

Hexham East First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122203
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	380424
Inspection dates	22–23 February 2012
Lead inspector	Margaret Armstrong

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	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	129
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fiona Armstrong
Headteacher	Judith Meek
Date of previous school inspection	18 June 2009
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Introduction

Inspection team

Margaret Armstrong

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector observed six teachers teaching nine lessons. Meetings were held with two groups of pupils, members of the governing body and school staff, including senior leaders. The inspector took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. She observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including assessment and tracking information, the school development plan, and the school's monitoring records. She also looked at documentation relating to safeguarding procedures and analysed 52 parental and carers' questionnaires and others completed by pupils and staff.

Information about the school

The school is smaller than average for its type. Most pupils are of White British heritage. A small percentage are from minority ethnic groups and a few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well-above average; so, too, is the proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. An above average number of pupils have a statement of special educational needs. In some year groups, more pupils than is usual join or leave the school other than at the start of the academic year. The school hosts a language unit which supports a number of pupils with extensive speech and language difficulties and who come from across the local authority. The school has achieved Healthy Schools status and the Activemark. It provides a range of extended services for pupils and families living in the immediate and wider community. The school hosts private breakfast and after-school clubs.

There is a children's centre located on the school site, which is managed independently of the school and did not form part of this inspection. A separate report for this provision 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, where pupils achieve well. It is not outstanding because attainment in writing is not as high as that in reading and mathematics. Progress in writing is less rapid because the pace of learning for the more-able pupils is not always fast enough. Attainment is above expectations overall by the end of Year 4 and pupils make good progress from their low starting points. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress because of the effective support they receive. Pupils who are taught in the language unit make outstanding progress because the specialist teaching is adapted very carefully and their individual needs are fully met. Parents and carers are all extremely positive about every aspect of the school's work and talk about the 'friendly atmosphere where pupils are very well cared for'.
- Teaching is good. Teachers have high expectations of all pupils. They use their subject knowledge well to plan interesting activities which engage and motivate pupils. Mostly, teachers' assessments are accurate and support learning well. However, teachers do not always plan sufficient challenge for the more-able pupils, particularly in writing. Although there is some good practice, marking does not always indicate to pupils how they can improve their work.
- Pupils enjoy school. This is reflected in their average and improving attendance. Good relationships ensure that pupils typically behave well and are motivated to learn. Pupils say they feel safe and know who to turn to if they have a problem. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.
- The dedicated headteacher leads an enthusiastic team who make good use of a range of monitoring activities to improve teaching. However, monitoring has not been rigorous enough to ensure the most-able pupils progress as quickly as they should.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and accelerate progress in writing by:
 - ensuring that teachers make better use of assessment information to plan a higher level of challenge for the more able
 - broadening the range of curriculum opportunities to enable pupils of all abilities to practise their writing skills in all subjects
 - giving pupils clearer indications of how to improve their work through feedback in lessons and marking.
- Strengthen the monitoring and evaluation role of senior leaders by providing them with more training to enable them to be more rigorous when observing lessons and evaluating pupils' work.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils enjoy many different aspects of school life. Always keen to contribute, they are attentive, take part enthusiastically in discussions and willingly answer questions. Nearly all pupils work enthusiastically with a partner and this is helping them become mature, thoughtful learners. It also helps them develop strong cooperation and leadership skills. Pupils are keen to practise the skills they have learnt. In lessons, they tackle new challenges with excitement and interest and learn well. As a result, achievement is good.

Children start in the Nursery with skills which are well below those typical for their age. They make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and achieve well. This is because adults are supportive, listen to the children and create conditions in which children feel welcomed, safe and secure. This ensures children settle quickly and become busy, active learners. In the Nursery, for example, children were seen thoroughly enjoying solving problems, creating models and exploring pattern in the vibrant indoor learning area.

Pupils make good progress as they move through the school. Consequently, attainment by the end of Year 4 is higher than typical for pupils' ages in reading and mathematics. This is because teachers ensure that tasks and activities are very closely tailored to pupils' abilities and pupils are given good opportunities to enhance their reading and mathematical skills in other subjects. Pupils' attainment is broadly as expected for their age in writing because the more-able pupils are not always challenged sufficiently. The school is taking effective action to narrow the gap in attainment between English and mathematics. All groups of pupils, including those who join the school partway through the year, make good progress because of the good quality teaching. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, those potentially vulnerable and the very few at the early stages of learning English make good progress because of the effective support they are given. Pupils who are

taught in the language unit make rapid progress because adults are highly skilled in providing tasks which are very well suited to pupils' abilities. The consistent approach to the teaching of sounds and letters, and the effective use of a wide range of intervention programmes, ensure pupils make good progress in developing their reading skills. As a result, attainment in reading is broadly typical by the end of Year 1 and higher by the time pupils leave the school. All parents and carers feel their children are making good progress. Generally, their views are accurate, although the more-able pupils do not always achieve as well as they should.

Quality of teaching

Teachers set high expectations for pupils. They understand how pupils learn best and in lessons provide a good balance of teacher input and pupil activity. Consequently, pupils have regular opportunities to learn independently or to take the lead in learning. Pupils are eager to learn because teachers use a range of exciting activities and resources. As a result, lessons have good pace and there are many opportunities for pupils to practise their basic skills of literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology. This was seen in a lesson in the Reception Year, when children were observed making good progress because the class teacher made effective use of the special character 'Bob the Beetle' to extend their knowledge of sounds and letters. All parents and carers feel their children are taught well and commented positively on how this helps them develop confidence in their learning. These views mirror the findings of the inspection.

Teachers are skilled at intervening when pupils need individual support. They are quick to pick up any misconceptions in pupils' learning and to provide clear guidance to enable pupils to achieve well. Teaching assistants are well trained and provide consistently good support for individuals and groups. This is particularly the case in the language unit where pupils are given very precise support. As a result, they make outstanding progress in their confidence in speaking.

The impact of the planned curriculum on teaching is good in reading and mathematics but more limited in writing, because there are not enough planned opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills in other subjects. Generally, teachers make good use of their knowledge of pupils' prior learning to ensure tasks are smartly tailored to pupils' needs. For example, in a lesson in Year 3 the teacher used questioning skilfully to encourage all pupils to talk about the work they had done to interpret information about 'My Favourite Sandwich Snack'. Occasionally, teachers do not use this information effectively to ensure the needs of the more able are fully met, particularly in writing. Teaching promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. There are ample opportunities for pupils to learn by working together collaboratively and taking responsibility for their actions.

The pupils' work is marked frequently and regularly. Although there are examples of informative marking, with indicators for improvement that help pupils to progress and to meet their targets, this is not consistent across subjects or year groups. In particular, marking and feedback in writing do not provide pupils with sufficient information on what they need to do to move onto the next steps in learning.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' considerate attitudes and their enthusiastic response to the expectations set for them are key elements in the positive climate for learning. Their willingness to learn is demonstrated in their keenness to participate in a broad range of sporting, artistic and cultural activities. Pupils have a good understanding of different types of bullying and the risks to which they may be exposed, both within and outside the school. In the words of one pupil, 'My school is special because the teachers take good care of us and make sure we are safe'. Pupils say they feel safe in school and that the school helps them to learn how to stay safe. They appreciate the opportunities they have to talk to their 'Special Adults' if they have a worry or a concern. Attendance is average and improving and pupils arrive punctually to school and to lessons. The importance of good attendance is promoted well through the effective use of rewards which motivate pupils to attend regularly. Pupils' behaviour is good. Pupils are polite and courteous and their behaviour impacts well on their learning. Pupils manage their own behaviour well in the classroom and around the school. This is because clear boundaries have been set for behaviour and pupils know exactly what is expected of them.

The school has effective systems to manage the behaviour of a small number of pupils who have complex behavioural difficulties. School records show that pupils who find it difficult to manage their own behaviour are supported well. As a result, they make good progress in their personal development and play a full and active part in the life of the school. A very small number of parents and carers raised concerns that the school does not deal effectively with incidents of bullying. This was not confirmed by the pupils who reported that bullying was rare and, if it did take place, was dealt with very quickly by the headteacher. Pupils demonstrate a strong sense of responsibility with members of the school council making thoughtful suggestions and decisions to enable the whole school to benefit.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides strong, perceptive and determined leadership. Her success in communicating high expectations is demonstrated in the good team spirit which pervades the school. This can be seen in the work of the senior leadership team which has ensured all who work in the school are committed to continuous improvement. Currently, the collection and analysis of assessment data feature strongly in the school's monitoring processes. This contributes to the setting of challenging targets for individual pupils and fulfils the school's commitment to ensuring all pupils achieve well. However, monitoring has not been rigorous enough in ensuring the more-able pupils achieve as well as they should in writing.

The school's positive reputation in the community and the good outcomes for pupils are due to the effective support of staff and members of the governing body who share the headteacher's values and ambitions. The clarity of direction, well-planned professional development and good partnership work with parents, carers and external agencies have contributed well to the improving outcomes for pupils. The school leaders have demonstrated their ability to bring about improvement and parents and carers and pupils acknowledge this. Self-evaluation is comprehensive

and reflects the high expectations which have been set for the work of the school. Consequently, the school has a good capacity to improve further.

The impact of the curriculum on pupils' outcomes is good. The curriculum is currently being adapted to ensure the needs of all pupils are fully met through a thematic approach to learning. Adaptations to the curriculum very effectively support pupils who need specialist support with speech and language. There is a consistent approach to teaching literacy, numeracy and other key skills across the curriculum. However, the curriculum does not provide pupils with sufficient opportunities to practise their writing skills in other subjects. The curriculum promotes pupils' personal development well. Pupils benefit from a wide range of experiences outside of school. They talked excitedly, for example about their participation in the 'Community Garden Project' where they have opportunities to explore new interests and to take on leadership roles. As a result, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

The governing body holds the school to account well and challenges senior leaders about the achievement of pupils to ensure a strong impetus on improving the attainment and progress of different groups. This maintains a firm commitment to equal opportunities. The governing body's role in strategic development is good. It ensures that safeguarding procedures are met and that the well-being of staff and pupils is a priority for the school. In addition, the school has ensured that in the before- and after-school clubs, pupils are well-cared for and provided with an appropriate range of activities.

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.



24 February 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Hexham East First School, Hexham, NE46 1JD

Thank you very much for making my visit to your school so enjoyable. I was made to feel very welcome and you looked after me very well indeed. I enjoyed talking to you and especially liked the way in which you care for each other and your school. I know the adults in your school make sure you feel well looked after and I know you feel safe. You should be very proud because you are polite, respectful and your behaviour is good. Yours is a good school and I found it to be a happy place where people get on very well and find lots of interesting ways to help you learn and develop. As a result, you make good progress and achieve well. Well done!

The headteacher, staff and governors have your best interests at heart and they are dedicated to making sure you do well. It is clear you have many interesting experiences at school but I have asked the headteacher and governors to help you even more by checking more carefully in lessons how well you are doing. I have asked them to plan more challenging work for those of you who are working at a higher level, particularly in writing, with more opportunities to develop your writing skills in other subjects. In addition, I have asked the teachers to help you more by giving you clearer guidance on what you need to do to improve further.

You can continue to help by coming to school regularly, working as hard as you can and by helping each other in and around the school. Thank you again for welcoming me to your school.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Armstrong
Lead inspector

