

Silver Tree Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123350
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	314568
Inspection dates	10–11 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Moira Fitzpatrick

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	148
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Jimmy Jamieson
Headteacher	Mrs Lynda Blacklock
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Durham Road Ushaw Moor County Durham DH7 7LF
Telephone number	0191 373 0622
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The school is smaller than average. It was formed at the start of the last academic year by the amalgamation of separate infant and junior schools. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage and there is a very small number for whom English is not their first language. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is above average. There is an above average percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, though the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need is below average. Children's attainment when they start in Reception is well below what is typical for their age, especially in personal and social, and language development. The school took up the new accommodation in October 2007. Prior to this it had been housed in the old infants' building where limited space and the poor condition of the building restricted learning activities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to pupils' achievement and standards in Key Stage 2, the quality of teaching and the provision for pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The school's effectiveness is inadequate because a significant proportion of pupils do not make enough progress in Key Stage 2. By the end of Year 6 standards are below the national average, and especially low in mathematics. Pupils' achievement is inadequate overall. Although the school has become aware of the unsatisfactory progress of some groups of pupils, recent action has not yet had an impact on raising standards. Teaching is inadequate overall. Although there are examples of good and outstanding teaching in Key Stages 1 and 2, in too many lessons, especially in Key Stage 2, expectations of the pupils are not high enough and the pace of learning is slow. The provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in Key Stage 2 is inadequate because teaching does not take enough account of their needs to enable them to make the progress of which they are capable.

The school's pastoral care for pupils is good and pupils say they feel safe and secure. Support and guidance for learning are satisfactory because, although in some classes they help pupils make good progress, in others pupils are not given enough direct guidance on how to improve their work. The curriculum is satisfactory and improving as teachers develop areas of strength in subjects, such as writing or information and communication technology (ICT), and increase the range of after school clubs. Pupils' personal development is satisfactory. They behave sensibly and with consideration for others. Their attitudes to learning are directly influenced by the quality of teaching so that in some classes they show great enthusiasm, while in others they are passive, bored and take little interest in learning. A significant minority of pupils have poor attendance and this reduces the school's attendance figure to well below average. Pupils know how to stay safe and live healthy lifestyles. They enjoy taking on responsibility and helping the school to run smoothly. While their personal qualities prepare them well for the future, too many leave the school with weak basic skills so are not adequately prepared for the next stage of learning.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher and staff have had to cope with considerable turmoil because of damaged buildings, new building and several site moves since the school was formed. This has slowed the school's progress and has taken time away from improving the quality of provision for learning. The school's self-evaluation is satisfactory and staff have a clear idea of what needs to improve and how to tackle these improvements. Under the headteacher's leadership good teamwork is developing as staff from each of the former schools work together to share expertise and make improvements. The school has the capacity to improve and to tackle the weaknesses that both it and the inspection have identified.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children start school in the Reception class with attainment that is well below that typical for their age. They make satisfactory progress overall and many, though not all, reach the expected

level in all areas of learning by the time they start Year 1. Children's progress in personal and social skills, and communication, language and literacy is good, because these skills are promoted well by staff who encourage the children to be independent, make choices and work in harmony by learning to share. Children choose from an increasing range of activities and there is a good emphasis on learning letter sounds and on writing. Good links are developing with the adjoining private Nursery to assist the transition of children to Reception and to make the most efficient use of resources. The provision is satisfactory and improving well since the transfer to the new school site. The Foundation Stage leader provides satisfactory leadership and has made an accurate evaluation of what needs to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and improve achievement by Year 6.
- Increase the levels of challenge and pace in the teaching and raise expectations of the pupils.
- Improve provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and increase their rate of progress.
- Improve attendance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Standards are below average when pupils leave school at the end of Year 6, and pupils' achievement is inadequate. This is because pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable in Key Stage 2. Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 1 and reach average standards in reading, writing and mathematics. In the national tests in 2007 the school's performance was the same as the national average. Pupils now in Year 2 are on course to reach similar standards by the end of the school year.

In Key Stage 2 progress is inadequate. This results in a significant proportion of pupils not reaching the standards of which they are capable by the end of Year 6. School data indicate that this pattern of underachievement at Key Stage 2 has been a feature in recent years. In national tests for 11-year-olds in 2007, the school's results were close to average in English. However, the results in mathematics and science were significantly below average, with only half of the group reaching the expected level in mathematics. This was because a significant number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities did not make enough progress from their starting points at the end of Year 2. Standards in the current Year 6 are also well below average and a high proportion of pupils are not making enough progress to reach their targets by the end of the year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is satisfactory. Pupils have welcomed the move to the new school site and report that behaviour is better than it was in the last school year because they feel, 'we all have more space and are settled.' Behaviour is satisfactory and, in lessons where teachers fire pupils' enthusiasm, it is very good because pupils are engrossed in their learning. Overall, pupils show only satisfactory attitudes to learning because in too many classes teaching does not inspire them or capture their interest sufficiently. Attendance is well below average because of the poor attendance of a significant minority of pupils. Pupils have welcomed the opportunities they have to take on responsibilities and make a contribution to the school community. They are proud of their

work through the school council and of the links with the wider community through fund raising and concert performances. Pupils have a sound understanding of healthy diet and the need to be active. Relationships are good and pupils support each other in the classroom and playground. While their personal skills prepare them well for their future, too many pupils leave the school unprepared for the challenges of the next stage in their education because of their weak basic skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

The quality of teaching and learning is inadequate. It is too variable in quality between classes to promote consistent progress, especially at Key Stage 2. In some classes it is good or even outstanding while in others it is inadequate.

Where teaching is good or better, teachers have a good knowledge of their pupils' needs through their accurate assessment of learning. They use this information well to plan tasks that match the needs of all groups of pupils. This allows pupils to make a prompt start on tasks, work independently and succeed with their learning. These lessons move at a brisk pace because teachers have high expectations, relationships are very good and pupils want to please their teachers.

Where teaching is inadequate, the level of challenge set for pupils is not high enough because teachers' assessment is inaccurate. Teachers do not expect enough of pupils or make explicit what is to be achieved in the lesson. In these lessons, learning moves at too slow a pace, pupils show little interest in their learning, and the tasks set do not provide pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities with the support or starting points to work independently. Teaching assistants give good support but some teachers do not identify all of the pupils who need extra help to make satisfactory progress. This results in groups of pupils falling behind others in the class.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and statutory requirements are met. In most classes, planning for the basic skills is satisfactory. Provision for ICT is improving since the school took up new accommodation. Staff have received recent training and are beginning to make regular use of computers to support pupils' learning: this is having a positive impact on standards. Pupils' personal and social skills are given a high priority through a well planned personal, social and health education programme. This ensures that pupils learn how to stay safe and know how to make sensible choices about their lifestyle. The school provides a satisfactory range of after school activities as well as visits and visitors who enrich pupils' learning. Pupils are keen to see these expand because they enjoy the opportunities the school provides for them to try new things and develop their talents.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school's pastoral care for pupils is good. Those pupils who require it, receive good support for behavioural and social difficulties from trained teaching assistants. Teachers form good

relationships with pupils who say they feel safe and secure in school because they know who they would go to if they had a problem. The school has positive strategies for promoting good attendance, but these are not always effective with the poorest attenders. All safeguarding and child protection procedures meet government requirements.

Support and guidance for learning are satisfactory. Academic guidance is variable and so too is the quality of teachers' marking, some of which gives pupils no guidance on how to improve. The school is currently developing systems to track pupils' progress and standards, as well as to improve the accuracy of some teachers' assessment. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is inadequate. Too few pupils have their additional needs identified, for example those who have fallen behind because of weak teaching, so there is no appropriate support to help them make the same progress as their peers. Test results show that these pupils achieve less well than their counterparts in most other schools.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has provided strong, supportive leadership for staff and governors since taking up post when the schools amalgamated. However, the demands of overseeing first building repairs and then building developments over a protracted period, have reduced the time she has been able to spend on tackling weaknesses within the school. A high level of staff absence during this time has made it difficult to move the school forward at a good rate so that improvement since the schools amalgamated has only been adequate. Since the amalgamation, staff have shown an increased confidence and understanding of their role in improving the school and now that the situation has stabilised, have more opportunity to monitor and evaluate its work. At present school evaluation is adequate and subject leaders have a sound idea of where improvement is needed; for example, which aspects of mathematics require more emphasis in each year group.

Governance is satisfactory, but since amalgamation governors have allocated too little time to monitoring the work of the school and holding it to account for standards and progress. Consequently, they have not recognised the decline in standards at the end of Key Stage 2. Parents express growing confidence in the school because of improvements to behaviour and their closer involvement with their children's learning.

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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	4
The behaviour of learners	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	4

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4
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	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
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?	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

12 December 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Silver Tree Primary School, Durham, DH7 7PQ

Thank you all for making me feel so welcome when I visited recently. It was good to see your lovely new school and to hear that you enjoy the extra space and better equipment that you now have.

I could see that many of you work hard and enjoy your lessons, but I agree with some of you that sometimes the work set is too difficult or too easy, and that your learning isn't interesting. This is an area the school is going to improve in future so that you all make good progress and enjoy your learning. You can expect to find lessons more interesting and to become more successful in your learning as the year goes along. The school will also be working with your parents and carers to help those of you who don't attend often enough to come to school more regularly so that you can make better progress in your learning. An inspector will visit your school before too long to see what has improved.

I liked the way you have settled quickly into your new school building and are looking after it. It was good to hear that the school council is already looking for ways to make things even better. Your sensible behaviour and kindness to each other make your school a calm and happy place to be. I was pleased to learn that you feel safe and free from bullying and that you know the adults will take care of you. I hope that in the future you enjoy a lot of success in your learning and continue to make even more improvements to your new school.

All good wishes for the year ahead.

Yours sincerely

Moira Fitzpatrick

(Lead inspector)