

Fens Primary School

Mowbray Road, Hartlepool, County Durham, TS25 2LY

Inspection dates 3–4 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- From their starting points in nursery, pupils make good progress and reach standards which are above average in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- Teaching is good overall and outstanding in Years 5 and 6. Teachers explain work clearly, plan interesting activities and have high expectations of their pupils.
- Children get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage where provision is good. Children are happy and enjoy a range of interesting activities both inside and outside the classroom.
- Pupils' behaviour is good in lessons and in the playground. When moving around school it is exemplary. Pupils are courteous and show respect to adults and to each other. Pupils say that they feel very safe in school.
- The senior leadership team, skilfully led by the headteacher, is highly ambitious for the school and is determined to further improve the quality of teaching and learning, raising all pupils' achievement.
- The school's governors are perceptive in their analysis of the school's performance, holding senior leaders to account based on their detailed knowledge of the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough teaching is outstanding. Some teachers do not always plan work which is challenging enough, provides opportunities for pupils to apply their skills or moves pupils on quickly enough. The skills of the best teachers have not been shared well enough amongst all teachers in school.
- Leaders do not always form an accurate assessment of the quality of teaching and the progress pupils make in their learning when they are observing lessons or analysing work.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 30 lessons or parts of lessons, one of which was a shared observation with the headteacher. Inspectors also listened to pupils read, observed pupils at playtime and lunchtime, and observed teaching assistants working with pupils.
- Discussions were held with senior leaders, staff, governors, pupils, parents and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors looked at a range of evidence including the school’s own view of its work, the school’s information about pupils’ attainment and progress, documentation relating to teachers’ performance, pupils’ behaviour, attendance and the school’s safeguarding procedures.
- Inspectors took account of 47 responses from parents to the online questionnaire (Parent View), two letters from parents and 42 questionnaire responses from staff.
- Inspectors looked at a range of other evidence including school displays, its website and work representing the school’s wider work beyond the classroom.

Inspection team

Philip Scott, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Janice Stephenson

Additional Inspector

Gordon Potter

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is a larger than average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in the care of the local authority, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, and pupils whose parents are serving in the armed forces, is below average.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action is slightly above average but the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The school runs a very popular Breakfast Club and offers a wide range of after-school clubs and activities for pupils.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is outstanding to further raise standards and accelerate the rates of progress made by all pupils by:
 - sharing the outstanding practice that is already in school
 - ensuring teachers plan work that offers consistent and appropriate pace and challenge to all groups of learners
 - providing pupils with even more opportunities in lessons to apply their highly-developed skills in a range of open-ended, investigative, problem-solving activities
 - further improve the skills of leaders so that when they observe lessons and analyse work in pupils' books they form an accurate view of the quality of learning that takes place and the progress pupils make.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children achieve well from their starting points on entry to the school, which are generally in line with those expected for their age, but there is a wide variation across each year group of children. Pupils' work in books, work seen in lessons and the school's own detailed assessment using its new tracking systems all confirm that they make good progress overall.
- Pupils' attainment in English and mathematics is above average by the end of Year 6, including the most able. This is because the progress made by pupils in Year 5 and Year 6 accelerates rapidly because of exceedingly effective teaching, high expectations, detailed marking of work and appropriate challenge for all pupils in these year groups.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children work independently and cooperatively in a range of interesting activities both inside the classroom and also in the well-equipped and stimulating outdoor areas. Their reading and writing skills develop rapidly in the Reception classes, some children reading fluently and displaying good writing skills, such as in a written account of how they made bread which one child read confidently to an inspector.
- Pupils make good progress overall in developing reading skills. Most pupils read widely at home and at school. Younger pupils in Key Stage 1 are eager to read, and use their knowledge of letters and the sounds that they make to read unfamiliar words, whilst older pupils are developing in their fluency and understanding of what they are reading. This was particularly evident in a Year 6 lesson where pupils were skilled in inferring meaning from a book new to them, 'The Eye of the Wolf' by Daniel Pennac.
- In lessons, pupils were generally working hard and making good progress. This, and the school's own tracking data, confirms that pupils are achieving well. Work in pupils' books shows a range of writing, most pupils making good progress since the beginning of the year, but this is not always the case in every year group.
- Pupils achieve well in mathematics, having many opportunities to use and develop their basic numeracy skills. Pupils are benefitting from the school's recent drive on problem solving. A Year 6 class were engrossed in trying to find the evidence to prove that if the number worn by a Premier League footballer on his shirt was a prime number, then he would score more goals.
- The gap in the performance of the pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is narrowing because the extra money (the pupil premium) is spent wisely on providing a range of additional support for pupils' learning, and to give access to extra-curricular activities. These pupils are now only six months behind their classmates in reading and mathematics, and four months behind in writing. This shows the school's commitment to give equal opportunities for all pupils to access all it has to offer, as does the progress made by the very small proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups.
- Early identification of pupils who are at risk of falling behind enables the school to make effective provision for pupils who find learning difficult. This includes outstanding teaching for groups of Key Stage 2 pupils, combined with well-planned activities skilfully delivered by support staff. This enables nearly all pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs to make outstanding progress.

The quality of teaching is good

- The vast majority of teaching is good and some is outstanding, especially in Years 5 and 6. In outstanding lessons, teachers have high expectation of what pupils can achieve, and the pace of learning and level of challenge enables pupils to concentrate and be involved in the lesson. Teachers build effectively on what pupils already know and further develop their investigative skills, and as a result, pupils make rapid progress in their learning. Occasionally, not all teaching follows this outstanding practice.
- Teachers' questioning is usually good, open-ended and deepens pupils' understanding. Lessons

are carefully planned and teachers are adept at making explanations clear. Teachers' subject expertise often accelerates learning, such as in a Year 5 lesson on Ancient Greece where pupils' historical thinking was challenged and their writing skills developed as a result of the teacher's excellent subject knowledge of Sparta and Athens.

- Teachers insist on high standards of behaviour in lessons, such as in a physical education lesson where the teacher skilfully kept pupils on task despite the excitement of playing a game of indoor basketball. Good use is made of interesting and exciting resources that promote pupils' concentration and enjoyment of learning.
- Teachers know their pupils and manage their classes extremely well. There are high levels of trust and respect, and pupils' social and moral development is promoted well in lessons.
- Pupils' work is marked thoroughly and regularly, but the quality of marking does vary across the school. In the very best examples, marking is detailed and gives high quality suggestions for the next steps in learning based upon a focus on key skills, such as how to structure writing to best effect. Occasionally, marking does not reflect high enough expectations, and does not pinpoint the next steps pupils need to take to improve their work clearly enough.
- Teachers' planning and observation of lessons show that most of the work undertaken by pupils successfully matches their abilities and moves their learning forward, but on occasion in some year groups, it is not challenging enough for some.
- Teachers and teaching assistants give timely and constructive individual advice during lessons to disabled pupils or those with special educational needs. Consequently, they enjoy learning, are fully involved and the vast majority make outstanding progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils typically behave extremely well in the playground, in classrooms and around the school. They are polite and courteous to each other, to adults and to visitors, know how to look after each other and are able to share equipment and take turns. They move around school impeccably, arriving and leaving school assemblies without a fuss or a noise.
- The youngest children in the Nursery and Reception classes follow instructions carefully, and enjoy working and playing together. Two boys were fascinated by a soapy bubble that rose above the height of the school, excitedly describing it to each other.
- Records show that minor incidents of poor behaviour are dealt with swiftly and effectively. The limited responses to the online questionnaire for parents (Parent View) and the school's own questionnaire, to which virtually all parents responded, show that parents feel pupils behave extremely well, are kept safe at school and any hint of bullying is dealt with quickly.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are exemplary across many year groups and subjects, but occasionally a few pupils can become disengaged from learning and lose concentration when teaching is not of a high enough standard or is challenging enough.
- Pupils are proud of their school and say how safe they are made to feel, one pupil stating that 'all staff take very good care of you'. They know how to keep themselves safe, understand that there are different types of bullying and relish coming to school. Another pupil stated that 'I love school. We are very lucky here and do not need anything else to make this school better'.
- Pupils appreciate the many ways in which they are involved in the life of the school, including supporting charities such as the British Heart Foundation. Older pupils feel very well prepared for the next stage in their education.
- The school has a range of effective strategies to ensure pupils attend regularly and are on time. As a result, attendance is now broadly average, and the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has fallen significantly.

The leadership and management are good

- The senior leadership team has a clear and ambitious vision to drive improvements in the school. This is based upon an accurate and realistic evaluation of what the school already does well, and areas in which it needs to improve. As a result, the school is well placed to improve still further.
- A new tracking system is highly effective in keeping a close check on pupils' progress, and as a result, teachers set realistic targets to meet pupils' academic needs and address their personal development, and those who need extra help are quickly identified and supported.
- The headteacher and other leaders and managers observe lessons regularly and staff are given constructive feedback on how to improve their teaching. Their performance is managed well, and appropriate professional development is matched to the needs of the school and the progress pupils make. Staff morale is extremely high.
- Occasionally, senior leaders are not rigorous enough in assessing the quality of teaching that is taking place in some year groups when observing lessons, or analysing pupils' work in books to reach an accurate view of the rates of progress that some pupils make in their learning.
- The curriculum meets the needs and interests of all pupils, and promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well. Pupils are enthusiastic about the interesting topics they study which are often enhanced by visits out of school such as to Robinwood Activity Centre or to Seven Stories in Newcastle to find out about author Enid Blyton.
- The views of all pupils are valued, and their talents nurtured so all feel special. Discrimination of any kind is not tolerated and all pupils have equality of opportunity to succeed.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures fully meet requirements. Record keeping and staff training is thorough and up to date.
- The school provides a number of opportunities for pupils to participate in out of school physical education activities, such as athletics and other team sports. It is using the extra funding for Primary School Sport to allow all pupils in school, access to new activities such as Street Dance and table tennis, and also to provide significant professional development for teachers in physical education in order to guarantee sustainability of new initiatives in lessons and after school. The school is already enabling pupils to develop healthy lifestyles and better physical well-being. Many pupils benefit from a popular, well run and over-subscribed Breakfast Club.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have a good knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and are very supportive. They share the view to 'build citizens for the future', and are increasingly using their own professional expertise to enhance their role and impact in school. Governors are fully supportive of the senior leadership team's drive to improve teaching and raise pupils' progress and attainment further.
 - Governors are familiar with school performance data posted on the internet, and are kept fully informed by the headteacher's reports and their own visits to school. Finances are extremely well managed and governors ensure that pupil premium and additional money for school sport is spent wisely to maximise its impact on pupils' achievement and physical well-being. They ensure all pupils are safe.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	111600
Local authority	Hartlepool
Inspection number	425976

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	467
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Martin Slimings
Headteacher	Peter Cornforth
Date of previous school inspection	22 January 2008
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