

Fens Primary School

Mowbray Road, Hartlepool TS25 2LY

Inspection dates

15–16 March 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher has established a successful leadership team. Together, the team has brought about rapid improvements. Pupils' progress has improved at pace across subjects.
- Leaders acted swiftly to address specific issues identified by pupils' outcomes in 2016. They used assessment information successfully to improve teaching and learning. As a result, the downturn in results has been addressed.
- The governing body is a strength of the school. Governors are committed to the school and its community. They are effective in holding leaders to account for how well pupils are doing.
- Rates of pupils' attendance have improved rapidly since the last inspection, as a result of leaders' effective actions.
- The early years provides children in Nursery and Reception with a good start to their education. Staff focus well on helping children to develop good communication and language skills in readiness for Year 1. Occasionally, however, the most able children are not challenged effectively in their learning.
- Middle leaders are developing their skills and benefiting from good-quality professional development opportunities. Currently, they are developing systems to track pupils' progress in subjects other than English and mathematics.
- Leaders have refined assessment information. It is now accurate and supports staff in improving pupils' outcomes. Nonetheless, the most able pupils are not identified consistently or early enough by teachers to ensure that their work is appropriately challenging.
- Pupils say they feel safe. A strong sense of community permeates the school. Pupils behave well; however, they say that not all poor behaviour is reported and followed up by leaders.
- Senior leaders have ensured that the curriculum is a strength of the school. It is effective and engaging. Teachers have a strong subject knowledge. As a result, pupils make good progress across a range of subjects. Pupils' learning in science and physical education (PE) is especially strong.
- In some year groups, particularly key stage 1, the achievement of disadvantaged pupils is not as good as that of other pupils in school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - refining assessment procedures further to ensure that pupils' progress and outcomes are fully captured across the wider curriculum
 - reducing the differences in the achievement of the small number of disadvantaged pupils and others nationally, in all year groups
 - tracking the progress meticulously of the most able pupils in key stages 1 and 2 in all subjects
 - setting aspirational targets for all children in the early years, especially the most able
 - honing systems for recording, analysing and reporting incidents of poorer behaviour.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - using assessment information effectively to plan tasks and learning that stretch the most able pupils in their thinking and challenge them in their work, including those in the early years
 - equipping a small minority of pupils with the skills needed to manage their own behaviour impeccably, particularly at lunchtime.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher is ably supported by a committed deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher and middle leaders. Since the last inspection, leaders have undertaken training to identify strengths and weaknesses in the school's provision. As a result, leaders now have an accurate view of the school, although not all documentation contains clear evaluation, so that the next steps in securing school improvement can be clearly identified.
- The headteacher is rightly proud that Fens Primary is a caring school. He, along with other leaders, including governors, has developed a school steeped in community. At the heart of the school is the ambition to create well-rounded citizens for the future. Leaders are currently creating a Fens citizenship tracker, through which all pupils will receive awards based on the skills they acquire over time.
- Leaders were quick to acknowledge that the 2016 results were disappointing and not typical of pupils' performance over time. They took swift action to address the correct issues. Leaders' sharper focus in the tracking of English and mathematics has resulted in improving pupils' outcomes, particularly at key stage 2.
- Leaders have built leadership capacity through clear succession planning for middle leaders. Middle leaders are a strength of the school. They are knowledgeable and are taking a more systematic approach to monitoring, by evaluating and linking their priorities closely to the school development plan.
- Teachers, including those with leadership roles, have benefited from a broad package of professional development opportunities. They welcome the chance to develop their skills and progress in their careers. Training is closely linked to performance management and the school's priorities. Newly qualified teachers follow a clear induction plan and have access to a wealth of training in school and local authority development programmes. As a result, all staff feel well supported in their roles.
- Leaders have spent a considerable amount of time and resource on developing an assessment system since the last inspection. They can articulate clearly how this is identifying pupils and specific groups that need additional support. Assessment information allows leaders to set clear targets, identify progress concerns and test out the effectiveness of the information. Leaders are aware that the most able pupils, currently, are not always identified at the earliest opportunity to ensure that they are making good progress.
- Leaders are still developing their assessment system and tracking of pupils' progress in subjects other than the core subjects of English and mathematics. They are rightly basing this system on the successful model in place for the core subjects. The capturing of pupils' progress in science is already well under way. Middle leaders have a clear rationale around how they will track their subjects and set expectations over time.
- The quality of the curriculum is a strength of the school. The curriculum is enhanced by a range of visits and visitors, as well as extra-curricular clubs such as street dance, yoga and tennis. Provision for science and PE is particularly strong. In both these areas

of the curriculum, teachers are engaging pupils and developing their skills over time. The school has developed a curriculum offer that is based on traditional subject areas, with cross-curricular links when leaders identify a genuine learning opportunity. Within the school, the Bousfield Learning Suite has been created which allows teachers to bring the curriculum to life.

- Governors ensure that additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is well spent. Over time, pupil premium spending plans have become more strategic. A newly appointed pupil premium champion has created a bespoke system that identifies how money will be spent. It tracks whether pupils are accessing the additional interventions, extra-curricular clubs and subsidised breakfast club. Early indications show that differences between disadvantaged pupils and others are closing more rapidly when there is this sharper focus on pupils' outcomes. However, it is too early to see the effect of the pupil premium champion's work, particularly on the achievement of the disadvantaged pupils, as it is not yet fully implemented beyond Year 2.
- Additional funding for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities has a positive effect on those pupils' learning. The SEN coordinator is passionate about her role and knows each child as an individual. Recent training for staff has been secured by the SEN leader around mental health. Pupils and staff worked with an educational psychologist to help them better understand the effects of mental health on pupils' well-being.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered effectively. Leaders ensure that there is good coverage of British values across the curriculum. This is evidenced from sharing fruit in Nursery to being positive online citizens by Year 6. Pupils are kind and caring. In assembly, pupils produce high-quality tuneful singing and can split with ease into accurate rounds to create wonderful harmonies.
- Leaders have used the support of the local authority well. Teachers attend regular training and opportunities to moderate standards of children's learning. As a result, the school has its own moderator of children's outcomes in the early years. The local authority sets challenging expectations of leaders and these are followed up with rigour during visits. This challenge is welcomed by leaders, including governors.
- Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school. A few parents commented that behaviour incidents are not always followed up by leaders, although pupils indicated that poorer behaviour was mainly at lunchtimes rather than other times in the day.

Governance of the school

- Governors are a strength of the school. They ask challenging questions and hold senior leaders to account. Governors spoken with believe that, 'every child is an individual'. Consequently, they want all pupils to be well-rounded citizens who are ready for the next stage in their learning.
- The chair of the governing body is proactive in ensuring that governors' training is up to date and that strong links are developed between governors and staff in the school. Governors are linked with subject areas. They make regular visits to the school to

question the curriculum and to understand the school's strengths and weaknesses. Governors ensure that finances are well spent and are targeted on the needs of pupils.

- Governor induction arrangements are detailed and comprehensive. New governors are appointed based on a skills audit, and governors use this audit to ensure that link governors have the knowledge needed to hold leaders to account. Newly appointed governors appreciate the support and training received so that they can quickly fulfil their role.
- Governors have an accurate view of the school. Recently, they have sharpened the data analysis information they receive and have requested a shorter, more evaluative statement of the school's position.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school has a strong culture of safeguarding. The headteacher ensures that there are effective and rigorous checks, systems and routines and that records are rigorously kept to keep pupils safe. Staff training records are impressive, with all staff undertaking a wide range of regular training, from e-safety to first aid.
- Pupils understand safeguarding issues, such as staying safe online. They receive regular training about the ever-changing technological world. This prepares pupils well for living in modern Britain.
- The appointment of a family support officer has had a marked improvement on the attendance of pupils. This has built capacity to work closely with more pupils and families.
- The designated safeguarding leaders have a good knowledge of their roles. They have developed effective working relationships with a range of agencies. They are rigorous in following up concerns for pupils to secure additional help and support.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers have a secure subject knowledge, as a result of the high-quality professional development opportunities organised by leaders. Teachers use the structure of the curriculum to plan sequences of lessons that interest and engage pupils. Across key stages, therefore, pupils make good progress in a wide range of subjects.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work as a cohesive team. Effective questioning is engrained in some classes, so that responses from pupils give evidence and rationale to support their answers. Detailed responses from pupils demonstrate the effect of the work undertaken by leaders to improve comprehension.
- The Bousfield Learning Suite is a stimulus for the curriculum, bringing to life the sights and sounds associated with the subjects studied across the school. Teachers use these experiences back in the classroom to enhance learning and immerse pupils in different scenarios. For example, one older pupil commented, 'Sometimes I feel like I'm in the book as I'm reading.'

- Leaders responded swiftly to the decline in pupils' results in 2016 by increasing the challenge in reading texts across the school. They focused on developing pupils' comprehension skills and sought to increase pupils' stamina. Pupils read more books for pleasure and have developed their abilities in giving evidence in their answers. As a result, reading is now being taught effectively throughout the school, and standards are rising again. By the time they reach the upper end of key stage 2, pupils typically have developed a love of books and are keen to talk about different authors and the styles in which they write.
- Teaching of writing is a strength of the school. For example, recently teachers held a writing week using the book 'Matchbox diary' by Paul Fleischman. Teachers successfully adapted curriculum plans to link with the text and pupils produced high-quality writing which is given prominence in a range of displays.
- The teaching of phonics is strong. Teachers and teaching assistants have excellent subject knowledge in this area. Children in early years get off to a confident start in being able to blend and segment sounds. Pupils have a love of reading and can attempt new words using their phonics skills when encountering new, unfamiliar words.
- The teaching of mathematics is improving, following recent training on reasoning and problem solving. Work in books demonstrates that teachers are no longer relying just on fluency of basic number skills in lessons. Year 2 pupils were observed developing mastery through reasoning, applying, investigating, demonstrating and interpreting mathematical concepts.
- Teachers have regular opportunities to be coached by each other. Coaching links directly to the school's priorities. This dialogue around learning, however, does not always make future actions clear so that teachers know their next developmental steps. Records tend to focus more on the actions of the teacher than the effect of learning on pupils.
- Teachers typically pitch the work they set at the right level to enable pupils to move forward in their learning. In the case of the most able pupils, however, the work set sometimes involves pupils going through tasks that they can do comfortably or waiting while other pupils complete work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are safe and say that they feel safe. The strong culture of safeguarding is reflected in pupils' understanding of keeping safe.
- Pupils are confident to talk about what constitutes both verbal and cyber bullying. Teachers use texts in lessons that provide opportunities to reflect. For example, in Year 4, pupils were able to compare the similarities and differences between Hartlepool and Rwanda when using the text 'Christophe's story'. Pupils could indicate how the actions of the characters in the book were in fact bullying and were able to share what they would do if this were to happen in their school.

- Pupils are confident learners who are happy to work well together. If there have any concerns or worries, younger pupils value having a worry box to share their feelings and emotions.
- E-safety is a strength of the school. Some pupils are digital leaders and take pride in having this responsibility. Their child exploitation and online protection knowledge and understanding of social media and internet safety are very detailed. As ambassadors of e-safety, the digital leaders provided training to other pupils and staff.
- Pupils show respect for others by listening carefully to one another's opinions or by waiting patiently to take their turn.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They conduct themselves well in lessons and when moving around the school. Some pupils, particularly older pupils, say that although behaviour is strong there are some instances of poorer behaviour, particularly at lunchtime. They say that teachers are not always aware of these incidents. Staff could sharpen their response to poorer incidents of behaviour through the honing of systems to record, analyse and report behaviour incidents.
- Pupils are polite and courteous. Leaders are equipping pupils with the skills needed to become responsible citizens through raising aspirations. The 'Aspire to be' curriculum, developed by the school, allows pupils to meet a range of different professions and find out about the skills needed to gain employment. In assembly, Year 5 were able to talk about their future employment hopes and the skills needed, with one pupil able to talk eloquently about what they need to do to become a politician in the community.
- Pupils' attendance is improving over time. Leaders, including the recently appointed family support officer, have worked tirelessly to improve attendance. Overall, attendance improved in 2017 and is currently around the same percentage as at the same point last year. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils has also risen rapidly over the last two years, so that absence and persistent absence are no longer in the lowest percentages nationally.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Current assessment information shows that a greater proportion of pupils are on track to achieve expected standards by the end of each year in reading, writing and mathematics, compared to the same point last year. Current pupils' workbooks indicate that they are making rapid progress, particularly middle-ability pupils, boys and disadvantaged pupils, and that they are acquiring new skills and knowledge in English.
- Leaders acknowledge that the dip in the 2016 results were not what the school was expecting and changed the tracking system to develop a more detailed understanding of progress for all groups at each assessment point. Consequently, additional teacher capacity in lower key stage 2 has resulted in current Year 4 pupils making rapid progress to be back on track.
- Leaders set targets for pupils which add ambition, so that teachers' expectations for all pupils remain high. Pupils are now monitored from early years to key stage 1 and then

through to key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. This results in pupils making good progress from their starting points and enables leaders to hold teachers fully to account for progress.

- Assessment information is being used more sharply by teachers to target additional support where needed. For example, in mathematics, the additional support in Year 3 has resulted in pupils making better than expected progress over time. However, some of the most able pupils are not identified at the earliest opportunity to ensure that teachers are providing tasks and learning which is carefully matched to their needs.
- Pupils read fluently and have a love of reading. Phonics is taught well and pupils have access to home reading books that link closely to the sounds and letters they are being taught. Strong practice in phonics across key stage 1 has resulted in above national outcomes over time.
- The SEN leader matches interventions and support against individual education plans for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Therefore, pupils make good progress from their different starting points.
- The achievement gap between disadvantaged pupils and others is diminishing over time. Pupils' progress and attendance are improving year on year for the small number of disadvantaged pupils across year groups, as a result of carefully targeted interventions and recently refined assessment-tracking information.
- The curriculum is a strength of the school. The development of basic skills and opportunities for extended writing are evident across the school, with spelling and grammar corrected in all subjects with the same rigour as that used in English. The 'Aspire to be' curriculum is preparing pupils well for their next stage in education. It provides pupils with opportunities to think about future roles and the skills needed to achieve and be successful learners.

Early years provision

Good

- The early years is well led and managed. Most adults have high expectations of children. Leaders are striving to add further detail to improvement planning and self-evaluation.
- Children enter either Nursery or the Reception Year with skills and abilities that are typical for their age. Staff focus well on developing the speech and language skills of children, which helps prepare them for Year 1. Children are expected to develop independence from an early age, for example in Nursery where pupils are encouraged by staff to put on their own coats. Children live up to adults' expectations.
- Staff have strong, positive relationships with children. There is a good balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities, which contributes to progress over time.
- The proportion of children who reach a good level of development at the end of the early years has plateaued over the last three years. Children are not always challenged to achieve the highest standards. Leaders are taking assertive action to address this issue. As a result, many more children have already reached a good level of development this year than at the same time last year.

- Children are polite and their behaviour is good. They demonstrate from an early age kindness and encouragement. For example, in Reception, children were heard to prompt others to have a go, when they said, 'no, you try'.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in early years is good. The teaching of phonics is effective. Children are able to segment and blend sounds, and develop an early enjoyment of reading. As a result, phonics results are high over time and children are well prepared for Year 1. In writing, good progress can be seen as children move from writing over dotted lines to forming capital and lower-case letters correctly. For some children, letter formation remains a challenge, but staff are addressing this through a range of appropriate interventions.
- The learning environment is safe, stimulating and exciting for children. Both the indoor and newly created outdoor learning spaces provide opportunities for children to improve their skills in all areas of the curriculum. For example, children choose books and sit for an extended time reading independently.
- The early years leader ensures that there is a productive use of the additional funding for disadvantaged children. As a result, all children make good progress in literacy and numeracy.
- The introduction of half termly stay-and-play sessions in early years has resulted in high levels of parental engagement. The response from parents has been phenomenal. Parents have gained an understanding of the teaching and learning principles used in early years. Leaders are committed to developing these strong partnerships further across early years and the wider school community.
- Safeguarding is effective in the early years. There are no breaches of the statutory welfare requirements.

School details

Unique reference number	111600
Local authority	Hartlepool
Inspection number	10037721

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 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	464
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Martin Slimings
Headteacher	Peter Cornforth
Telephone number	01429 870 405
Website	http://www.fensprimaryschool.co.uk
Email address	headteacher@fensprimary.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	3–4 October 2013

Information about this school

- Fens Primary is an above-average-sized primary school with two classes in each year group.
- The school runs breakfast and after-school provision.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for support through the pupil premium is slightly above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with an education, health and care plan, is below average.
- The school has early years provision for children aged three and upwards. Children attend the provision for Nursery part time and then attend Reception class on a full-time basis.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning across the school, covering all classes. Senior leaders accompanied inspectors during some of these observations.
- Inspectors listened to three groups of pupils read and held discussions with three further groups of pupils. They also talked informally with pupils around the school.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders and lunchtime staff. Inspectors also met four members of the governing body, including the chair, and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors talked to parents at the start of the school day as well as taking account of the 65 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View and the 28 free-text responses from parents.
- Pupils' behaviour was observed during lessons, at playtimes and lunchtimes and around the school site.
- Inspectors examined several documents, including the school's self-evaluation, the school improvement plan and information relating to pupils' achievement and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Ian Clennan, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Belita Scott

Her Majesty's Inspector

Andy Jones

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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