly supportive of each other. They contribute significantly to the well-being of others as councillors, house captains, play buddies and learning partners. Links with the village are strong. The school and the village run a gardening club together. Pupils are proud to keep local traditions strong by growing vegetables in their small allotment and exhibiting them at the annual show. They often organise their own fund-raising events for charities overseas, gaining a good awareness of different cultures to their own.

An excellent curriculum brings many benefits to pupils' experiences and achievement. It is reviewed regularly to meet individual needs. The local authority has recognised this strength with an Inclusive Award. An excellent range of after-school clubs is available to all age ranges including wood carving for older pupils run by the school caretaker. Pupils talk enthusiastically about their enjoyment through visits, visitors and special weeks. Well-developed links with other schools support a variety of sporting activities and events. There are many productive links with local businesses and other agencies. The strong focus on the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT, reinforced in other subjects, underpins all learning.

The leadership and management of the headteacher and other senior leaders, including the governors are outstanding. The headteacher, appointed a year ago, has maintained the school's excellent reputation. Very effective monitoring and evaluation enable leaders to work together to promote the best opportunities for pupils to learn successfully and thrive in their personal development. The school's accurate judgement of its effectiveness indicates how well it knows itself. Any dip in standards, such as occurred in science in 2007, is thoroughly investigated and action is taken to ensure that pupils are again on target to reach exceptionally high standards. Governors work closely in partnership with the school and are fully involved in its strategic direction. They successfully hold the school to account. When, for example, lower standards in art, music and religious education were identified at the last inspection, the headteacher and governors carried out a thorough curriculum review of these subjects and used funding very effectively to appoint a specialist teacher for music. Standards have consequently risen. The popularity of the school is leading to some difficulties in accommodating the large number of pupils in a school that is already overcrowded. The school's desire to provide extended services to pupils, parents and the community is also restricted through lack of space. The outstanding leadership and management clearly have the vision to see beyond these barriers. They demonstrate an outstanding capacity for continued improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The quality of provision in the Foundation Stage is outstanding. Most children start school with standards that are typical for their age. Through excellent teaching in a stimulating environment, children make outstanding progress. During the inspection the imaginative use of the story, 'I'm going on a bear hunt,' provided the children with a wealth of opportunities for imaginative play as well as highly effective adult-led activities. By the end of the Foundation Stage, the children reach levels that are above those expected for their age in all six areas of learning. Excellent settling in arrangements for pupils from ten different nurseries, quality care from adults and friendly support from older pupils in the mixed-age class helps the Reception children quickly become confident learners. They build strong and positive relationships. Parents are very appreciative of these arrangements. One wrote, 'I am delighted with the speed and

ease with which my child has settled into Reception. He has grown in confidence and is much more independent than before.' The use of older pupils in Year 6 to act as buddies to the Reception children is a very happy and supportive partnership. The curriculum is good and children have access to the outdoors for some of their activities. As this area doubles as an infant playground and there is limited space, it is not possible to have permanent resources or to use the facilities in wet weather. The use of bikes and trikes is also restricted. Recently, funding has been granted and additional land acquired to allow the school to go ahead and plan a designated and partly covered area for regular use by the Reception children.

What the school should do to improve further

- Plan the development of a secure outdoor area for the children in the Foundation Stage.

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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?	1
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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of High Coniscliffe CofE Primary School, Darlington, DL2 2LL

Thank you all for making my day with you all so enjoyable. You were so keen to tell me how wonderful your school is and how much you love coming. I wasn't really surprised to hear this because your attendance at the school is one of the best in the country, so well done for all your effort. I agree with you and your parents that you go to a very special school that is outstanding in every way. It is one of the best schools in England and you have every reason to be extremely proud to attend.

There is so much to celebrate about the school that it is hard to know where to begin! You are all reaching very high standards and making excellent progress. In lessons I saw how extremely keen you were to learn. Your motto, 'I can if I try' is helping you to achieve highly. I watched many of you enjoy planning some of your own learning and reviewing your work. I was very impressed with the difficult puzzles Year 6 made up for Year 5 to solve. Your teachers and all of the staff are doing a brilliant job. They show great skills in helping you learn really well and provide wonderful support to you all as well as providing an excellent curriculum. The school has been popular and successful for many years because of the excellent leadership and management of the headteacher, deputy headteacher and the governors. Through their careful checking they make sure that the school continues to flourish.

I really enjoyed seeing the care you show for one another and how you want to help not only your friends in school, but also people in the village and those in the wider world. You should all be very proud of your gardening skills on the allotment and sensory garden. I hope you will do well at the annual show in the village. Those who are buddies should feel very pleased with how well you have supported the children in Reception and helped them to settle so well. You all told me how fit, safe and healthy you feel in school. Although you said there was no bullying you also added that if it ever happened, your teachers would quickly sort it out. I know how much you are looking forward to having more space for play activities in the future, including more opportunities for the Reception children to play outdoors.

I hope you will all keep working hard and continue to make your school outstanding. I wish you all every success. For those of you moving on to secondary education, you have clearly gained many important skills at High Coniscliffe which will help you flourish in the future. Good luck to you all.

Yours sincerely

Sheila Mawer

Lead inspector