

Prudhoe Castle First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122218
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	359190
Inspection dates	11–12 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Graeme Clarke

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	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	122
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Kathryn Hope
Headteacher	Mrs Jane Bland
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. In short visits to parts of lessons and in extended visits to four lessons, the work of five teachers in all year groups was observed. Inspectors examined a variety of examples of pupils' written work. They held meetings with members of the governing body, teachers and a group of pupils. They scrutinised the school's child protection and safeguarding documentation, information about the curriculum, development plans, records of pupils' progress and minutes of meetings. They analysed 57 questionnaires from parents and carers, 50 from pupils in Years 3 and 4, and 16 from members of staff.

- The progress and achievement of pupils during Years 1 and 2, and Years 3 and 4 last year, including the impact of the school's arrangements to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- How successfully the school has improved standards of attainment in writing and the opportunities given for developing writing skills through different subjects.
- In relation to promoting community cohesion, how the school's recent actions have promoted pupils' awareness and understanding of life locally.

Information about the school

The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school. The number of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average. Last year, a higher-than-average proportion of pupils had been identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities and a small number have a statement of special educational needs. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage and none is learning English as an additional language. The school has gained Healthy School status, the Gold Activemark and the Anti-bullying mark. It has the Creative Partnerships 'Enquiry School' award. Because of the long term-absence of the headteacher since January 2010, the school is currently led by an acting headteacher.

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: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

In this improving school, pupils receive a satisfactory education overall. A caring ethos prevails throughout. All aspects of pupils' personal development are good and some are outstanding. Well-organised activities successfully promote pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The governing body has ensured the safety and welfare of pupils and, in turn, parents and carers are fully reassured. Pupils do feel very safe and they behave well. The school is orderly with an atmosphere of calm, punctuated by the sounds of happy children and pupils enjoying play and taking pleasure from work. Pupils are very aware of how to maintain a healthy lifestyle and are proactive in eating healthily and participating enthusiastically in physical activities. They contribute exceptionally well in many ways to their school and town community. Good productive partnerships with local agencies and visiting artists and environmentalists augment pupils' learning and development. Pupils' well-developed social and recently improved basic skills, coupled with good attendance, equip them well for future life.

Improvements to teaching quality, particularly in the way teachers use assessments to design activities to suit pupils' abilities, lead pupils to participate willingly and enjoy learning. On occasions, class activities are overlong and do not involve everyone, leaving insufficient time for pupils to improve their learning when tackling tasks independently or to review their work. When marking pupils' work, teachers celebrate pupils' accomplishments, although they are inconsistent in giving pupils pointers to improve in all aspects of their work and following them through. Pupils begin school with skills and abilities that fluctuate around those expected for their age. Attainment at the end of Year 4 fell sharply to well below average after the last inspection and remained below expectations last year. It improved in 2010 to slightly above average. Year on year, pupils in Key Stage 2 make satisfactory progress from their starting points. Last year, pupils made satisfactory progress overall with good progress evident only in Year 4. Good quality care, guidance and support underpin the good progress made by almost all pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The staff team shares a common purpose and promotes the school's values well. During the headteacher's absence, they have rallied and continued to lift attainment and improve progress. Following careful evaluation, senior staff identify important priorities for attention but planning for improvement is not sufficiently precise, both in describing activities to raise attainment and specifying criteria to help judge their impact. Taking all this into account, the school's capacity for improvement is therefore satisfactory.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' progress and raise their attainment by the end of Year 4, by:

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- consolidating initiatives to improve writing, especially boy's writing, and mathematics
- drawing on the skills and successful approaches some teachers use to increase the quality and consistency of teaching
- organising class activities in lessons sufficiently well so that pupils sustain interest and have more time to consolidate their learning
- increasing the impact of marking by making sure that pupils act upon the pointers they are given on how to improve in all their work.
- Enhance the value of evaluation and development planning, by:
 - involving all senior leaders including governors in review, evaluation and development planning
 - ensuring actions to be taken to improve progress and raise attainment focus sharply on impact
 - setting criteria for success precisely at the outset to help the governing body judge when targets are met.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

A large majority of pupils enjoy school. They learn well in the better lessons where they take part enthusiastically. They become engrossed in activities and almost all work confidently on their own. They happily contribute to whole-class discussion, readily volunteering to answer questions and reviewing their own or classmates' work. Occasionally, signs of inattention stem from overlong whole-class activities. As they get older, pupils' handwriting skills remain underdeveloped. Printing rather than a cursive style prevails and, although legible, work is not always presented neatly.

Pupils' skills and abilities in all areas of learning fluctuate around those expected for their age when they join the school. Over the last three years attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 has declined from above to below average. Attainment at the end of Year 4 has improved over the same period. For example, attainment in writing, which was an issue at the last inspection and was below average in 2008 and 2009, has improved in 2010 and is now in line with national expectations. Pupils speak confidently, for example, they give extended, well-formed replies when asked to justify an answer. They have well-developed information and communication technology skills. From their starting points, pupils make satisfactory progress as they move through the school. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. Through Years 3 and 4 progress was slower than it should have been in 2008. Improved attainment since then reflects pupils' satisfactory progress in 2010. They made good progress in reading but satisfactory progress in mathematics and particularly in writing largely because boys did not do as well as girls. Given this pattern of satisfactory progress and attainment at levels expected for their age, pupils' achievement is satisfactory.

Pupils say they feel safe in school, follow procedures for safe conduct and are aware of safe use of the internet. They behave sensibly in and out of doors, saying that any

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bullying is dealt with quickly and effectively. Awareness of the importance of diet and involvement in popular after-school physical activities all reflect pupils' awareness of fitness and health and the choices they make at home to improve their well-being; for example, they are strong advocates to their parents and carers about the content of their lunchboxes. An effective school council, older pupils' readiness to help younger schoolmates and work to improve the grounds and play facilities all help make an admirable contribution to the school community. Through effective links with community organisations, such as Prudhoe in Bloom and the Duke of Northumberland's initiative to take pride in where you live, pupils make a substantial contribution to others in their locality. Their charitable work supports others less fortunate than themselves.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Effective teaching is developing but is not yet consolidated throughout the school. Thorough planning and information about pupils' attainments are used well to make learning intentions clear and design activities to suit pupils' abilities. Where teaching is at its best, pupils learn well through skilfully managed introductory and review activities and adroit questioning which encourages and sustains involvement. Pupils follow classroom routines diligently and work responsibly, both individually or in small groups. However, in some lessons whole-class activities are prolonged and lack the liveliness to maintain pupils' interest. In turn, a loss of motivation and restlessness occurs. Careful joint planning

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between teachers and teaching assistants ensures pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities take a full part and learn well. A uniform approach to marking pupils' written and mathematical work is not fully established throughout. Teachers usually give pupils pointers for improvement, especially in written work from literacy lessons. Less often, however, do they check that these pointers have been taken note of by pupils in their written work in all subjects.

Strengths in the curriculum lie in the many activities that broaden pupils' experience. Lesson activities are well organised in a way that strengthens basic skills. Themes in history, geography and science link effectively to promote pupils' progress. Visitors and visits in partnership with heritage centres expand cultural and environmental awareness, for example through the 'Time and Tide' initiative. Opportunities to take part in sports and dance substantially contribute to develop pupils' physical and social skills.

Throughout the school, considerate and caring relationships assure the welfare of all pupils. In partnership with local authority and health service support agencies, teachers are assiduous in ensuring appropriate support for pupils whose circumstances have made them vulnerable. The school carefully identifies and makes good use of information about pupils' abilities and progress. This, coupled with skilful teaching assistance and a close eye kept on their development, makes a key contribution to vulnerable pupils' confidence and good progress. Good arrangements successfully prepare pupils for joining the school and moving on to middle school education. Effective procedures have reduced persistent absence and maintained good attendance this year.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders are committed to improving progress and raising attainment by promoting more effective teaching. Under the guidance of their acting headteacher, staff willingly work well together as a coherent team. The school tackles any form of discrimination effectively and promotes equality of opportunity well. For example, initiatives to make writing more appealing to boys and accelerate their progress are beginning to bear fruit but are not yet firmly established. Vulnerable pupils participate fully and the gap between boys' and girls' progress is closing. Procedures for reviewing the school's strengths and setting priorities for development are yet to involve staff and members of the governing body working fully together. The recently reconstituted governing body is developing its role and expertise well, for example, to gather first-hand experience of the school's work. Governors know their next steps are to become more proactive in evaluation and strategic planning. Planning for improvement flows from self-evaluation and sets appropriate

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priorities for attention. However, suggested activities are often stated imprecisely and criteria for success are not focused sharply enough on expected impact to help the governing body with future evaluation. Effective partnerships with organisations enhance the quality of education. The school reaches out to parents and carers through bulletins, newsletters and meetings and through its active parent–teacher association. Following a thorough analysis, governors have assured a satisfactory contribution to community cohesion with plans in place to widen pupils' awareness of life in the United Kingdom and overseas. Measures for safeguarding the welfare of pupils are in place and meet current guidelines.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Almost all children join the Reception Year with nursery experience. In 2008, children began Reception class with levels of understanding in all areas of learning below those expected, especially in language development, and they made notably good progress. In 2009, children's skills and abilities were a little above those expected at the beginning of the Reception class. Most made progress a little better than anticipated in all areas of learning to reach outcomes that were average to above average, especially in mathematical development, at the end of the year. Children make best progress in their language development. At this early time in the school year, children have quickly learned to settle, they soon become engrossed in activities, are well behaved and play and learn well together.

Both the indoor and outdoor spaces provide a supportive environment in which children feel safe and develop confidence. A good balance of well-arranged activities in all areas of learning stimulates their imagination and enjoyment. Children are seen to learn in a carefully managed way that blends effective directed teaching with activities that they

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choose for themselves. Opportunities to consolidate children's learning are taken at every turn.

Provision is well led and managed. Good, productive relationships, struck with a local nursery provider and with parents and carers before children enter Reception lead parents to express a high degree of satisfaction and feel assured about the school's good welfare arrangements for their children. All adults work and plan effectively together as a coherent team and provision fosters good learning among children. Well-thought-through and diligently carried out assessment procedures record children's progress and enable a good match of activities and expectations to suit children's particular needs. Of particular note is the evolution of children's learning journals into learning diaries which chart and illustrate their progress systematically in all areas of learning.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

A higher-than-average proportion of parents and carers returned questionnaires and most were very supportive. The inspection endorses their views. Parents and carers were unanimously of the view that the school keeps their children safe. Almost all are pleased that their children enjoy school and they themselves are happy with their children's experience. A small minority wrote about their perceptions of the school's work. Half were positive and supportive while others expressed concerns about uncertainty during the temporary arrangements for leadership, about communication and about lack of their children's progress. During this inspection inspectors found that pupils make satisfactory progress and that their behaviour in class and around the school is good. They also found that several aspects of leadership and management are good. They noted that an active parent–teacher association supports the school and that scheduled meetings between teachers and parents or carers with their children to review progress took place during the inspection.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Prudhoe Castle First School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 57 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 122 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	36	63	20	35	1	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	35	61	22	39	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	23	40	30	53	4	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	21	37	29	51	5	9	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	24	42	30	53	2	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	23	40	29	51	4	7	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	29	51	26	46	2	4	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	29	51	21	37	4	7	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	22	39	30	53	3	5	1	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	23	40	27	47	3	5	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	22	39	28	49	1	2	3	5
The school is led and managed effectively	23	40	26	46	5	9	2	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	25	44	30	53	1	2	1	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



13 October 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Prudhoe Castle First School, Prudhoe, NE42 6PH

Thank you for your welcome when we came to inspect your school recently. We were impressed by your politeness and courtesy. We were delighted to see how much you enjoy all the activities arranged for you. You are well behaved in lessons and around the school. We were pleased to see how much you contribute to help others, to school life and to the town such as by taking part in the Prudhoe in Bloom project. We know all the staff are very proud of you.

Your school gives you a satisfactory education. All the adults in the school look after you really well and keep you safe. Last year, results in the assessment of your work in Year 4 were close to the levels expected for your age. These results were better than those in 2008 and 2009. Taken overall, pupils who left Year 4 last year made satisfactory progress. They made good progress in reading and least progress in writing where boys did not do as well as girls. When I looked at your books I liked the way your teachers often let you know how to improve, although they do not always do this or follow these points up with you to help you learn more. I have asked your teachers to make activities in all lessons interesting and to always give you advice to improve your work and follow it up with you so that you all make better progress.

I have also asked your teachers and the governing body to help make your school better by planning carefully to help you improve so that they can be very clear when they check how well you are doing.

You have many opportunities at Prudhoe Castle First School to learn about life and these help you to prepare for the future. We hope that you all do really well.

Yours sincerely

Graeme Clarke

Lead inspector

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