School report

Whitfield Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Whitfield, Hexham, Northumberland NE47 8JH

Inspection dates	2–3 February 2016
Overall effectiveness	**Inadequate**
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Inadequate
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
Early years provision	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Leaders have failed to secure improvement. Recruitment and retention of staff are ineffective, resulting in acute instability. Capacity for improvement is weak and sustainability, untenable.
- Leaders' impact on teaching and learning is minimal; teaching remains inadequate. This is compounded by frequently changing staff.
- Leaders do not evaluate the work of the school effectively. Insufficient attention to key priorities results in a haphazard approach to improvement.
- Subject leadership is underdeveloped, inhibiting the pace and scope of improvement. Subjects are not led, managed or monitored appropriately. Outcomes for pupils suffer as a result, particularly across reading, writing and mathematics.
- Teachers demonstrate low expectations of pupils. Weaknesses in teachers' subject knowledge, coupled with poor understanding of national standards, contribute to poor progress for pupils.
- Teachers do not use assessment or prior knowledge of pupils to plan effectively. Neither those pupils requiring support nor those needing extra challenge have their requirements met.
- Children in the early years are making negligible progress. Lessons and activities fail to capitalise on their typical and above-typical starting points, and expectations of what they can do are too low.
- The curriculum fails to prepare pupils adequately for life in the modern world. Pupils show a lack of understanding and tolerance for those who hold different beliefs or come from different cultures.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils attend well and no pupils are persistently absent. Attendance is carefully monitored by staff and punctuality is good.
- Pupils enter school with an impressive range of existing skills, knowledge and abilities. They have positive attitudes and are ready to learn.
- The acting head of school is committed to improvement and has an honest view of the school's current position. She can identify key priorities and is well respected by the school community.

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Urgently improve leadership and management in terms of consistency, quality and impact by:
  - securing stability in staffing to ensure that rapid improvement is achievable
  - devising detailed improvement plans that are clear, focus on the correct priorities and identify accountability for the impact of actions
  - develop leadership at all levels to secure improved capacity and sustainability
  - embedding assessment systems that are easily understood by staff and that can assist teachers' planning for the needs of pupils
  - creating a curriculum that inspires, informs and equips pupils with the enhanced skills, knowledge and understanding needed to be successful citizens in modern Britain
  - holding staff accountable for the progress of pupils in all subjects through more rigorous performance management and monitoring procedures
  - analysing school information and outcomes for pupils meticulously to determine priority actions, identify barriers and prevent underperformance.

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching so that it consistently enables all pupils to achieve their very best by:
  - instilling the highest expectations of what pupils can do and achieve across the whole of the school community so that learning opportunities take account of what pupils already know and can do
  - equipping all teachers with the requisite knowledge, skills and understanding of national curriculum requirements
  - supporting teachers through good-quality professional development opportunities to improve practice, share expertise and to promote a better understanding of pupils' capabilities
  - planning exciting lessons that inspire pupils to challenge themselves and develop a love of learning
  - offering pupils regular opportunities to practise basic skills in writing, reading and mathematics across the curriculum
  - preparing pupils for life in modern Britain by extending the opportunities they have to explore the beliefs, lifestyles and cultures of groups in society beyond their current understanding
  - monitoring more closely the existing capabilities of pupils and their subsequent progress, intervening to support and challenge in a timely manner
  - measuring carefully the impact of actions taken to inform next steps.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is inadequate

- Leaders and governors are failing to secure improvement and capacity for future improvement is weak. Standards of teaching and learning remain inadequate and the pace with which pupils progress is unjustifiably slow.
- Leaders' and governors' recruitment and retention procedures are ineffective. There is a lack of joined-up thinking or long-term vision for the future. Consequently, high levels of turbulence and a prolonged inability to secure good, reliable teachers are impacting negatively on consistency and standards.
- Leaders do not analyse the assessment information that they gather about pupils with adequate rigour. The planning of interventions that help pupils catch up or challenge higher ability pupils is not tailored appropriately, well thought through or timely. Neither are these interventions measured for impact to see whether they are having the desired effect. Groups and individuals fail to prosper.
- Leaders do not hold staff accountable for the progress of their pupils. There is little in the way of links between staff performance, school priorities and outcomes for pupils. Low expectations and standards are accepted and therefore entrenched.
- The local authority has failed to secure a stable platform for improvement. Recent notes of visit are overly generous and at times inaccurate. This is misleading staff and governors.
- Leadership is underdeveloped. Subject leadership, for example, is in its infancy. This means that core subjects are neither monitored, developed nor assessed carefully enough or with sufficient depth and regularity. National standards and expectations in each subject area are not fully understood or met.
- There is currently no qualified special educational needs coordinator. This area is being managed by the acting head of school. The manner in which early identification takes place and subsequent support systems are put in place for pupils with special educational needs or disability is lax. Several pupils, falling behind their peers in the autumn term, had little in the way of targeted support to enable them to catch up and those actions that have been taken are failing to have the desired effect.
- The school's curriculum is limiting pupils' readiness for life in modern Britain. Pupils are not taught about the viewpoints, beliefs and life choices of others in a way that is helping them to develop appropriate tolerance and respect. Even the oldest pupils are unable to define or discuss issues that affect some members of society, such as racism, homophobia or inequality.
- Diocesan support for the school is now firmly in place and the support offered has been welcomed and valued by leaders and governors. The diocese holds an accurate and honest view of the school's current position. This said, its impact on the school's fortunes to date is marginal.
- Pupil premium funding is not always targeted effectively. Analysis of the impact of the extra money is unconvincing. The very small group of eligible pupils do not make progress that is comparable with that of their peers. For example, in Key Stage 2 in 2015, disadvantaged pupils did not make more than expected progress in reading, writing or mathematics. The gaps in Key Stage 1 grew in 2015 in all subjects.
- Leaders make appropriate use of the extra money provided by the government to support primary sports and develop healthy lifestyles. Recently, the acting head of school has insisted that staff work alongside a qualified teacher, who visits weekly, to ensure that they learn from his expertise to deliver higher quality physical education with improved consistency.

- **The governance of the school**
  - Governance is ineffective. Weaknesses in leadership and staffing have not been tackled. Governors have little understanding or awareness of performance management procedures. The governing body has been unable to find solutions or a way forward for procuring good-quality teachers.
  - Governance was restructured in June 2015 and a new Chair of the Governing Body has very recently agreed to take on the role and responsibilities temporarily. A new vice-chair of the governing body has also been secured. There is no evidence of the impact of these changes as yet.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Pupils attend well, they are happy and are kept safe from harm. Staff are vigilant and have had up-to-date training that ensures they hold appropriate 'it-could-happen-here' attitudes. The site is secure and well maintained.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inadequate

- Teaching is inadequate. Significant weaknesses in teachers' subject knowledge result in the use of inaccurate or incorrect terminology. Pupils' knowledge and acquisition of subject-specific vocabulary suffer. Often the content of lessons is over-simplified and much too easy, contributing further to the difficulty pupils have in absorbing age-appropriate knowledge and language.
- Teachers hold low expectations of pupils. These are communicated overtly or indirectly to pupils, meaning that pupils hold low expectations of themselves. This is putting grave restrictions on pupils' life chances.
- Questioning is a poorly developed skill among teachers. The use of questioning to extend pupils' thinking or to promote ideas and challenge opinions is weak. Staff do not use clear, succinct explanations to inform or introduce new ideas. Lack of essential teaching skills is hampering the progress of pupils.
- Teachers do not intervene in a timely manner to address misconceptions or challenge poor practices. Consequently, these become the norm and are embedded. For example, too many pupils across the school are not supported to improve their pencil grip. Untidy handwriting and poor posture are the result.
- Teachers do not use assessment information and knowledge of pupils' existing capabilities to plan lessons that will inspire and challenge them. Lower ability pupils are not effectively supported and higher ability pupils disengage. Behaviour and attitudes slip.
- The teaching of basic skills is poor and misunderstood by staff. Pupils do not have regular opportunities to write at length across the curriculum or to develop a depth of skills in reasoning, logic or problem solving. Practising of skills already acquired and frequent repetition of low-level tasks are commonplace.
- Pupils switch off from the intended learning in lessons when it fails to incite their interest or challenge them. Low-level disruption ensues. Although these well-mannered pupils mask their frustration well, remaining well behaved in the conventional sense, progress is minimal.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate. Pupils demand little of themselves; they do not strive to achieve their best in lessons across the curriculum. This aspect of the school's ethos is restrictive.
- Pupils' ability to stay safe and understand risk is hindered by a lack of opportunity. Limited information and communication technology resources reduce their chances to learn about keeping safe in these technological times. Also, too few opportunities to discuss and debate contentious issues faced by groups in society mean that pupils are ill prepared for later life and ill equipped to manage risk or conflict.
- Pupils' understanding of British values is extremely weak. The curriculum inhibits this aspect of their personal development. Although articulate and enquiring, pupils are unable to contemplate issues to do with tolerance, prejudice or equality at age-appropriate levels; readiness for life in modern Britain is thereby compromised.
- Pupils express frustration about the unpredictability that a high turnover of staff creates. An inability to control their environment leads to concerns about new or different expectations. Older pupils say things get lost and they often have to explain school systems or repeat work that they have already done; younger pupils feel anxious about different rules and methods. This hampers personal as well as academic growth.
- The distinctive Christian ethos fostered by the school is tangible. Frequent opportunities for collective worship are enabled and a strong sense of community and cooperation is developed. Pupils' spiritual development is demonstrated by their interest and curiosity about their immediate environment. They talk proudly and happily of their lives, make visitors welcome and value their place in the local community.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. In lessons, pupils have difficulty staying focused, particularly when they are not effectively supported, challenged or inspired by staff. They lose interest and begin distancing themselves from tasks; rocking back in their chairs, putting their heads down on the desk or playing with resources on their table.

- Attendance is in line with national averages and no groups of pupils are persistently absent. Punctuality is good and any instances of poorer attendance are quickly addressed by the staff. Parents are very supportive of the school and its work and ensure that their children attend regularly.
- Pupils are united in their opinion that adults are there to help. They say that bullying is rare; usually it is just a 'misunderstanding', which is forgotten by the following day. All age groups play together and a family feeling exists in the lunch hall and playground.
- Pupils' cheerful, polite and welcoming behaviours emulate the warm, caring manner of adults. Positive relationships develop quickly. Pupils' behaviour in the conventional sense is conducive to building strong foundations for learning. It is therefore critical that staff begin to capitalise on this more productively.

Outcomes for pupils are inadequate

- The school's own assessment information shows that a large majority of pupils in classes across the school are not making the progress expected of them in reading, writing or mathematics. For example, no pupils in Years 5 or 6 made expected progress in mathematics across the autumn term.
- Internal information shows that a large majority of pupils in all key stages are not on track to reach age-related expectations in reading, writing or mathematics by the end of the year. Attainment as well as progress are inadequate.
- Pupils' work in books confirms the inadequate progress captured by assessment systems. Pupils are not using or applying knowledge, skills and understanding typical of their age or stage of learning. This is despite the fact that pupils enter school with skills and abilities above those typically found.
- Poor-quality technical skills in writing are evident across key stages. English spelling, punctuation and grammar are underdeveloped. Poor practices are not challenged. A group of higher ability pupils repeatedly spell common words incorrectly without correction; poor pencil grip during handwriting lessons is left unchecked; grammar lessons taught in upper Key Stage 2 are more relevant for younger learners and adults' use of inaccurate technical vocabulary all conspire to disadvantage pupils.
- Pupils have little opportunity to write at length or to apply their writing skills across the curriculum. Presentation and content are too variable. Skills that pupils bring to the writing task are not capitalised on and strengths seen in earlier pieces of work dwindle over time. Pupils' outcomes in writing in both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 in 2015 were below national standards. Higher ability pupils did not reach the standards expected of them in either key stage.
- Pupils' reading skills are underdeveloped. Strong, fluent readers are at times left to their own devices during reading sessions without challenge to engage with texts in depth. Lower ability pupils are not given adequate support to help them catch up quickly, and low expectations of the youngest readers mean that they are not challenged to exceed age-related expectations, despite their good skills on entry.
- Pupils in Key Stage 1 did less well than others nationally in reading and mathematics in 2015. Gaps narrowed across both subjects; however, no higher ability pupils reached the higher standards of attainment that should be expected. This signifies inadequate progress.
- Outcomes at Key Stage 2 show a similar picture. No pupils in 2015 achieved the higher standards that should be expected of them in mathematics. Overall standards in both mathematics and reading were below national expectations and no pupils made more than expected progress.
- The results of the Year 1 phonics test (the sounds that letters make) in 2015 showed significant improvement from the previous year. However, girls performed poorly compared with others nationally. Of those re-sitting the test in Year 2, boys did less well. Consistency in outcomes in this area of learning is not secure.

Early years provision is inadequate

- Teaching and provision for early years children are inadequate. Progress has suffered considerably, in part due to a lack of consistency in staffing and leadership. Frequently changing teachers with differing styles and approaches have meant that children's confidence and their ability to use the environment independently has faltered. Stability and familiarity are in short supply.
- The frequency with which early years children read is erratic. Some children, for example, have read nine books since they started school, while others have read as many as 35. Since all children are working on similar types of text in terms of difficulty or length, the discrepancies are difficult to excuse.

- Low expectations are entrenched. Age-appropriate, subject-specific terms and vocabulary are not used routinely by adults nor explained to children. Children learn inaccurate mathematical vocabulary while measuring, for example, repeating words like teensy (short or shortest) that will have to be unlearned as they grow and develop as mathematicians.
- Children's work in books shows little progress. Some children who were able to write their name before starting school are not expected to build on their evident strengths and interests. Letter formation is failing to develop at a rate that should be expected. Examples of children's writing on display do not show their true capabilities and poor-quality efforts are praised, meaning children do not strive to improve.
- Children are not adequately supported to catch up. Those identified as needing extra support with aspects of mathematics, reading or writing at the beginning of last term have not yet had effective intervention and therefore still lag behind. Work that is planned is not altered to suit the needs of children at different stages in their learning.
- Several early years children were recognised on entry to school as having particular abilities or talents, for example in reading. However, all children are currently reading similar, very simple entry-level texts; no challenge is there for the most-able readers. This inattention to individuals is a significant weakness.
- In 2015, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development was well above the national average. This was a significant improvement from the previous year. This successful group are now receiving an unacceptably low level of challenge in Year 1.
- Staff are vigilant in terms of safeguarding early years children. They are attentive to changes in attitude or mood and are quick to reassure children where appropriate. Links with parents are strong and positive and the school actively encourages partnership and strong home–school links.
- The impact of valuable early years specialist support from the local authority has been minimal due to the turbulent staffing and leadership arrangements.

School details

Unique reference number	122303
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10008143

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	43
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Penny Kennedy
Acting head of school	Erica Carter
Telephone number	01434 345267
Website	www.whitfield.northumberland.sch.uk
Email address	admin@whitfield.northumberland.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	26 February 2014

Information about this school

- The school was judged as requiring special measures at its previous inspection in February 2014 and has been subject to regular monitoring inspection visits by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors since then. In all five of these inspection visits, inspectors judged that the school was not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.
- This school is much smaller than the average voluntary-aided school.
- The school is part of a hard federation of four schools. Governors of the school work across the federation.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils, those who are eligible for support through the pupil premium, is well below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs or disability is very low. No pupils currently have an education, health and care plan or a statement of special educational needs.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- There are three classes; one for pupils in Reception and Year 1; one for pupils in Years 2 and 3 and one for pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6. Specialist teachers currently visit the school one morning a week to teach physical education, modern foreign languages and music.
- No pupils at the time of the inspection were accessing alternative provision.
- The school has sought and received support from the local authority, the diocese and Ponteland Middle School.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was conducted over two days by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.
- The inspector observed teaching and learning in all classes on both days of the inspection. The acting head of school conducted joint observations with the inspector in all classes on the first day of the inspection. Informal discussions with pupils about their work took place and the work that pupils were engaging with was evaluated.
- Meetings were held with the acting head of school, the mathematics leader, early years leader, two representatives of the local authority and the diocese, and the Chair of the Governing Body. Telephone conversations were also held with those working in partnership with the school, for example the headteacher of Ponteland Middle School and the local authority's early years adviser.
- The inspection took account of the views of parents, both in terms of written communications from parents directly to the inspector and responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View; 13 free-text responses and 22 general responses were received. Staff questionnaires were considered alongside the school's own surveys carried out with parents and pupils.
- Pupils' work in books was evaluated in partnership with the acting head of school. The mathematics leader also worked jointly with the inspector to examine work from children across the school in mathematics.
- The work of the school was scrutinised and a range of documentation was analysed, including the school's own records of pupils' learning and progress, the checks made by leaders on the quality of teaching and staff performance, and those relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.
- The inspector listened to pupils read from both key stages and spoke with a group of four pupils more formally. The inspector also spoke with pupils during lessons and breaktimes and while they were moving between classrooms.

Inspection team

Fiona Manuel, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector

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