

Darras Hall First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122265
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	327677
Inspection dates	17–18 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Derek Sleightholme

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	417
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Nigel Twelves
Headteacher	Mr Peter Tincombe
Date of previous school inspection	1 September 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Broadway Darras Hall Ponteland Newcastle upon Tyne Tyne and Wear NE20 9PP
Telephone number	01661 823857

Age group	4–9
Inspection dates	17–18 November 2008
Inspection number	327677

Fax number

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Age group	4-9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large first school. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The number at an early stage of acquiring English as an additional language is very low. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average; so too is the number with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision includes a Community Powers funded nursery managed by the governors and three Reception Classes.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. 'I am delighted with all aspects of the school', is a written comment that typifies most parents' high regard for the school. The headteacher works resolutely with senior leaders and governors to set clear priorities for the school's development. Together they are particularly successful at delivering the school's aims that include promoting 'high expectations based on each individual child's ability to achieve'.

Achievement is outstanding. The school has an exceptional five-year record of very high pupil performance in assessments at the end of Years 2 and 4. Current standards in Year 2 and Year 4 continue to be significantly high. The large majority of pupils make outstanding progress. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are working at broadly average standards because they benefit from skilled support provided by teaching assistants.

Pupils' personal development and well-being and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. A particular strength is that pupils understand spirituality as an integral part of their learning. One reflected intelligently, 'you can express yourself through painting.' Pupils say they feel safe, reflecting the good care, support and guidance they receive. They know why it is important to be fit and healthy. Through their efforts, the school has secured accreditation as a Healthy School and been awarded the Activemark. Pupils love coming to school and their attendance is above average. Behaviour is hard to fault. Pupils hold mature conversations with their teachers and visitors who they welcome into school courteously. Pupils enthusiastically accept responsibilities such as school councillors, monitors or buddies. Pupils' rapid progress in acquiring basic skills ensures they are prepared very well to cope with the future.

Teaching and learning are outstanding. The carefully planned activities that challenge pupils so successfully stem from a deep understanding of how children learn. Lessons are delivered confidently with pace and rigour. Teaching and learning successfully meet the needs of highly motivated pupils. First hand learning opportunities, such as science investigations and themed weeks, often involving specialists, contribute to the overall excellent curriculum. Pupils from White British backgrounds learn directly about different cultures, celebrations and festivals from the pupils who are from minority ethnic backgrounds who are keen to share their knowledge and experiences. Overall, pupils make speedy gains across subjects. Pupils' enthusiasm for school is also reflected in the high take up of an appealing range of extra-curricular activities.

Leadership, management and governance are outstanding. School leaders are fully committed to maintaining very high standards of academic and personal development. Exemplary monitoring is a strong feature of the school's quality assurance procedures. Governors debate issues diligently and contribute to accurate self-evaluation. The school priorities are relevant and realistic. The school provides outstanding value for money.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the EYFS is good. It includes some outstanding features. Children enter the Nursery with skills and abilities that are above those typically found. Children progress well and they make rapid gains in personal and social skills, communication, language, numeracy and calculation. By the end of Reception, most children have met the early learning goals and more than half of them exceed these goals. This is because teaching is at least good and regularly

includes outstanding practice. Very effective planning ensures children in each Reception class access similar, engaging learning experiences.

Children make excellent progress personally. They behave very well, respond to instructions readily, enjoy healthy, physical activities and play together enthusiastically. If they need help they confidently approach an adult. Progress is often rapid because indoor activities are very stimulating. Nursery children quickly joined in when learning a new song and loved adding actions. Reception children eagerly made plans for a wedding in engaging activities that promoted their personal, social, language and number skills. Although the outside areas are used regularly and children make clear gains, especially during adult-led activities, there is a lack of resources to trigger children's interest and enquiry. The EYFS practitioners have already identified this area for improvement.

Care is good. Staff, who know children well, operate efficient systems for daily routines. Assessment practices are developing well with a range of methods used to record information about progress. Leadership is good. It provides a strong sense of direction and promotes effective teamwork.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase resources to stimulate exploration, investigation and independence in the outdoor areas of the EYFS.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Achievement is outstanding. Progress from Year 1 to Year 4 is outstanding. Current standards in Year 2 are exceptionally high in reading, writing and mathematics. Current standards in Year 4 in English, mathematics and science are significantly higher than the level expected for pupils at this age. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make outstanding progress. In the 2008 assessments at the end of Year 2, results were significantly high in reading, writing and mathematics. The results of 2008, Year 4, school assessments in English, mathematics and science were significantly above what would be expected for pupils at this age. The trend of significantly high standards in all core subjects continues to be maintained.

The outstanding achievement and excellent results stem from school leaders setting very challenging targets, consistently high quality teaching and ensuring highly motivated pupils have opportunities to extend their learning independently.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils know the importance of keeping healthy and a high proportion of them take up energetic extra-curricular activities. They welcome opportunities to grow tomatoes; reflecting their understanding of the importance of 'a balanced diet and eating healthy food'. Pupils feel safe. If pupils are troubled they know they can access support promptly. Playground buddies assume responsibilities conscientiously. Behaviour throughout the school is outstanding.

Pupils really enjoy their learning and take part in school activities enthusiastically. In literacy, pupils were wholly engaged in an interactive game, positively encouraging their peers, cheering them on and thoroughly involved in the competitive aspect. Pupils have a sensitive appreciation of distant places and other cultures. Many are thrilled to learn French. Extremely articulate

school councillors are full of ideas for improving their school community. One good outcome is their management of a daily fruit tuck shop they established. Pupils have outstanding literacy, numerical and technical skills, which they apply across subjects. They work collaboratively in teams and listen to each other's opinions before reaching mature decisions. All these factors prepare them extremely well for life ahead.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding. This is because teachers have an excellent understanding of exactly how children learn. The focus on learning is pivotal to developing pupils' acquisition of skills alongside knowledge and understanding. Exemplary teaching results in pupils making very rapid progress, producing consistently high quality work, and gaining confidence in understanding how they learn. This exceptional drive for improved learning begins with work that is appropriately targeted to meet individual pupils' needs.

Expectations are high from the outset. Assessment information is used wisely to set very challenging targets. Teaching helps the pupils achieve these by planning brisk, lively lessons that enthuse all pupils. Engaging methods, including interactive learning, inspire and motivate pupils to take a responsibility for their own improvement. By Year 4, they become independent researchers and critical self-evaluators. Following a visit to Beamish museum, pupils used their exceptional research skills to retrieve and select appropriate information from a range of websites. The outcome was work of the highest quality. This learning is reinforced and consolidated by high quality homework.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. It spans subject boundaries to provide a holistic approach. This enables pupils to make appropriate links between subjects. Pupils particularly enjoy themed weeks. They spoke enthusiastically about the recent French week where they became important artists and managed an art gallery selling their works of art. Excellent curriculum plans, constantly re-evaluated, are central to providing a broad and balanced curriculum. More than half the pupils take part in the excellent range of after school clubs. They say they are particularly fond of singing, drama and art.

No opportunity is missed to extend understanding. Pupils' knowledge of places and cultures gained by regularly travelling abroad are used to extend learning effectively in the humanities. An exemplary feature is that pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, keen to share their personal experiences and traditions with others, add significant value to class discussions. Curriculum partnerships are excellent. Visiting professionals enrich the programme. For example, excellent links with the local high school support the teaching of French for all pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support currently provided by the school are good. Well established routines ensure pupils' health and safety. Child protection procedures, safeguarding and risk assessments meet requirements. Good links with external agencies ensure the needs of pupils

are met. Parents are fulsome in their praise for a school in which they say 'the standard of pastoral care is consistently high'. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from the support provided by skilled teaching assistants and special learning programmes; this helps them to achieve particularly well.

The school has very effective systems for following and recording pupils' progress. As a result, teachers are well placed to plan lessons that build on previous learning and to inform pupils what to do next. Most pupils receive high quality academic guidance which is linked to children's targets and really helps them to move on, but the quality of feedback does vary from class to class.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership, management and governance are outstanding. The headteacher provides determined and focused leadership and leads a committed team of very effective managers. Important outcomes of this leadership are that pupils' performance in annual assessments over time has been exceptionally high and that teaching, learning and the curriculum have improved.

Monitoring has improved and is now rigorous. Leaders, including governors, follow a thorough, structured, timetabled programme of lesson observations, work scrutiny and data analysis. Consequently, the self-evaluation of the school is compiled from reliable evidence and it is a mostly accurate picture of the school. Governors provide very good support. Their contribution to debate is strengthened because they receive an excellent briefing on pupils' performance. They confidently raise issues with school leaders and hold the school to account very effectively.

This is an inclusive school. Leaders' actions have helped to ensure that pupils of all starting points and backgrounds reach levels of attainment that exceed their respective group nationally. Leaders have promoted cohesion well by encouraging pupils from different cultural backgrounds to share their traditions and practices with others. Leaders set challenging targets on the expectation that these highly motivated pupils can progress at twice the rate normally expected. The school has made very good progress since the previous inspection and has excellent capacity for further improvement.

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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?	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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

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/or disabilities make progress	1

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which 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	2
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 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?	2

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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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

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

19 November 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Darras Hall First School, Northumberland, NE20 9PP

We enjoyed our recent inspection of your school. Thank you for helping us. We enjoyed meeting you, visiting your classrooms, looking at your work and talking to you about your school. You were friendly and courteous and we were impressed by your excellent behaviour and good attendance.

These are the things we found out about your school during our visit. You attend an outstanding school. All the people who work in school are doing a very good job and it is a friendly place to be. Your personal development is excellent. You told us that you feel safe and know how to get help. We know you understand the importance of being fit and healthy. The staff provide you with good care. They organise appropriate support for those of you who need extra help quickly. Your school leaders have devised a teaching and learning programme for you to follow that makes learning interesting and challenging for you. You are set high targets because the staff know you are capable of making rapid progress. You play your part by continuing to work hard in lessons. Consequently, you make outstanding progress throughout the school. You have achieved excellent results in the annual tests. By the end of Year 2 and Year 4, most of you are working at a much higher level than is normal for your age. Well done!

We know that you enjoy the many activities that are part of the outstanding curriculum the school provides. You told us how thrilled you were to take part in the exciting French week.

There is one main thing the school could do better:

- increase the outdoor equipment for the Nursery and Reception children so that they can explore and investigate more on their own.

We wish you and all the staff the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Derek Sleightholme

(Lead Inspector)