

Furrowfield School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108426
Local Authority	Gateshead
Inspection number	288095
Inspection dates	9–10 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Alastair Younger

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	56
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Paul Tinnion
Headteacher	Mrs E. Christine Bell
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2005
School address	Whitehill Drive Felling Gateshead Tyne and Wear NE10 9RZ
Telephone number	0191 4334071
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average sized school for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. A small minority of pupils board during the week, the rest are day pupils. Pupils are representative of a wide range of backgrounds, but most are from homes with greater than average social and economic deprivation. Nearly all pupils are White British, 20% of whom are looked after by the local authority. At the moment, all pupils are boys, but girls will be admitted from September 2007. Attainment on entry is usually low and occasionally very low.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Furrowfield is a good school with several outstanding features. There has been a very significant improvement since the previous inspection. The school's previous designation as having serious weaknesses no longer applies. Systematic self-evaluation accompanied by prompt and effective actions give the school a good capacity to keep improving. The school gives good value for money.

It is well led and managed. It is run efficiently and pupils make good progress. There are particularly close and effective working relationships with parents, other schools and colleges and the many agencies involved in helping young people to stay safe and secure better futures. The nature of pupils' difficulties means they do not meet national standards, but they achieve well because they are well taught. Examination results at the end of Key Stage 4 are good and have been improving for several years. The physical care, guidance and support of pupils are outstanding. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have access to increasingly good information about pupils' academic progress, but not all are using it well enough to offer the best possible academic support and guidance to pupils.

The school has a wonderful atmosphere. The premises are bright, stimulating and very well looked after. Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils take pride in the school and there is virtually no non-accidental damage. Pupils are cheerful, usually good humoured and hard working. Many are keen to express how much they like school and it is clearly evident that they are proud of their achievements. They behave well most of the time, but there are instances of impulsive and unpleasant behaviour, some of which lead to short-term exclusions from school. Most attend regularly, but influences out of the control of the school result in a few pupils rarely attending or being unable to attend for long periods. This results in overall attendance being satisfactory, closely matching the average for similar schools, but having declined slightly over the past year.

Curriculum provision is good. Older pupils, in particular, benefit from excellent opportunities to learn in settings other than school. This work-based curriculum is very well established, with extensive access to college courses and work experience. These opportunities are much enjoyed by pupils and contribute particularly well to helping many pupils secure work or training placements on leaving school, with prospects of future well-being greatly enhanced. An added benefit is that many activities engaged in by the 'Furrowfield Countryside Team' positively enhance the local environment and contribute particularly well to the fostering of good links with the community. Successful participation in the 'Healthy School Award' over the past five years and an extensive range of popular physical and adventure activities make a good contribution to helping pupils to adopt healthier lifestyles.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make sure that all teachers follow the excellent example set by some, of stating clearly what they expect pupils to learn in each lesson and using this to determine whether pupils are making enough progress.
- Persevere with a drive to improve attendance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good. The nature of pupils' difficulties means that standards are not comparable to mainstream schools. Most pupils have been underachieving for several years prior to arriving at Furrowfield. About a third of Year 7 pupils, for instance, are about five years behind with their reading when they are first admitted. Good teaching in an environment that supports pupils well and helps them to improve their attitudes and behaviour results in most pupils making good progress. This was seen to good effect in most lessons during the inspection. The result of this good progress is that by the time they leave, many have gained good qualifications to help them on the way to a successful future. Last year, over a half of Year 11 pupils gained five GCSE passes in subjects including English, mathematics and science, with grades ranging from C to G. Results have been improving rapidly over the past three years. Lower attaining pupils frequently achieve a good degree of success in Entry Level or Certificate of Achievement assessments. The build up to examination success in Key Stage 4 is greatly helped by good achievement in Key Stage 3. Test results from the end of Year 9 last year showed that a few pupils achieved the nationally expected standard of Level 6 in mathematics and science. Achievement in English is good, but attainment is frequently lower because of the lower starting point. Pupil absence is the main barrier to better achievement. A small group of pupils simply do not attend frequently enough to make sufficient progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils develop good personal qualities and face much brighter futures as a result of the progress they make at Furrowfield. Good moral and social development is clearly evident in improved behaviour and attitudes and in the way pupils relate to one another, to staff and to visitors. Good spiritual development can be seen in the way that pupils become less self-centred and more thoughtful about other peoples' problems. It can also be seen in the enthusiasm and enjoyment with which most pupils enter in to activities. Cultural development is well promoted, extending pupils' horizons beyond Gateshead and allowing them to gain insights into how people from other societies live. Behaviour during the inspection was outstanding. The way pupils conducted themselves demonstrated tremendous loyalty to a school. Also it showed that they enjoy coming to school because they recognise it is helping them to lead happier, healthier and more successful lives. Behaviour is not always so good. Serious misbehaviour has led to about 40 short-term exclusions over the past year, involving a small number of pupils. It is a good sign that the trend in exclusions is falling and that fewer individuals are involved and for shorter periods. Attendance is satisfactory. Most pupils attend well, but the virtual non-attendance of a few took overall attendance below the average for similar schools for the first time last term when six pupils accounted for 90% of all unauthorised absence. Pupils contribute exceptionally well to the community. They are proud of their school and know that sensible suggestions are always listened to. On top of this, the school frequently reaches out to the broader community, entertaining senior citizens, raising funds and contributing enormously to improving the local environment.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

As a result of good teaching and learning, pupils make good progress on two fronts. Knowledgeable teachers with a good understanding of the National Curriculum help pupils to achieve well academically whilst sensitive teamwork with skilled classroom assistants helps build good relationships and trust, contributing enormously to pupils' personal development.

Most teaching is at least good and some is outstanding. Teachers are usually careful to link what they teach to what they want pupils to learn. They take good notice of assessment information to ensure that work is matched accurately to individual ability. Expectations are explained carefully to pupils and time is reserved to check what has been learned. Weaker, occasionally inadequate, teaching is usually the result of teachers not being specific enough about what they expect pupils to learn. They spend overlong periods occupying pupils rather than teaching them and do not involve pupils sufficiently in learning. All lessons are characterised by skilled management of behaviour. Staff are quick to spot potential problems and fully recognise that prevention is better than cure. This ensures that behaviour in lessons is nearly always good.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

There is a good, well-enriched curriculum. The work-related curriculum for older pupils is outstanding; it is introduced in Year 9 and blossoms in Key Stage 4. Statutory requirements are met. There is a strong focus on promoting basic skills, especially on improving reading. The timetable is well balanced to ensure that pupils can put their improving basic skills to good use across a wide range of subjects that add interest and enjoyment to learning. Science, art and history have been targeted as priorities for improvement. In these subjects, a lack of expertise has slowed development. After-school activities, open to all pupils, are popular. They give pupils many opportunities to participate in good quality physical and recreational events, which they might otherwise not experience. For many years, the work-based curriculum has been a strength of the school. It fully embraces the spirit of national 14 to 19 curriculum initiatives aimed at reducing disaffection and preparing pupils for adult life whilst keeping a close eye on improving pupils' basic skills. It gives them access to a good range of courses leading to qualifications including GCSE in up to six subjects. All pupils participate in work experience and many spend time in college, following courses that lead to the gaining of qualifications and preparing them well for taking up trades. Year 11 pupils have run successful enterprise projects. Environmental projects are hugely successful in helping pupils to contribute to the improvement of local amenities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. The physical care and protection of pupils are outstanding with the very high standards seen in the residence being duplicated throughout the school. The school is a place of safety, with thorough procedures to ensure that children are well protected and only appropriate adults are appointed. Behaviour is well managed to ensure that the impulsive behaviour of a small minority of pupils does not put others at risk. Initiatives to

promote better attendance are successful in most cases, but a small group of pupils remains immune to the efforts of staff to get them to attend regularly. Academic guidance and support are helped by increasingly accurate and thorough assessment of pupils' progress, but hindered by the reluctance of a small minority of teachers to use this information to set pupils clear learning targets in lessons and to check that they have achieved them. The school has made tremendous progress in improving links with parents and works extremely effectively with many other professionals to ensure that pupils thrive.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. There has been a huge improvement in governance since the last inspection. It is now good, with governors taking an increasingly effective role in monitoring standards and improving provision. The leadership team, under the excellent headteacher, has been very successful in systematically addressing weaknesses and putting in place good systems for improving teaching, care and the curriculum. Occasional lapses in the quality of teaching are the result of individuals not following the good advice of senior staff rather than any weakness in initiatives or training. Monitoring of teaching is perceptive and constructive, but occasionally tries to cover too much ground rather than focus on clearly identified areas for improvement. There is some unevenness in the management of the curriculum, mainly because it has not been easy to recruit specialist teachers in some subjects. The school runs very smoothly and efficiently on a day-to-day basis; staff morale is high and pupils enjoy attending. Pupils are given every chance to succeed and to enjoy the fruits of their success through greatly enhanced prospects of future economic well-being.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
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 the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

11 May 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Furrowfield School, Tyne and Wear, NE10 9RZ

Well done!

My colleague and I visited your school the other day to see how you were getting on. We had a very enjoyable time, greatly helped by your friendly welcome and the way you were so keen to share your views with us in such a mature and sensible fashion.

It is our job to look at what goes on in school and to comment on the progress you are making. When we have looked at everything, we share our views with you and the staff.

This is what we thought:

- you're learning a lot and making good progress in class because teaching is good; even so, we've asked teachers to make sure they know what they expect you to learn in every lesson and then to check that you've learned it
- you behave well and it's obvious that you like the school
- your days are filled with interesting lessons and lots of good activities after school
- the opportunities for you older pupils to do work experience and try out college are tremendous
- staff take great care of you, especially in the wonderful residence
- everything runs smoothly because the school is well led and managed
- a few of you don't attend often enough to benefit from what the school has to offer.

Good luck for the future

Alastair Younger

Lead inspector