

Hempstalls Primary School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 124111 |
| Local Authority | Staffordshire |
| Inspection number | 314814 |
| Inspection dates | 27–28 February 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Doris Bell |

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

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 3–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 237 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Neil Harvey Jamieson |
| Headteacher | Lynne Bennett |
| Date of previous school inspection | 15 September 2003 |
| School address | Collard Avenue Cross Heath Newcastle ST5 9LH |
| Telephone number | 01782 297768 |
| Fax number | 01782 297776 |

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|--------------------------|---------------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Children start this average-sized school, which has more boys than girls, with skills that are well below those expected for their age. The proportion of pupils receiving free school meals is above, and in some years well above average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is currently average though it too fluctuates from year to year. The range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities is greater than in most schools. The school has had a new headteacher and a new deputy headteacher since the previous inspection. It has achieved a Healthy Schools award, an Activemark and an FA coaching award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with some outstanding features. The headteacher's exceptionally clear vision, her very focused leadership and excellent management of change have been the driving forces behind the recent rapid improvement in pupils' progress. Overall, leadership and management are good, with subject leaders and governors taking increasing responsibility for improving pupils' progress. All of this begins with the effective provision and good progress in the Foundation Stage. As a result, achievement is now good throughout the school because all staff know where their pupils should be in relation to where they need to be by Year 6, and are working very hard to get them there. The very effective teamwork and good quality teaching thus engendered give the school good capacity for further improvement.

Standards are average in Year 6 in English, mathematics and science but pupils' writing is improving rapidly. Some of the writing in their 'celebration of writing' books is outstanding, as is some of the Year 6 pupils' writing on display around the school. However, pupils do not readily transfer these skills to their day-to-day writing in other subjects, and teachers' marking does not often enough focus them on doing so. Additionally, the work given to more able pupils in subjects other than English and mathematics does not always fully stretch them. The provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is now excellent. These pupils are supported well and they make good progress towards their targets.

The school has begun to make effective links between subjects in its well-planned curriculum. This and the high quality care, support and guidance given to pupils supports their learning and personal development well. As a result, pupils thoroughly enjoy school and want to do well. Some pupils describe the school as 'the best place to be'. Their understanding of how to improve their work is very good. They are fully involved in assessing their learning, know the levels they are at and what they need to do to improve. They share all of this information with their parents. The smiles on the faces of the parents and their glowing comments about the school are testament to the faith parents have in the staff to do their best for their children at all times. The school's effective links with other schools and external agencies all contribute to this.

The school is rigorous if over-cautious in its own evaluations of its work, including its overall effectiveness. This is because it felt hidebound by past data rather than basing its judgements on how well pupils are doing now. The school uses the information from its self-evaluation exceptionally well to move the school forward, resulting in measureable improvements in teaching and learning.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Excellent induction procedures prepare children and their parents really well for school routines. The strong focus in the curriculum on improving the children's weak language, mathematical and social skills contributes effectively to their good progress. Effective leadership and management, thorough planning and the rigorous tracking of each child's learning are successfully sustaining that progress during a period of unavoidable staff absence owing to sickness and maternity leave. The vast majority of children progress well towards the goals expected nationally at the end of the Foundation Stage, usually meeting those for personal, social and emotional development.

Reception children begin to communicate confidently with each other and with adults, although they tend to play alongside rather than with other children. Their speech is limited and sometimes indistinct. However, they usually listen carefully and follow instructions well, and they know what to do as they move around the exciting activities prepared for them. Staff use the outdoor area very effectively to develop all areas of learning, and to consolidate the more focused learning taking place in the classroom, for example in mathematics. However, adults sometimes miss opportunities to improve children's language and social skills in the activities that children choose for themselves.

What the school should do to improve further

- ensure that pupils' learning in science and other subjects is as well matched to their individual needs as it is in English and mathematics, and give more able pupils better opportunities to pursue their own learning.
- complete the work on linking different subjects together, check that pupils use their writing skills in all subjects and ensure that teachers mark those skills at all times.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of grammar, structure and spelling, and they know how to adapt their writing for different purposes and audiences. The school's efforts to improve pupils' ability to write at length, still the weakest aspect of their writing, are beginning to bear fruit. However, more remains to be done to encourage pupils to use their improved writing skills in all of their work. The increased focus on practical work in mathematics and science is improving pupils' progress in these two subjects. Pupils are becoming increasingly better at selecting the right method of calculation to solve real-life mathematical problems. They explained to inspectors how fractions 'are useful for lots of things' including solving problems.

Achievement is now good for all pupils throughout the school. This differs from last year's published data but reflects what is happening in the school now. Standards are slightly below average in Year 2 and average in Year 6. A good proportion of Year 6 pupils are already working above the nationally expected standards in English and mathematics. However, more able pupils do not always make fast enough progress in other subjects because they have too few opportunities to pursue learning for themselves.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils demonstrate a real sense of ownership of their school. They have a well-developed understanding of how it works and of how they can help to improve it. Through the school council, and as buddies, helpers and house captains, they contribute exceedingly well to the school and wider communities. They have a good understanding of different cultures in Britain and around the world. Their very strong sense of right and wrong is evident in their exemplary behaviour, their excellent understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe, and in how well they relate to, understand and care for each other.

Attendance is above average. Pupils see the school as a fun place to learn, readily sharing with their parents their excitement at discovering new things. Parents in turn are highly satisfied with what the school does for their children. Pupils' excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles results in their making healthy food choices and in the high rate of participation in the many

sporting activities available. All of this, plus their good progress in basic skills, including information and communication technology ensures they are well prepared for their future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers plan lively, interesting lessons that engage pupils well, make them want to learn, and contribute to their enjoyment of school. Teachers appreciate that pupils learn in different ways and adapt their teaching accordingly. Pupils respond with enthusiasm and an eagerness to learn, fostered effectively through working with 'learning partners', which successfully improves their communication skills and speeds up their progress.

Teachers are very keen to develop their knowledge and skills further. Their enthusiasm is evident in the pupils' responses, and in the improvements in writing and mathematics. Procedures for assessing and tracking pupils' progress during lessons and over time are robust. They have resulted in improved planning, marking and target setting. More able pupils are usually given suitable extension work in English and mathematics but are not always given challenging enough work to do in other subjects, including science. Teachers miss opportunities to improve pupils' writing skills when marking other subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum includes a number of imaginative, exciting and challenging activities that successfully contribute to pupils' learning and personal development. Stimulating resources, well-attended extra-curricular clubs and the committed support of teaching and non-teaching staff enrich the curriculum. Some effective links are made between different subjects but this work is at an early stage. Booster groups, well-constructed guided reading and phonics sessions have resulted in rapid progress in reading and writing. However, more remains to be done to encourage pupils to use their writing skills in all subjects at all times. The provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Staff care deeply for the pupils and the school has very robust systems for ensuring pupils' health, safety and well-being. It works very closely with parents and external agencies in this. The high response to the inspection questionnaires shows parents' strong support for what the school does. All pupils, including those who find difficulty learning, benefit from the very stimulating learning environment that successfully raises their aspirations and self-esteem. The pupils' writing 'I have a dream' bears witness to this. Pupils trust the staff, knowing their views are highly valued and they will always receive help should they need it. Pupils know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve because they understand the levels they are at and what they need to do next. This ensures that the school's motto 'learning and laughing together' is fully realised.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher nurtures the staff as much as the pupils, creating very effective teamwork that has successfully improved pupils' progress and personal development. The school's involvement in an 'intensive support programme' has also helped, as has the headteacher's moderation of the teachers' assessments of pupils' work. The school sets challenging targets for Year 6 and is on course to at least reach them this year. Other leaders and managers support the headteacher well in her work. Their joint checks on teaching and learning, and the headteacher's joint monitoring with local authority staff have sharpened all staff's skills in these areas. However, more remains to be done to ensure consistency in progress in writing, and sufficient challenge for more able pupils at all times.

Governors know the school well. They attend training, sometimes with the staff, and have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Their improvement plan has a manageable number of achievable priorities but the success criteria do not always focus sufficiently on the impact of the school's work on pupils' progress.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

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|---|-----|
| 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

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| 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

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|---|---|
| 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 | 2 |
| 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 | 2 |

The quality of provision

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|--|---|
| 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? | 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**

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| 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 | 1 |
| 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

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Hempstalls Primary School, Newcastle, ST5 9LH

Thank you for welcoming us to your school and for talking to us about your work. You clearly enjoy school very much, telling us it is the 'best thing' because teachers 'make learning fun' for you. You and your parents are rightly very proud of how well you are doing and of what the school does for you. You are correct in thinking that you go to a good school that cares deeply for each one of you.

The headteacher is particularly successful in helping the staff to teach you well. You have an excellent understanding of how to keep yourselves safe, fit and healthy, and of how to care for yourself and others. Through the school council and the many opportunities you have to take responsibility for various aspects of school life, you make an excellent contribution to the school and to the wider community. We found you to be very polite, well mannered and hardworking. You help and care for each other and try hard to make as much progress as possible. You are able to do this because you have a really good understanding of your targets and the steps towards them and you know how to assess how well you are doing. All of this ensures that you achieve well. Indeed, many of you in Year 6 are already working at levels beyond those expected for your age. This is a testimony to the work of the school and to your own efforts.

The school is helping you to make links between different subjects and teachers usually plan well to ensure that each of you makes the progress of which you are capable. However, there are some things the school could do even better to ensure that this happens at all times and in all subjects. These are to:

- ensure that your learning in science and other subjects is as well matched to your individual needs as it is in English and mathematics, and to give those of you capable of making even faster progress more opportunities to do so.
- complete the work on linking different subjects together, check that you use your writing skills well in all subjects and make sure that teachers mark those skills at all times.

You can help by continuing to work hard, listening carefully to what you are asked to do, and remembering to use what you learn in literacy when you write in other subjects. We hope that you will continue to enjoy learning as much as you do now, for the rest of your lives.

Yours sincerely Doris Bell Lead inspector