

Wooler First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122236
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	380432
Inspection dates	31 January 2012–1 February 2012
Lead inspector	Derek Neil

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	5–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	99
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sarah Davidson
Headteacher	Deborah Currans
Date of previous school inspection	15 March 2007
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Age group	5–9
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Introduction

Inspection team

Derek Neil

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector observed four teachers in eight lessons or parts of lessons. These included a joint observation with the headteacher. He also observed three short sessions of individual support for pupils with special educational needs. The inspector held meetings with three groups of pupils; with the Chair of the Governing Body and two other members of the governing body; and with school staff, including middle managers. He had informal discussions with some parents and carers. He observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents including the school development plan and assessment information. The inspector analysed 30 parental questionnaires. He also looked at Ofsted's on-line questionnaire (Parent View) but insufficient responses were recorded to aid inspection planning.

Information about the school

The pupils in this smaller than average-sized first school are predominantly White British. A very small number are at the early stages of learning English as an additional language. The proportions of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and of those who have special educational needs are about average. In recent years, several pupils have joined the school other than at the usual time either because their families have moved into the area or because of the closure of two local schools. The school has Healthy Schools status and the Activemark.

A privately run playgroup and a children's centre operate on the same site as the school. These did not form part of this inspection but reports of their quality can be found on the Ofsted website.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key Findings

- This is a good school. Parents and carers are very happy to send their children here, knowing they are safe and that staff are strongly committed to promoting their well-being as well as their academic and personal development.
- Attainment fluctuates because the nature of the small intake varies each year but it is usually above expectation. Until recently, few pupils were reaching the higher levels in mathematics. The school has successfully tackled this issue.
- Children make good progress in the Reception class. Pupils make steady progress in Key Stage 1, and then make rapid progress in Key Stage 2. They have very positive attitudes to learning, enjoy being in school and achieve well, although sometimes their written work is a little slapdash.
- Teachers plan carefully constructed lessons that challenge pupils to think for themselves and to take responsibility for their own learning. Lessons usually contain a variety of interesting activities and the learning is brisk. The occasional lesson lacks urgency and pace and, consequently, learning is no better than satisfactory.
- Pupils behave well and are safe in school. They are courteous and confident when speaking to adults and show respect for each other. They report that there is very little bullying and that it is dealt with appropriately by staff when it occurs.
- Leadership and management are good. The school has made good progress since the previous inspection and continues to improve. Staff work effectively as a team to develop exciting new ideas for the curriculum. Managers are working intensively with staff to improve teaching and to accelerate pupils' progress in Key Stage 1.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Amplify current plans to accelerate the rate of progress in Key Stage 1 by:
 - injecting more pace into lessons
 - ensuring that when managers evaluate lessons they consider how much the pupils have learned.

- Improve the presentation of pupils' work across the school, paying particular attention to handwriting and spelling.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Attainment fluctuates because of the small size of each year group but is usually above expectation. It dipped in 2011 to below average in Year 2 and below expectation in Year 4 when a significant number of pupils joined the school during the year. By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils' reading skills are broadly in line with what is expected nationally, and by the time they leave the school in Year 4 their attainment in reading is above expectations. They read accurately, with confidence, and greatly enjoy books. The more able read aloud very fluently and with good expression, appreciating the significance of punctuation. Pupils' writing shows imagination and a keenness to use adventurous vocabulary although, occasionally, some otherwise good work is spoiled by poor handwriting and careless technical errors.

Achievement is good. Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage so that at the end of Reception they have skills that are slightly above average. They make steady progress in Years 1 and 2 and rapid progress in Key Stage 2. They learn well in lessons. They are attentive, concentrate on the teacher's explanations, and eagerly volunteer to answer questions. When given individual or partner work they complete the task responsibly and on time. Older pupils strive to improve their performance; in one lesson, for example, they competed against their previous best scores in tests on the multiplication tables. They understand the importance of working hard and of taking responsibility for their own learning. As one colourfully expressed it, 'Learning is becoming brainy without eating fish!'

Pupils with special educational needs and those who are learning to speak English as an additional language make equally good progress. Those with special educational needs get very good support, particularly in English where they enjoy a well structured series of pacy one-to-one sessions carefully targeted on their needs. Pupils confirm they learn well in school most of the time and their parents and carers agree they make good progress.

Quality of teaching

Teachers plan in detail, supported by a well-organised curriculum that enables them to teach pupils essential skills, knowledge and understanding at an appropriate level. Lessons are carefully constructed to build on pupils' prior learning. Relationships are good and teachers manage pupils' behaviour effectively. They boost pupils' confidence and self-esteem by regularly using praise and encouragement, while sensitively correcting errors and misconceptions to draw out important learning points. Teaching assistants and other adult helpers are well briefed and provide useful support for small groups and individuals. Staff make the most of opportunities to enhance pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, they refer explicitly to the class rules, which reflect shared values such as honesty and kindness, and to important social skills such as listening and taking turns.

Most of the teaching is good, as parents, carers and pupils agree. Such lessons are characterised by their variety of interesting, briskly paced activities, designed to make pupils think for themselves. In a mathematics lesson, for example, pupils learned that objects could be heavier or lighter than others, despite their size, by first estimating which would be heavier and then weighing them in a balance. Good lessons begin with a lively introduction to stimulate pupils' interest and imagination; pupils in one class were fascinated by a video clip of the first moon landing before undertaking some imaginative writing. In good lessons, pupils actively participate at all times. For example, before a role play session in which the class had to interview a volunteer about her imagined experience as an astronaut, all pupils were engaged in thinking of suitable questions to ask. However, a minority of lessons, particularly in Key Stage 1, are no better than satisfactory because they lack the brisk pace evident in other lessons.

Pupils' work is marked regularly and teachers provide clear explanations about how it could be improved. Sometimes pupils respond to this guidance, for example by correcting their mistakes, but they do not do so consistently.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The vast majority of pupils feel safe in school, and parents and carers concur. They report that bullying is rare and that it is dealt with promptly and effectively by staff when it occurs. There is very little name calling; pupils know this is wrong as, in the words of one pupil, 'it makes people sad'. Behaviour is good, as parents and carers confirm. No pupils have been excluded and racist incidents are almost unknown. Pupils behave very well in class. They work hard and do not disrupt the learning. Outside lessons, behaviour is just as good. Pupils show impeccable table manners in the lunch hall. Although their play in the yard is boisterous it is never dangerous, largely because of the close supervision provided by staff, who often organise much appreciated traditional games, such as Duck, Duck, Goose. Nonetheless, a minority of pupils consider that behaviour could be better. A small number of them report that their concentration is sometimes affected by the noise of their classmates' discussions in class, and a very small number feel uncomfortable because of the behaviour of some of their classmates. Their high expectations of behaviour are reflected in the words of one older pupil: 'You should treat people the way you

expect them to treat you.’ Attendance is slightly above average and pupils arrive punctually to school and to lessons.

Leadership and management

The school has made good progress with the recommendations made in the previous inspection report. Middle managers are now empowered to show initiative and have led innovative developments, for example, by strengthening curriculum links with the on-site pre-school providers and by introducing more outdoor learning for all age groups. Managers, including members of the governing body analyse the school’s performance thoroughly, using a wide range of evidence, and accurately identify strengths and areas for improvement. The relative lack of higher grades in mathematics, for example, was attributed to a need for a greater emphasis on problem solving throughout the school. Consequently, suitable actions were planned and implemented to strengthen this area. Managers regularly observe lessons and their judgements often inspire improvements in teachers’ skills. Their evaluations are perceptive, but tend to focus more on what the teacher does than on the progress the pupils make. Given its successful track record, the school has good capacity for improvement.

The curriculum is broad and balanced, meets pupils’ needs effectively, and promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. For example, all pupils learn a musical instrument and find out about life in their partner school in India. Much of the school’s success is due to its concentration on helping pupils understand the importance of learning. The very youngest pupils pin a summary of what they have learned each day on the wall, while older pupils reflect on how they learn most effectively. A variety of enrichment activities makes a powerful contribution to pupils’ personal development. Pupils’ enjoyment of fiction, for instance, is bolstered by special events such as the day they came to school dressed as a character from a Roald Dahl story. Much of the innovative work the school does to promote pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is displayed around the building, although the presentation of some of the pupils’ work is a little slipshod. The school promotes equal opportunities effectively and tolerates no form of discrimination. It does much to give pupils a wider perspective on cultural diversity than the largely mono-cultural village provides. Managers’ rigorous analysis of assessment data identifies pupils who are making less progress than expected and triggers additional individual support. Consequently, pupils are making better progress than last year: whereas boys performed less well than girls in Key Stage 2, for example, this gap is being narrowed. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and are effective. A strong feature of the school’s practice is that members of the governing body make useful visits to monitor matters, such as the security of the site and pupils’ behaviour.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



2 February 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Wooler First School, Wooler, NE71 6EB

Thank you for welcoming me so warmly into your school when I visited recently. I enjoyed watching you in lessons and at play, talking about your school with you and your teachers, and looking at your work. Now I want to share with you what I found.

You go to a good school. It has many strong points. Staff take good care of you; I understand why you say you feel safe there. You behave well and look after each other. One of you helpfully explained that most of you understand that 'you should treat people the way you expect them to treat you'. That's a good maxim for all of you. The teachers often give you interesting activities in lessons. This helps you to make good progress in literacy and numeracy and also in your personal development. I was very impressed by your table manners and by the confident and courteous way so many of you came and talked to me. You enjoy reading and many of you read very well. Your exhibition of photographs on Roald Dahl day shows how much fun you have with books. I was also impressed by your understanding of how to learn, particularly the way you appreciate the importance of always doing your best.

There are a few things that would make the school better. I have asked the staff to continue with the work they are doing to make sure you make more rapid progress in Key Stage 1. I have also asked them to help you improve the presentation of your work. You can all assist by writing as neatly as possible and being careful not to make mistakes with your spelling and punctuation. You should also make sure you correct any careless errors the teacher points out to you.

Thank you again for helping me so much. It was a pleasure to meet you. I wish all of you the very best.

Yours sincerely

Derek Neil
Lead inspector

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