

Firthmoor Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132207
Local Authority	Darlington
Inspection number	341312
Inspection dates	22–23 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Tom Grieveson HMI

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 of pupils on the school roll	284
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Dean
Headteacher	Mrs Alfreda Lindley
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 20 lessons and a support session; and meetings were held with the school's senior leaders and other staff, representatives of the governors, one of the school's partnership representatives and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, scrutinised a large sample of pupils' books and folders and analysed documentation. Inspectors considered the 100 inspection questionnaires which were returned by parents and carers and the 109 completed by pupils.

- the extent to which all teachers take account of the learning needs of all pupils when preparing lessons so that the tasks pupils are given enable them to make progress commensurate with their starting points and capabilities
- the impact of the school's work in raising boys' attainment in English at both Key Stage 1 and 2
- the performance of the more able pupils in writing and mathematics at Key Stage 1 and in English at Key Stage 2
- the extent to which the school's senior leaders and governors are developing sufficient leadership capacity at all levels (including the Early Years Foundation Stage) to drive improvement and sustain the gains made in pupils' learning and progress.

Information about the school

Firthmoor Primary School is located in the south east of Darlington. It is larger in size than most primary schools, with over half of pupils known to be entitled to free school meals. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage and speak English as their first language. Twice as many pupils as nationally have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Most pupils live locally with a relatively small proportion travelling from other areas of the town.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Firthmoor provides its pupils with a good and improving education. The school's leadership team has tackled the areas for improvement from the previous inspection successfully, standards are rising and the large majority of pupils are making good progress. There is good capacity for further improvement.

Pupils behave well and apply themselves enthusiastically to their work. They display very positive attitudes towards school and each other. Relationships are harmonious and almost all pupils work and play well together. School buddies are particularly caring in helping new pupils who enter the school to settle, by being available to support those who are upset or worried and in mending friendships. Teaching is good overall. Most teachers use their high expectations and insightful knowledge of pupils' prior learning to plan well-targeted lessons which challenge and motivate pupils. Good assessment information is used effectively by these teachers to track pupils' progress carefully and ensure that those who underachieve are given the additional help they need, often from very effective teaching assistants. The high quality of teaching for pupils engaged in the Reading Recovery programme has resulted in excellent rates of progress. Not all teachers use assessment evidence well enough, however, when lessons are being planned. Where this occurs, activities are not precise enough in meeting the needs of all pupils and this is a limiting factor in the progress which some make.

A carefully crafted curriculum provides pupils with a wide range of experiences both within and beyond the teaching day and does much to underpin pupils' good progress. Effective use is made of external expertise; pupils make regular visits to places of interest to support their school-based studies and these do much to increase their enjoyment and motivation. Effective leadership promotes all aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. The school invests significant time and effort in developing pupils' well-being and safety. Pupils know they are safe and have great confidence in staff's support. This provides a secure platform for learning and is central to pupils' keenness to be in school and their evident enthusiasm when arriving each morning. The high number of inspection questionnaires completed by parents and carers demonstrates their overwhelming appreciation of the school and its work.

The school provides good value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- In order to raise standards further and promote good progress at each key stage, the school should:
- Ensure that all teaching is consistently good or better by:

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- - ensuring that all teachers demonstrate high expectations of pupils' capabilities
- - taking full account of the learning needs of all pupils
- - planning precise learning objectives which build on previous learning and set a clear context for the lesson which pupils fully understand
- - deploying adults' support effectively so that all pupils can successfully engage with the activities provided for them.
- Ensure that all teachers, in all lessons, use the school's tracking and assessment information to carefully plan learning which consistently meets the needs of all pupils by:
 - - rigorously evaluating the progress pupils make
 - - using this knowledge to carefully craft activities which enable pupils to move their learning forward in lessons
 - - checking regularly on the progress pupils make in lessons and where necessary modifying the tasks they are given
 - - providing clear and evaluative feedback to pupils so they know how well they have done and what is required to improve further.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Pupils demonstrate good attitudes to their learning, work hard and are keen to succeed. The large majority make good progress, often from very low starting points when they enter the school. Although they remain below average, standards have been rising steadily at Key Stage 1 over the last five years. Provisional results from recent assessments confirm that this trend is continuing and marked improvements are evident in writing and mathematics with more higher-level scores. The majority of Key Stage 2 pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, also make good progress and standards in 2009 were broadly average overall with particularly strong improvement in mathematics. Those engaged in the Reading Recovery programme make excellent progress.

Pupils' behaviour is good and relationships are strong. They are proud of their association with Firthmoor, enjoy coming to school and appreciate the efforts made by staff to make them feel safe and secure. Pupils know that any difficulties will be dealt with. Pupils are respectful and well mannered when moving about the school.

They know how to stay healthy and recognise the benefits of exercise, showing positive involvement in physical education and the school's wider sports provision. Pupils develop their understanding of enterprise through links with local business and the school's wider partnership network. They have opportunities to engage in charity fundraising and through activities such as during the week with the theme of money. Attendance is satisfactory and continues to improve. Pupils' spiritual development, in particular, is well led and promoted extremely well through assemblies and the curriculum, with a clear focus on promoting their self-esteem and respecting different views and values.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is mostly good and underpins the good progress made by pupils and the higher standards being attained. Classrooms are well organised and resourced.

Teachers manage pupils' behaviour effectively and this creates a conducive environment for learning. Teaching, learning and progress are most effective when teachers use their detailed knowledge of pupils to provide challenging and interesting tasks which reflect high expectations of pupils' capabilities and build successfully on their prior learning. Pupils' progress is further enhanced by the encouragement and support of effective teaching assistants. Where these factors combine, pupils respond positively, with high levels of application, enthusiasm and commitment. They show keen interest in their work and cooperate well with others. In particular, those pupils engaged in the Reading Recovery programme make exceptionally good progress because of the excellent teaching they receive. Limited progress occurs in those few lessons where the purpose of the lesson lacks clarity for the pupils and where tasks do not meet their needs well enough. While pupils continue to apply themselves well and strive in these situations to complete their work, most are capable of achieving much more.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and offers a wide range of good opportunities for pupils. It is well matched to their needs and supports their academic and personal development effectively. Enrichment activities are many and greatly enjoyed by the pupils. A wide range of visits and visitors extend the range of expertise offered by the

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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staff and contribute effectively to developing pupils' knowledge of places and cultures beyond their immediate environment. The emphasis on developing pupils' speaking and listening skills is enabling older pupils in particular to become confident and articulate speakers. Good-quality intervention strategies are helping those with special educational needs and/or disabilities to make good progress.

Effective transition arrangements ensure that pupils entering or leaving the school are well prepared. The school is highly inclusive and the work of the school's inclusion officer is very effective in engaging with parents and carers and supporting those pupils whose circumstances make them the most vulnerable. Significant investment by the school to engage parents and carers and improve attendance is proving to be very effective. Attendance rates are rising and the relatively large number of parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire were highly supportive of the school's provision and the support they receive. Safeguarding and risk assessment procedures are secure and rigorously enforced.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

High expectations of pupils' capabilities and a resolute drive to improve the quality of provision are underpinning improvements in standards, good learning and progress. Senior leaders and governors demonstrate a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are knowledgeable about where important improvements have occurred and where further development is required. School improvement plans are carefully targeted and reflect priorities well. Much successful work has been done to improve teaching since the previous inspection so that predominantly good teaching is evident. However, more is still required to ensure consistently good teaching in all classes.

Governance is satisfactory and improving strongly. Important changes to the way the governing body operates have been made and these are bedding down well. The manner in which the governors are able to challenge the work of the school is strengthening as their knowledge of the school's performance is becoming more insightful. The governing body generally is benefiting from individual expertise, most notably in the area of safeguarding. Parents' and carers' engagement is strong with much valuable work evident which is increasing their confidence to work with the school. Partnership working is very effective and is contributing well to pupils' good

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outcomes. A range of agencies support the work of the school, and the school is particularly active in working with neighbouring schools in areas such as developing young children's oracy skills. The school promotes quality of opportunity well; targets are ambitious for all groups of pupils with evidence of sustained impact on particular groups, including those involved in the Reading Recovery programme. The school promotes community cohesion satisfactorily and this is improving. Appropriate actions to provide opportunities for pupils to learn and value other faiths and cultures have been established. This work has had a strong impact on relationships in school as pupils demonstrate good cooperation skills, and are highly supportive of and considerate towards each other.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enter the Nursery with skills and abilities at levels that are well below those expected for children of this age, particularly in communication, language and literacy, and emotional development. In both the Nursery and Reception the large majority of children make satisfactory progress, although a small number are making good progress towards the early learning goals. Nonetheless, when they enter Year 1, attainment levels remain below and sometimes well below average.

Children's behaviour is good. High levels of supervision and support from staff coupled with an effective key worker system is improving children's social and emotional development. This is reflected in their enthusiastic involvement in a wide range of play and learning contexts. Children engage well with staff and their peers, demonstrating satisfactory levels of sustained concentration and interest.

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The quality of the learning environment has improved since the previous inspection. There is an appropriate range of toys and equipment available to support the six areas of learning, although there is much greater potential to expand on what is currently available. The staff team demonstrates a satisfactory understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements. Staff deploy an appropriate range of teaching styles to support children's needs, although the balance between those activities led by adults and those initiated by children requires improvement. Staff are developing their observation and assessment skills in order to track children's progress more accurately and provide a basis for planning further activities. However, this work is not secure and, as yet, does not fully inform planning in order to build on and develop children's learning as well as it should.

All policies and procedures are in place to promote children's safety effectively. The Nursery encourages children to eat healthily through the provision of healthy snacks. However, not all children are encouraged to follow healthy hygiene practices and particularly in relation to hand washing before eating and drinking following play in the outdoor area. The day-to-day management of the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory and this enables the area to run smoothly. The future development of the Early Years Foundation Stage is, however, hampered by a lack of leadership expertise.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

One hundred parents and carers responded to the inspection questionnaire. The overwhelming majority are highly supportive of the school's work and the outcomes achieved by pupils. About one tenth of parents and carers who responded expressed some concerns about pupils' behaviour. Inspection findings confirm that pupils' behaviour is well managed by staff and that good improvement has been made in this respect since the previous inspection. Pupils' behaviour in classrooms and around the school was judged to be good and is fully reported upon in the relevant section of the report.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Firthmoor Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 100 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 284 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	49	49	46	46	5	5	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	50	50	47	47	3	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	42	42	51	51	6	6	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	47	47	52	52	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	49	49	48	48	2	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	45	45	50	50	4	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	43	43	52	52	5	5	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	40	40	52	52	4	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	47	47	50	50	2	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	42	42	44	44	11	11	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	39	39	50	50	8	8	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	47	47	51	51	2	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	53	53	45	45	1	1	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



24 June 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Firthmoor Primary School, Darlington, DL1 4RW

Thank you all for the helpful way you engaged with the inspection and particularly to those who gave their time to speak with us in meetings, around the school and in lessons. We are very grateful to you. The report is now complete and I want to share the inspection findings with you.

We have judged Firthmoor to be a good school. The headteacher, governors and staff have worked very hard and very effectively to improve the way that the school works and the education you receive. We consider that the teaching, the curriculum and the way the school cares for you are all good. That is why you are reaching higher standards and making good progress in your learning. You have also played your part. We were very impressed with your behaviour and your attitude towards your work. Well done!

All good schools can become even better so we have asked the governors and staff to concentrate on two things in particular. First, we want all the teaching in all the lessons to be as good as it can be. Second, we want all the teachers to make better use of the assessment information which they have about you so that all of the activities you do in lessons meet your needs all of the time.

I know that you will want to help the staff to make these improvements by sharing your views with them. Please accept the best wishes of all the inspection team and a special mention to all the Year 6 pupils who are about to move on to their secondary schools. We wish you all well in your future studies.

Yours sincerely

Tom Grieveson

Her Majesty's Inspector

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