

Firs Hill Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133325
Local Authority	Sheffield
Inspection number	316083
Inspection dates	3–4 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Lesley Clark

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	470
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Steven Moss
Headteacher	Mrs Dina Martin
Date of previous school inspection	20 October 2003
School address	Orphanage Road Sheffield S3 9AN
Telephone number	0114 2426009
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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

Firs Hill Primary School is much larger than average. It is a popular school and is currently oversubscribed. It serves an area of significant social and economic disadvantage to the north of Sheffield City centre. Seventy-five per cent of pupils speak English as an additional language which is exceptionally high. The majority are new learners of English when they start at the school. The languages most commonly spoken at home are Punjabi, Urdu, Somali and Arabic. Ninety per cent of pupils come from British minority ethnic groups with a small proportion from White British and other European heritages. An increasing number come from the Czech Republic and Slovakia with limited or no previous schooling. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The number of pupils who come and go at times other than the usual ones is also above average. The school has an extensive lifelong learning programme for parents and adults in the community. Sixty per cent of the teaching and support staff are bilingual.

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 which is held in high regard by the local communities. It has several outstanding features which contribute to pupils' excellent personal development. Outstanding promotion of equal opportunities and resolute tackling of any forms of discrimination mean that pupils from very different cultural backgrounds are able to flourish both academically and personally. Pupils are very proud of their school. They particularly like the fact that, in their words, 'There are lots of people from different places', and agree, 'There is no racism.' They like the way, 'People pick up English very quickly here. Everyone helps each other and special teachers help you to speak well.' They thoroughly enjoy all the school has to offer them from the outstanding range of extra-curricular clubs at lunchtimes and after school to the exceptionally rich provision to develop their creative talents. These are sensitively organised so as promote the best learning opportunities for different groups of learners such as 'boys only maths' and 'girls only science' clubs. The result is pupils know 'It's not winning that counts but trying hard.'

Pupils' overall achievement is good. From a well below average starting point, pupils do well at each stage of their education to reach close to average standards in science and below average standards in mathematics by the end of Year 6. Standards have gone up recently in science because of the school's increased focus on scientific language and improved opportunities for pupils to learn through investigation. The school recognises that mathematics is relatively weaker and has started on a comprehensive programme to raise standards. This is having an impact in Key Stage 1 where learning is much more practical but it has to filter through to all classes in Key Stage 2. The success of this approach is seen in the most recent test results at the end of Year 2 where standards in mathematics equalled those in reading, previously the school's strongest subject. Pupils make the best progress in English. Their achievement is outstanding as the majority of pupils who are new to learning English and whose starting points are below average go on to reach standards at the end of Year 6 that are comfortably at nationally expected levels. This is because of excellent subject leadership, successful strategies to help new learners and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and high expectations, especially of more able pupils. As a result, Year 6 pupils can quote extensively from Shakespeare's Macbeth and clearly explain what the quotations mean.

The quality of teaching is good and helps pupils to learn effectively. Much of the teaching of literacy is outstanding; it is less assured in mathematics, especially in Key Stage 2. This is because teachers miss opportunities to help pupils to learn through finding out for themselves, by asking questions and using resources to help them to learn. Where teaching is less successful, teachers do not take into account that pupils have different ways of learning and rely too much on speaking and listening to convey new concepts. Bilingual staff give outstanding support to new learners of English. A good curriculum gives pupils a broad education. An excellent range of educational visits and visitors to school successfully widens their experience and extends their aspirations.

The care, support and guidance given to pupils are outstanding, both academically and personally, and play a large part in pupils' good progress and outstanding personal development. Pupils know their targets and what they need to do to improve their work. Similarly, the school has an excellent overview of each pupil's progress so that support can be targeted where it is needed. Pupils feel secure at school and they learn to value each other and their personal beliefs. They have an excellent awareness of why it is important to lead healthy lives. The school

council takes a lead on environmental issues, suggesting recycling to minimise waste. Pupils make an exceptionally positive contribution to the community, from the nationally acclaimed 'big bang' drumming group to the 'social environment' group on the school council that helps create rules that work. Behaviour as a result is good and pupils learn to play pleasantly and cooperatively, with due regard for the safety and well-being of others. Pupils are well prepared for their future lives for they know themselves well and realise it is important to work hard to achieve success.

The school is well led and managed. Many initiatives started five years ago are beginning to bear fruit as seen in the improved progress since the previous inspection. Parents are now closely involved in their children's work and twice weekly 'drop-in' sessions see many parents in school working alongside their children for the first half hour of the day as well as attending courses in their own right. This has had a significant impact on their children's learning. There is still some way to go but the outstanding lead given by the headteacher and the senior leadership team is driving the pace of change rapidly. This successfully promotes high quality care and is now becoming evident in rising standards. The strength and recent pace of change are such that the school's capacity to improve is demonstrably outstanding. The school has an accurate understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement. Governance is good, with governors closely involved in supporting the school. It gives good value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The Foundation Stage is well led and managed. Nursery provision is outstanding. It is good in the Reception classes. Children enter the Nursery with very limited communication, language and literacy skills, often because they are new learners of English. Outstanding teaching in English, supported by simultaneous translation in the children's mother tongue, gives them an excellent start to their education. They learn rapidly because the well-planned indoor and outdoor curriculum stimulates their curiosity, giving them free access to explore an extensive range of interesting activities. The recent extension to the Nursery day, to provide full day care, further benefits children's learning. Reception teachers plan carefully together to provide purposeful activities that allow access to the outdoor play areas, despite the limitations of upstairs classrooms. The quality of teaching is good and teachers' engagingly warm approach ensures children learn well, though they sometimes have to sit and listen for just a little too long.

What the school should do to improve further

- Capitalise on the gains made in Key Stage 1 to raise standards in mathematics in Key Stage 2.
- Give pupils ample opportunities to learn actively and independently so as to increase the amount of time pupils learn through trying things out for themselves.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good with standards close to those expected nationally by the end of Year 6. The trend in the school's results is steadily upwards at both key stages. Pupils' performances in national tests in both 2006 and 2007 confirm English is the strongest subject with science close behind. Standards in mathematics show less marked improvement at Key Stage 2 but distinct improvement at Key Stage 1 where the most recent test results at the end of Year 2

confirm that a more practical approach to mathematics is raising standards. The school sets appropriately challenging targets which it meets. Pupils make good progress at each stage of their education because they are well taught. Outstanding systems to monitor their progress ensure that pupils get the right amount of help when they need it. This ensures that those new to the school, new to learning English or those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, resulting in exceptional tolerance and understanding of different beliefs and cultures. Pupils have a strong voice in what goes on at school and older pupils value the contributions made by younger ones, saying, 'They have very imaginative ideas.' Attendance is satisfactory and improving significantly, largely because of the school's zero-tolerance for extended holidays and an innovative approach to minimise Eid absences which is really making a difference. Pupils develop into mature, socially responsible people with a healthily energetic approach to learning and to play. They throw themselves wholeheartedly into creative activities such as filming their dramatic productions in the wildlife area. They thoroughly enjoy school and have lots of good ideas to make it even better.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

A real strength in teaching is the way teachers match activities to suit different ability groups. An area for improvement is to ensure an equally sensitive match to pupils' preferred learning styles. This is done well in Key Stage 1 where pupils have more opportunities to learn through questioning and discovery. Teaching assistants are extremely well deployed to help individual and groups of learners and, as a result, all groups of learners make good progress. Outstanding teaching in English ensures that pupils learn to use and understand language in many different forms, using computer technology very effectively to help them to do so. In other lessons, teachers do not always use the interactive aspects of new technology to the full. Teachers manage behaviour very well and guide pupils with considerable success towards assessing their own learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum makes good provision for literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology not just in lessons but also in extra-curricular clubs. Outstanding aspects of the curriculum include enrichment from a wide range of clubs, several residential visits for both younger and older pupils and extended creative arts projects which enlarge pupils' experience. In addition, the curriculum celebrates pupils' home languages as well as introducing them to other foreign languages. The Key Stage 1 curriculum links subjects creatively together and so pupils practise their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects; this is at an early stage of development in Key Stage 2.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school's systems to safeguard pupils and to ensure they receive suitable guidance both academically and personally are outstanding. Child protection procedures are in place. Consequently, pupils feel safe at school. The learning mentor works successfully with individuals with behavioural difficulties to help them achieve well. Similarly, parents are closely involved in helping their children if they have problems. The systems to check pupils' progress are equally outstanding. Pupils use their targets effectively and senior leaders keep a close eye on overall progress, identifying individuals who need more help. The effectiveness of these systems shows in steadily rising standards. Teaching assistants give outstanding support to learners experiencing difficulties.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

An outstanding leadership team gives exceptionally clear direction to promote high quality care and increasingly effective education. It recognises quite rightly that there is still some way to go. Its main strength is that it sees leadership as 'not only being within the school but out of school, into the community.' In this it is highly successful, with many parents and adults in the community coming into school to help their children and also to improve their own skills. Revised management structures to sharpen the tracking of progress in order to raise standards in mathematics are beginning to work. Strategic pairings of teaching staff to balance strengths as well as senior staff working alongside others are effective management tools, leading to good professional development of all staff. Governors are well informed and fully represent staff, parents and the community. They hold the school rigorously to account. Financial management 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	1

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?	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	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
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

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

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	1
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	1
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Inspection of Firs Hill primary, Orphanage Lane, Sheffield, S3 9AN

Thank you for making us so welcome and for talking to us so readily about your school. We really enjoyed meeting you all and watching you work and play.

You go to a good school and are right to be proud of the way you all get on so well together. You behave well and those of you with behavioural problems get excellent support. We were impressed by your school council and by how much thought they put into representing your views and getting things done on your behalf. Your personal development is outstanding, especially your awareness of why it is important to live healthily and your contribution to the community. Your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is equally outstanding, reflecting your excellent response to the many and varied extra-curricular clubs and activities as well as to the multicultural nature of your school. You achieve well. You do best in English. I was especially impressed by Year 6 who quoted at length from Macbeth and could explain exactly what Shakespeare was trying to say. I also watched the video you made in the morning out in the wildlife area of your own versions of the play - I thought you acted very well indeed and I loved the frightening close-ups!

Your school is well led and managed and you are well taught. Your headteacher and teachers take excellent care of you, guiding you extremely well. We have asked your school to do two things to improve your education. First, standards in mathematics should be higher. They are getting better in Years 1 and 2 but more needs to be done in Years 3 to 6. Second, we think that you would all benefit from learning more actively and so we have asked your teachers to increase the amount of time pupils learn through trying things out for themselves.

We hope that this will make your learning even more enjoyable and productive. On behalf of the team I should like to wish you all the very best for the future.