

Inspection of a good school: Firthmoor Primary School

Ingleby Moor Crescent, Darlington, County Durham DL1 4RW

Inspection dates:

8 and 9 December 2021

Outcome

Firthmoor Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils love their school and feel proud to be part of it. Leaders have created a calm, caring atmosphere. Parents are keen to praise the school. One represented the views of many when they commented, 'It's a fantastic school. They do lots for the children and there are great after-school clubs.' Leaders are well supported by committed staff who feel proud to work at Firthmoor. Adults are ambitious for pupils and pupils achieve well as a result.

Pupils behave very well. They are polite, kind and helpful. They show care and respect when working and playing together. They are not concerned about bullying, but say that if it did happen, teachers would deal with it immediately.

Pupils take on leadership roles in the school. 'Young curriculum leaders' support the development of subjects. One young physical education (PE) leader said that he feels his role is to support other children and encourage them to do sport. School councillors, elected by their peers, focus on making their school and their local community a better place. They support younger pupils with their play and carry out charity work.

The school offers a wide range of extra-curricular clubs and visits. During the week of the inspection, Year 6 pupils were looking forward to visiting the pantomime. Pupils develop their cultural capital by taking part in a wide range of theatrical and environmental projects.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have improved the teaching of early reading. A new phonics scheme has recently been introduced. As a result of effective training, staff demonstrate strong subject knowledge. In Nursery, children build the knowledge they need in preparation for beginning to learn phonics at the start of the Reception Year. Pupils use their phonic knowledge to sound out new words. They read books that match the sounds they know. This helps them to develop fluency in their reading. Pupils who need help with reading receive effective and timely support. Pupils enjoy reading and are encouraged to read

every day. Teachers also read daily to pupils. Younger pupils are encouraged to retell stories, which builds their speech and language skills.

Curriculum plans clearly identify what pupils need to learn at each stage to build up their skills and understanding. Staff demonstrate strong subject knowledge and explain new learning clearly. The curriculum is planned to help pupils to build on their prior learning from the earliest stage in school. For example, leaders have recently introduced a new programme in the early years which is leading to children developing a good knowledge of basic number facts. Older pupils use their number skills to solve complex problems and clearly enjoy the work their teachers set. Similarly, in PE, there is a well-planned curriculum where teaching builds on what pupils already know and can do. Pupils enjoy their learning in this subject, particularly in sports such as archery, judo and golf. In a range of subjects, pupils take pride in their work and achieve well.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive effective support. Staff are committed to providing the best for pupils. Staff quickly identify those who may need additional support. Leaders create support plans that give teachers strategies to support pupils with SEND. Staff work closely with parents and carers, and a range of other professionals, to ensure that the needs of pupils with SEND are well met.

Following the pandemic, the school has prioritised pupils' well-being and mental health. Pupils confirm that there is always an adult they can talk to if they have a problem or a worry. Pupils learn about democracy by voting for their school council. However, some lack an understanding of some British values, such as freedom and liberty, and aspects of equality.

Staff work hard to support children in the early years with personal, social and communication skills. The 'All about me' theme and the 'Early Dinosaur' programme help children develop their speech and language skills. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders arranged stay-and-play sessions for parents of children in the early years to encourage them into school. Because of COVID-19 measures in school to keep pupils safe, these sessions have been paused.

Governors bring a wide range of skills to the support and challenge they give to school leaders. Governors know the school and local community well.

Staff morale is high. Staff feel privileged to work at the school and support each other well. They are highly motivated and work hard for the benefit of the pupils. Leaders are considerate of staff workload, mental health and well-being. There is an effective strategy to support early career teachers.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that safeguarding is a high priority. Checks on newly appointed staff are carried out thoroughly. Through the school's information-sharing system, staff are made

aware of the needs of any vulnerable pupils. The headteacher and inclusion officer work closely with external agencies to support pupils who may be at risk of harm.

Staff ensure that pupils have a strong awareness of how to stay safe. Pupils are taught about the importance of having a healthy lifestyle. Those spoken to during the inspection could explain how to stay safe while using the internet and how to deal with online bullying.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's curriculum for pupils' personal development is not planned well enough to enable pupils to develop a suitable understanding of some fundamental British values and equalities issues. Leaders should review the curriculum to ensure that pupils are provided with sufficient opportunities to learn about democracy, individual liberty, the rule of law and respect and tolerance for those with different protected characteristics.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in November 2016.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	138129
Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	10200334
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	308
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	William Paton
Headteacher	Ann Dixon
Website	www.firthmoor.darlington.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	8 October 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is a stand-alone academy.
- The chair of governors has been in post since 2018.
- The school currently uses the following alternative provider: Clifton House. This provision is registered under Rise Carr College.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The school had a remote visit in October 2020. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and has taken that into account in their evaluation.
- The inspector met with the headteacher and members of the school's leadership team.
- The inspector held meetings with members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.
- The inspector reviewed a range of documentation about safeguarding, including the employment checks undertaken when staff are appointed.

- A range of documentation was scrutinised, including leaders' plans to improve the school, curriculum plans and the school's website.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics and PE. For each deep dive, the inspector met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspector spoke with parents before school and considered the 12 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. He also considered 15 responses from Ofsted's online staff survey and the 23 responses from Ofsted's online pupil survey.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour around school and during lessons.

Inspection team

Richard Knowles, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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