

# Alston Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	112101
<b>Local authority</b>	Cumbria
<b>Inspection number</b>	378423
<b>Inspection dates</b>	10–11 November 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Derek Neil

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	103
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	J Hilditch
<b>Headteacher</b>	D Clarke
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	13 February 2007
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. They observed six lessons taught by five staff. Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, groups of pupils, members of the governing body and members of staff, as well as speaking with some parents and carers and an educational psychologist linked to the school. They observed various activities throughout the school day and looked at a range of documents including policies related to safeguarding and behaviour, and the school development plan. Inspectors considered 41 parental questionnaires together with questionnaires completed by pupils and staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How well the more-able pupils make progress, particularly in mathematics.
- How the school's new grouping arrangements affect learning and progress.
- How the federation contributes to improving the school.

## Information about the school

This primary school is smaller than average. Almost all pupils are White British. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is about average. A high proportion has special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school has Healthy Schools status, the Eco-schools Green Flag Award, and the International School Award at Foundation level.

Since 2006 the school has been in a federation with a very small school nearby at Nenthead. The two schools share a headteacher and governing body. Since the previous inspection there have been several changes in leadership. A substantive headteacher and assistant headteacher have been appointed in the past two years. The headteacher is based at Alston. Other leadership roles are spread across the federation.

**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**

**2**

## Main findings

This is a satisfactory school. During a period of instability in the leadership of the school, standards of attainment declined, particularly in mathematics. The new leadership team has taken effective action to reverse this trend. The school is now improving strongly. Parents and carers are happy to send their children there, knowing that the staff take extremely good care of them and cater exceptionally well for their individual needs. 'The headteacher and her team are very aware of my son's particular needs and are building up his confidence in all areas.' was an apt comment from one parent.

The small numbers in each year group mean there are inevitable fluctuations in attainment every year. However, overall, pupils enter the school with skills that are broadly typical for their age. They make satisfactory progress and attain average standards at the end of Year 6. Although some pupils have underachieved in mathematics in the past, particularly the more able, school leaders have introduced numerous initiatives to bring about improvements and have data to indicate that pupils are now making more rapid progress.

While teaching is satisfactory overall, it is improving. In the best lessons, the teacher maintains a brisk pace and a high level of challenge, ensuring everyone is making good progress. In some lessons, however, the work does not meet the needs of all the pupils; consequently, some pupils make less progress than they could. Well-planned changes to the curriculum are making a clear contribution to improving pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. Recent changes to the organisation of classes, which mean pupils are grouped with pupils of similar attainment rather than by age, are helping to raise attainment. Pupils enjoy school and develop into confident and happy young people, with a good knowledge of how to stay safe and healthy. Their behaviour is good and they show respect and consideration for others. They make an outstanding contribution to the school and the wider community; for example, one girl, on her own initiative, runs a popular lunchtime games club.

The headteacher has a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. She is backed by a supportive staff team and a knowledgeable governing body. Although recent changes have not had time to impact on results in national tests, the school's data and inspection evidence clearly indicate significant improvements in the rate of pupils' progress. Improvements in the curriculum and in the school's care, guidance

and support are also highly evident and are helping to raise attainment. The school has demonstrated a good capacity to improve.

Up to 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.

### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Further improve pupils' progress and raise levels of attainment by:
  - drawing up a detailed improvement plan for mathematics
  - enabling staff to learn from expertise available in the federation.
  
- Further improve the quality of teaching so that it is all at least good by:
  - better matching work to pupils' needs and abilities
  - ensuring teachers use high quality and appropriate resources at all times.

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

<b>3</b>
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Pupils enjoy school. They work hard in class and generally give of their best. They listen attentively to the teacher's instructions and are keen to volunteer answers to questions. They particularly like practical tasks. In one lesson, for example, they worked excitedly with partners estimating and measuring the size of objects in the classroom. Gradually they developed a sense of what a metre and a centimetre look like. They also learned the benefits of different measuring tools; one described the advantage of a tape measure by saying, 'It goes around bends!' Pupils also enjoy creative writing, though some otherwise good work is marred by poor spelling. School leaders have worked effectively to overcome shortcomings in teaching and a legacy of underachievement. Recent data indicate that progress for all groups of pupils, including the more able and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, is improving rapidly.

Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay healthy. Many are involved in sports. They feel safe in school; they know they can go to a 'trusted adult' if they have a problem. Pupils behave well in lessons and at other times. At playtime they are very active with the very good range of equipment provided, cooperating sensibly with their friends. They relish the extensive opportunities to make a positive contribution to the school and wider communities. For example, the eco-group, the tuck-shop managers and the lunchtime telephonists all play their part in running the school and are developing useful skills for the future. Pupils' improving literacy and numeracy skills and their very good wider skills and personal qualities mean they are well prepared for their future economic well-being.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

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

**How effective is the provision?**

While teaching is satisfactory overall, it is improving and there are examples of good and outstanding practice. Teachers are enthusiastic, have good relationships with their class and manage pupils' behaviour well. Lessons are lively and enjoyable for pupils. They are characterised by an emphasis on active learning. In one class, for example, pupils worked in groups to solve a range of problems in a mathematics lesson, and to suggest reasons for bias in various war reports in an English lesson. In one outstanding lesson, the teacher made sure the work was always suitably challenging for all individuals, including the brief session when the whole group worked together on the carpet. In other lessons, however, although different work is set for different groups, it is not always at the right level for them. The impact of some lessons is reduced because the teacher uses inappropriate resources such as unclear visual aids. Leaders have introduced more rigour into assessment, which in the past has been inaccurate and led to inflated views of pupils' attainment. Pupils know their targets in mathematics and English, and are more aware of the level they are working at. Teachers mark their work thoroughly and regularly. Some marking is of a very high standard: the teacher identifies and praises the strengths of each pupil's work and gives detailed and clear guidance on what they need to do next.

The curriculum provides increasing opportunities for pupils to practise their numeracy skills. In one assembly, for instance, pupils were encouraged to calculate the new totals for each team's house points. Good links between different subjects enable pupils to practise basic skills in new contexts; in cookery, for example, they calculate quantities needed in different recipes. A wide range of enrichment activities, including much-enjoyed theme days shared with friends at the other federation school and an impressive number of extra-curricular activities, provide further opportunities for academic and social development.

The pupils are cared for exceedingly well. In particular, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities get sensitively tailored specialised pastoral support. The

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

school makes very effective use of relevant outside agencies. Staff know the pupils well as individuals and the pupils know there is always someone there to help them. Induction arrangements and preparation for moving to secondary school are very comprehensive and ensure pupils feel well prepared.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher, along with other leaders, has settled the school after a period of instability, and is driving the school forward. Senior leaders have the continual improvement of the school in their sights. School data and evidence from the inspection indicate that the decline in attainment has been arrested. A cohesive staff team is dedicated to raising standards and supports fully the recent changes. Although the school development plan provides a comprehensive picture of current improvements, the action plan for mathematics is not as detailed about what is to be done and the outcomes that are intended. Staff have access to specialist expertise in mathematics at the partner federation school; the school has plans to exploit this better as opportunities so far have been limited. Since the previous inspection, the school has made progress in improving the quality of teaching for the youngest pupils. Recent changes to the organisation of groups are bringing about further improvements.

The governing body provides a good level of support and challenge. A new committee structure, intended to enhance its contribution, is too recent to evaluate. This is a highly inclusive school, where pupils learn to treat everyone with consideration and respect. As one girl pointed out, 'We're all different and it's good to be different.' The school promotes equality of opportunity well. Senior leaders are successfully increasing the rate of progress made by all groups of pupils. Discrimination of any kind is not tolerated. The curriculum promotes community cohesion well in the school and the village; it does good work in diverse communities further afield, such as in the other federation school, and by linking pupils with penfriends at a partner school in Bristol. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils ensure they are safe in school. Requirements are met, staff have been well trained, and relevant policies are regularly reviewed.

*These are the grades for the leadership and management*

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

## Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make satisfactory progress and reach broadly average levels in all areas of learning, although some do less well in communication, language and literacy. Induction arrangements, which include home visits and attendance at the school in the term before the children are due to start, are very effective; children settle quickly into school life. Each morning, well-established routines ensure that children are happy and developing independence. Parents and carers can also contribute to their children’s learning and have opportunities to speak with staff. The staff team is strongly led. It works with the children in a variety of groupings, which include pupils in Years 1 to 3. This recent arrangement is based on a sound rationale. It gives the youngest children the opportunity to work alongside older classmates, to learn at a level appropriate to their ability rather than one that is determined by their age, and to be supported by a team of adults with a range of skills. At times the children benefit greatly from outstanding teaching that ensures they make progress at a rapid rate. However, the quality of their experience is not consistently at this level. The team is well led and managed by the headteacher, who has got the staff team working enthusiastically and energetically with the recent changes. She recognises the importance of evaluating fully the new organisation in terms of children’s progress and parental satisfaction.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation stage</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2



## **Views of parents and carers**

The answers of parents and carers responding to the questionnaire were largely positive; they were unanimous that their children were safe and enjoyed school, and that teaching was good. A small number wrote comments in praise of the staff's work, and a small number made some criticisms. These latter concerned the way the school dealt with poor behaviour, their children's rate of progress and the new grouping arrangements. The lead inspector brought these concerns to the attention of the headteacher and the report gives the inspection's findings on each of them.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Alston Primary 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 inspector received 41 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 103 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	19	46	22	54	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	20	49	21	51	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	18	44	22	54	1	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	15	37	21	51	5	12	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	19	46	22	54	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	16	39	23	56	2	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	14	34	25	61	1	2	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)	17	41	19	46	4	10	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	17	41	22	54	2	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	10	24	23	56	6	15	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	17	41	18	44	2	5	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	17	41	19	46	3	7	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	18	44	21	51	1	2	0	0

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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 is for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## 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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



14 November 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of Alston Primary School, Alston, CA9 3UF**

Thank you for welcoming my colleague and me so warmly into your school when we visited recently. We 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 we thought.

You go to a satisfactory and improving school. It has many strong points. Staff take extremely good care of you; I understand why you say you feel safe there. The teachers give you interesting activities in lessons. You behave well and take good care of each other. You know how to stay healthy; it was good to see so many of you exercising with hula-hoops and skipping ropes at playtime. You make an excellent contribution to the community; for instance, many of you are involved in organising fund-raising activities and organising litter-picks in the village.

There are a few things that would make the school better. I have asked the staff to help you make more rapid progress and to help you to attain even higher standards. I have asked the teachers to make sure the work they give you is the right work to meet your needs. I have also suggested to senior leaders better ways of planning for improvements.

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

Yours sincerely

Derek Neil  
Lead inspector

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