

Mount Pleasant Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114166
Local Authority	Darlington
Inspection number	325957
Inspection dates	3–4 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Derek Neil HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	292
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Lynne Henderson
Headteacher	Mrs Gillian Broome
Date of previous school inspection	28 November 2005
School address	Newton Lane Darlington County Durham
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors. The inspectors visited 12 lessons, observed pupils throughout the day and held meetings with pupils, staff and governors. They observed the school's work, and looked at documents such as the school's assessment data, the school development plan, and the minutes of the meetings of the governing body. They also considered the 65 parental questionnaires that were returned to the inspection team.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the attainment and progress of the pupils in Key Stage 2
- the school's work with its most disadvantaged pupils
- the reasons for the recent fall in standards
- the role of leadership and management in tackling the decline in standards.

Information about the school

Mount Pleasant is a large primary school in the Cockerton West Ward of Darlington. A Nursery unit and a Reception class make up the Early Years Foundation Stage. A high proportion of the pupils are boys. The percentages of pupils entitled to free school meals and of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well above average. Few pupils are from minority ethnic groups. The percentage of pupils who use English as an additional language is about average. There is a unit for 14 pupils with autism; currently eight pupils are registered there. The school shares its site with a children's centre.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

4

Capacity for sustained improvement

4

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

The school's performance has deteriorated since its last inspection. Standards have fallen and many pupils have underachieved. This has occurred because teaching has not been good enough to deal with some challenging pupils, and managers have failed to intervene effectively or quickly enough to halt the decline. Much has improved recently. Additional staff have been provided to support pupils who need extra help. Teaching has improved. As a result, attainment has begun to rise and most pupils make at least satisfactory progress in lessons. These improvements are too recent, however, to have made a significant impact on pupils' progress over Key Stage 2, which is inadequate overall. Furthermore, they are too precarious for anyone to be sure they will last: standards remain low and pupils continue to underachieve in some teaching groups, particularly where pupils' behaviour is poor. A lack of rigour in the school's self-evaluation means that the school leaders overestimate the school's quality. The governors do not play a full part in holding the school to account. As a consequence the school's capacity to improve is inadequate.

Many aspects of the school's work are satisfactory or better. Teaching and learning are good in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1, and are now satisfactory overall in Key Stage 2, although pupils' rate of progress is too slow to close gaps in their prior learning. Staff do their utmost to engage with and involve their most vulnerable pupils; for example, the children registered with the autism unit are integrated very well into the life of the school. Staff provide a high level of care to ensure pupils are safe, get help when they have problems, and are well supported to meet their varied and often complex needs. Despite the anti-social behaviour of a minority, pupils feel fairly safe and most enjoy school. They have a good understanding of how to stay healthy. Many make a contribution to the running of the school, though more could be done to get them to accept greater responsibility. The school has comprehensive systems for monitoring pupils' progress, though it does not use these well enough to set targets to enable them all to achieve well.

The school has been staffed and organised to support the many children who present serious personal and educational challenges. However, the use of this resource has not resulted in these pupils making progress commensurate with their capabilities

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards and improve progress in Key Stage 2 by:
 - improving teaching and learning so that more of it is good
 - making sure pupils are taught in stable groups of a reasonable size
 - making better use of pupils' targets for learning
 - setting work that is more challenging for the most able pupils.

- Make leadership and management more effective by:
 - enabling governors to hold the school to account more
 - introducing more rigour in the way staff evaluate the quality of the school's work, including its strategies to manage pupils' behaviour.

- Ensure pupils accept greater responsibility by:
 - creating more positions for them to take on
 - strengthening the role of the school council
 - making sure pupils fully understand how their misbehaviour affects others
 - teaching them to understand more about the different faiths and ethnic groups that make up our society.

How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

4

- In Key Stage 1, standards are low but improving. Few pupils achieve at the highest level.
- Standards in Key Stage 2 have declined considerably since the last inspection and are now well below average. The 2008 unvalidated results were very low indeed, especially in writing. Very few pupils achieve at the highest level. The school's assessment information indicates that, after this period of decline, standards are set to rise, but remain nonetheless much lower than average. This represents unsatisfactory progress overall.
- The recent attention paid in lessons to mental arithmetic means that pupils are able to carry out additions and subtractions quickly and accurately. Their ability to multiply and divide is less secure.
- By the end of Key Stage 2, because of recent improvements made by the school, pupils' handwriting is neat and letters are well formed, though most of their writing is in pencil and little is done in ink. They use a good range of vocabulary in their imaginative writing and know how to use a variety of connectives such as 'although'. However, their knowledge of parts of speech is weak and many make too many technical errors, for example in their spelling

and punctuation.

- Pupils do not make sufficient progress during their time in Key Stage 2. For the past two years they have seriously underachieved. Girls sometimes do worse than boys, though this does not occur every year. The school has taken steps to tackle this, and pupils' rate of progress has improved, but not enough to overcome past underachievement. Boys are not doing as well in mathematics as they should and pupils' progress in some teaching groups is adversely affected by the poor behaviour and attitudes of some pupils.
- Most pupils like coming to school and recognise the importance of learning. They show good attitudes in class and try hard to do well. As a result, they make at least satisfactory progress in their lessons. However, a significant minority do not concentrate or get on with their work, particularly when expected to do so with little supervision.
- Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities including those with autism enjoy their lessons and make good progress because of the high level of well planned additional support they get.
- Pupils mostly feel safe in the school. They are well supervised throughout the day and appreciate the fact that the premises are protected from intruders. However, they are not confident their property is secure. Some of the younger and less confident pupils are afraid of playtime because of the fights that sometimes erupt and because of the squabbles between different groups of friends. The behaviour of a few pupils has been so irresponsible that some privileges have been withdrawn; the children are no longer allowed to play with some of the equipment because of the way it was being treated.
- Pupils understand the importance of eating healthily and taking exercise. Many are involved in physical activity after school. The school fruit shop does good business at playtime. The award of Healthy School status and of the Activemark is a tribute to the school's success in this area.
- Pupils contribute to the school and the wider community through organised activities, such as fund-raising and running the fruit shop. They could do more here. The school council meets regularly and has contributed to improvements in playground equipment, but pupils are unclear about its recent achievements. Several pupils have been selected to act as playground helpers but they do not carry out their responsibilities properly.
- Pupils' attendance has improved since the last inspection and the school has succeeded in reducing the number of pupils who are frequently absent, though these figures remain slightly worse than average. The most recent analysis by the school indicates attendance this year has begun to decline slightly.
- The school raises pupils' aspirations through activities such as visits to a local university. However, pupils' chances of achieving their goals are limited by inadequate achievement in basic skills.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	4

¹ Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	2
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	4
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	3
How well do pupils behave?	4
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	2
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	3
Pupils' attendance	3
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	4
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	3

The quality of the school's work

- Teaching is good in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1. It is broadly satisfactory in Key Stage 2 because of recent changes, though these have not yet had time to make a strong enough impact on the legacy of underachievement. Consequently pupils do not achieve as well as they should over their time in the school.
- The strengths in the teaching include some stimulating introductions to lessons, a variety of interesting activities, the opportunities for pupils to work independently, and the regular use of praise and encouragement. In most classes the teacher successfully builds on what the pupils already know and plans work that is well matched to their ability.
- In the less effective lessons some pupils are not challenged by the tasks they are given; and in some cases they do not understand the work because the explanation is unclear. In too many instances, pupils are unable to concentrate for long and do not work hard enough.
- The school regularly assesses pupils' work and monitors their progress. Teachers have comprehensive information on how well their pupils are doing and they use this to plan their lessons. This is sometimes not done to best effect. For example, an identified concern about boys' learning has led to the targeting of questions at the boys in one class to the clear neglect of the girls. Pupils are given targets for learning but do not always understand them. Sometimes the targets are unsuitable; for example, a spring term target to begin sentences with adverbs is inappropriate for an able girl who was already doing this in the autumn.
- The staff have worked hard to make the curriculum enjoyable and imaginative. It is enriched by an extensive range of visits and extra-curricular activities. It is planned to give pupils opportunities to develop their basic skills through the full range of subjects, though this has yet to have an impact on test results.
- The organisation of Key Stage 2 into single-age groups has resulted in some very big classes. This makes teaching difficult, and learning is not always effective because of complicated arrangements to separate groups from the rest of the class at different times of day for different purposes to work with different staff.

- The school cares for its pupils very well. The children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities including those with autism get a high level of expert help. Staff take great care to boost their self-esteem and make sure they are happy. The school has enjoyed some successes with the wide variety of problems that its pupils have. For example, learning mentors have helped several pupils to control their anger; and pupils with poor attendance have been encouraged to come to school more often through the good work of a home-school worker.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	3
Effective assessment	3
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	3
Support, guidance and care	2

How effective are leadership and management?

- The school is less effective than it was at the time of the previous inspection. It faces challenging circumstances but senior leaders have not managed a difficult situation well. When senior leaders became aware of the concerns in Key Stage 2 over the past two years their efforts to resolve the problems were ineffective; pupils continued to underachieve.
- The school monitors and evaluates its work through a wide range of methods but these are not systematic or robust enough to ensure that managers identify priorities accurately and quickly. Managers observe lessons but they use a number of different formats to record their comments, and the quality of their insights varies considerably; on the whole, their judgements tend to be too uncritical. A number of different initiatives has been introduced but there is no system for assessing their effectiveness; for example, the impact of strategies to improve pupils' behaviour has not been formally evaluated.
- The governing body shares some responsibility for the decline in the past two years. Governors were criticised in the last inspection. Since then the school has ensured they are better informed about its work; one device is that staff give regular presentations on their area of responsibility. However, governors have been too ready to accept the school's version of events and not to question it. The poor test results of the past two years were received with no record of governors expressing concern. The decision to organise Key Stage 2 with large classes has not been seriously questioned, despite the problems it has caused.
- The school is highly inclusive and promotes equal opportunities well. The staff share a determination to serve all pupils well and to protect the most vulnerable. The pupils with autism are successfully integrated into the life of the school and attend most of the mainstream classes with their peers.
- At the time of this inspection the school had effective safeguarding procedures. Children are well supervised during the day. The arrangements for vetting the suitability of staff are robust. Great care is taken to protect

children from inappropriate use of the internet.

- The school's contribution to community cohesion is developing satisfactorily and is largely focused on engaging more with parents and carers. It has achieved some success with hard-to-reach groups through its own efforts and through its close partnership with the children's centre. For example, a good number of fathers come to a weekly cookery class. The school is not yet building pupils' knowledge of different faith groups or ethnic groups sufficiently well, although progress here is emerging.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	4
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	2
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	2
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	4
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision-making about matters relating to learning and well-being	3
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	2
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	3
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	4

Early Years Foundation Stage

- Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and knowledge well below what is typical for their age, particularly in speaking and listening. They make good progress because of the rich curriculum and the good quality of teaching provided by the whole team. By the time they start Key Stage 1 they are performing at levels slightly below average in most areas of learning, although their writing skills remain at a very low level.
- The children's introduction to the nursery is carefully planned. They feel safe and happy there. Their personal and social development is good as it is given a strong emphasis in the early stages, particularly for those children who lack confidence or have poor self esteem. They are taught how to deal with safety issues and are aware of safe practice within the unit and beyond. They learn to take responsibility for small tasks and are beginning to develop learning skills.
- Children's language development and early literacy and numeracy skills are also promoted well.
- Children flourish in the nurturing and stimulating environment and benefit greatly from the opportunities for active and independent learning. There is a very strong emphasis on learning through independent play and through a variety of well planned activities that cover all areas of learning. Children can move freely between indoor and outdoor areas, but the outdoor activities do not have the same level of challenge as the indoor provision.
- The leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage are

good. The work of the support and teaching staff is well coordinated; they are a skilled and experienced team who plan well together and have a clear understanding about how young children learn. Staff regularly observe the children at work and assess their progress. They make good use of this information to support the pupils and move them on in their learning.

How good are the outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	2
What is the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	2
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?	2
Overall effectiveness: how well does the setting/school meet the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	2

Views of parents and carers

The inspection team received 65 questionnaires, which represents 22% of the pupils on roll. These were mostly positive. Few parents provided any written comments but those that did mentioned their children's happiness and the care provided by staff, particularly in helping when their child had a problem. One noted that literacy and numeracy skills had improved recently. A parent of a pupil who uses English as an additional language was very happy with the progress made. The most common concern, reflected in 8% of the returns, was with pupils' behaviour.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



5 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Mount Pleasant Primary School, DL3 9HE

Thank you for welcoming me and my colleagues so warmly into your school. We enjoyed watching you in lessons and at play; talking about your school with you and your teachers; and looking at your work. Now we want to share with you what we thought.

We think there are a lot of good things about your school. All the staff take very good care of you. You told us that you are made welcome there. The youngest children get a very good start to their school career. You enjoy lessons and you especially like the additional activities the school provides at lunchtime and at the end of the day. Many of you behave well in class and around the school; you know about the importance of eating and drinking healthily and taking plenty of exercise; and usually you play and work nicely with each other. Some of you help with the running of the school, for example by serving on the school council or selling fruit at playtime.

Your teachers work really hard but there are some things we think could be better; therefore we have decided the school needs some special measures for improvement. Here are some of the main things that need to be done.

- Although the amount of progress you are making in your work has improved recently we would like you to do even better so that you all reach the standards you are capable of. You can help here by always working as hard as you can, even when the teacher is not sitting at your table.
- We know that some of you help out around the school but we would like far more of you to take on more responsibility for what goes on during the school day. This includes making sensible use of playground equipment and the soap in the boys' toilets!
- There are lots of things going on in the school and some things work better than others. We have asked Mrs Broome and the staff to look carefully at these so they can see what works well and what doesn't. In that way they can make sure they are always giving you the best deal possible.

We will be interested in watching what happens to the school over the next few months and hope, with your help, it will get better and better. Some other inspectors will visit your school to see how well it is improving.

Thank you again for helping us so much with the inspection. It was a pleasure to meet you.

Wishing all of you the very best for the future,

Derek Neil
Her Majesty's Inspector

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