

Alston Primary School

Church Road, Alston CA9 3QU

Inspection dates

26–27 June 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders and governors have responded swiftly and decisively to the recommendations from the last inspection. Their actions have ensured that Alston Primary School remains good.
- Leaders and governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This has helped them to plan improvements that have moved the school forward. Governors hold leaders to account for their progress with these improvements.
- Leaders have improved teaching and learning. Strong teaching is consistent across subjects and years. This has led to an improvement in pupils' outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics across the school. Most pupils currently in school are making strong progress.
- Disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make strong progress because leaders make effective use of extra funding, including the pupil premium.
- The curriculum enables pupils to learn across a range of subjects. Sometimes, the work that the most able pupils receive in subjects other than English and mathematics does not challenge them sufficiently.
- Teachers make sure that pupils have opportunities to hone their writing skills in a range of subjects. At times, and especially in lower key stage 2, teaching does not support pupils to identify and correct their spelling mistakes. When this happens, it has a negative impact on the quality of writing that pupils produce.
- Children in early years make a good start to their education. Good teaching enables the majority to reach at least a good level of development by the time they start Year 1.
- Younger pupils in school benefit from the changes that leaders have made to the teaching of phonics. Most pupils are on track to reach the expected standard in the national phonics screening check in Year 1.
- Leaders ensure that pupils develop well spiritually, morally, culturally and socially. They are well prepared for life in modern Britain. They participate in a wide range of sports as a result of leaders' good use of the physical education (PE) and sport premium grant.
- Pupils behave well in school and benefit from good arrangements for their personal development and welfare. The strong culture of safeguarding that leaders have established helps pupils to feel safe in school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' outcomes further, by ensuring that:
 - teachers provide pupils, especially in lower key stage 2, with more opportunities to revise and improve their spelling so that pupils can confidently apply their spelling knowledge to their written work
 - in subjects other than English and mathematics, the most able pupils receive work that is sufficiently challenging to enable the most able pupils to make strong progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and governors were right to be concerned when the short inspection in February 2018 identified a number of recommendations for improvement. Their response has been vigorous and decisive. The important steps they have taken to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have brought about rapid improvement. As a result, Alston Primary School continues to be a good school where pupils learn well.
- Leaders and governors have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses, because they draw upon a range of information. Their evaluations are honest and reflective and enable them to prioritise their efforts on the correct improvements for pupils. A significant change has been the improvements that leaders have made to the teaching of phonics for younger pupils. This change has had a positive impact on the progress that pupils are making in reading and writing.
- Leaders have established effective systems for assessing the progress that pupils make over time, especially in reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders make good use of assessment information to hold teachers effectively to account for pupils' outcomes, and to ensure that the right actions are taken when pupils are at risk of falling behind.
- Leaders and governors have successfully secured high-quality training for teachers and staff, especially in reading, writing, mathematics and phonics. The positive impact of this training on pupils' outcomes, including those of disadvantaged pupils, is clearly visible in the work in pupils' books. Teachers say that they value this training, and that their improved subject knowledge helps them to plan work that builds more effectively on pupils' prior learning.
- Leaders ensure that teachers have opportunities to develop professionally, for example by working with primary and secondary colleagues from across the Alston Moor Federation, and from a network of other local primary schools. This helps teachers to share and learn from good practice as well as to check the accuracy of their assessments.
- Leaders, including subject leaders, carry out a range of activities to monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and its impact on the progress that pupils make over time. As a result, senior and subject leaders have developed a good overview of standards in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Leaders and governors have a strong awareness of the opportunities and challenges that the school's unique location presents. They have successfully created a curriculum that builds upon the school's local context, as well as widening pupils' experience of the community beyond Alston. For example, pupils learn about Roman history from the area's rich resource of antiquity, while on other occasions travelling to cities such as Newcastle to learn about Jewish culture and worship. This helps pupils to learn successfully and to develop spiritually, morally, socially and culturally.
- Leadership of the school's provision for pupils with SEND is effective. Leaders, teachers and support staff work together to identify pupils' needs and to secure appropriate professional advice and guidance where it is needed. Pupils with SEND make strong

progress from their individual starting points as a result.

- Leaders' good use of the PE and sport premium funding ensures pupils have access to a wide range of sports and activities to help them develop healthy lifestyles. For example, pupils work with coaches to develop their sports skills in activities including netball, football and trampolining. They take part in local competitions through the school sports partnership. These activities enable pupils to improve their participation in physical activity, and to develop personally and socially.

Governance of the school

- Records from governing body activities show that they hold leaders stringently to account for pupils' outcomes, including those of disadvantaged pupils. They ask probing questions to ensure that they understand fully the progress that leaders are making to improve the school. Governors conduct regular meetings with leaders about particular aspects of the school's work, and compile detailed reports to ensure that all governors are appropriately informed about the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- Governors are highly committed to improving their own effectiveness. They have made good use of available training to improve their understanding of the wide range of information that school leaders provide, for example, in relation to pupils' performance in national tests. This enables them to provide leaders with an appropriate degree of support and challenge.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Governors and leaders have established a culture of safeguarding in the school. Leaders ensure that staff are well trained to recognise signs of abuse. They follow the correct procedures for reporting, in a timely manner, any concerns they may have about pupils' welfare.
- Leaders and governors carry out necessary checks to ensure the suitability of adults to work with children. They have established good working relationships with a range of agencies, which enables them to share important information, and to ensure that pupils and their families receive the help and support they need.
- The school's curriculum ensures that pupils discuss relationships and develop a strong understanding of how to stay safe when online. The school provides a warm, caring and welcoming environment in which pupils say they feel safe. Their parents and carers agree with this view.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers' generally effective planning helps pupils to learn well, with little time lost in lessons.
- Leaders have provided effective support to ensure that teaching enables pupils to make strong progress and to enjoy their learning. Teachers' clear explanations help pupils to understand what they have to do and they settle quickly to their work as a result.

- Teachers provide opportunities in lessons for pupils to build further on what they have already learned. For example, in a mathematics lesson, pupils in key stage 2 who had been learning about three-dimensional shapes had opportunities to develop their understanding further by considering whether statements about a range of shapes were 'true or false'. Teachers make sure that the questions they ask pupils invite them to explain their thinking clearly. This helps teachers to assess what pupils have understood and to take action if they start to fall behind.
- Teachers make lessons interesting with a range of resources and use their subject knowledge to ask probing questions that draw out from pupils their understanding of new learning.
- The teaching of reading, writing and mathematics is good. Teachers provide work that is challenging and helps pupils to make strong progress. The support that leaders have provided has ensured that the teaching of phonics is now a strength. In mathematics, teachers ensure that pupils have secure basic skills. The teaching of writing enables pupils to write in a range of styles. However, the teaching of spelling at times fails to ensure that pupils become accurate spellers who learn from their mistakes.
- Teachers plan work for pupils that helps them learn across a range of subjects in the wider curriculum. They have opportunities to practise their reading, writing and, where appropriate, their mathematical skills in other subjects. For example, pupils in key stage 1 used their mathematical knowledge to set out their findings about different materials in a science experiment. This opportunity supported the progress that pupils made in mathematics at the same time as developing their scientific knowledge. However, on occasions, the work that pupils receive in some subjects, especially the most able pupils, does not challenge them enough to make the strong progress of which they are capable.
- Teaching assistants work effectively because teachers ensure that they have the information they need to provide pupils with the right support. They share teachers' good subject knowledge because leaders ensure that they participate in the same training and professional development, for example in phonics. This makes a positive contribution to the progress that pupils make.
- Teachers provide pupils with homework in line with the school's policy. They also provide feedback to pupils in line with the school's assessment policy. Pupils understand this feedback and know that it helps them to improve their work.
- Teachers provide parents and carers with regular information about the progress that their child is making. Parents who spoke to the inspector said that they value this information, and are happy with the progress that their child is making at Alston.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Leaders and teachers know children and their families well. This helps them to make sure that important information is shared in order to help pupils learn well. Parents say that they value the support that they and their children receive from school, for

example where children have suffered ill health or are pupils with SEND.

- Leaders have ensured that pupils develop a good understanding of the dangers of social media, and of how to keep themselves safe from hazards. Incidents of bullying are rare. However, pupils understand what bullying is, and know that if it does occur, their teachers will make sure it stops.
- The curriculum that leaders have established enables pupils to develop an awareness of British values and of difference and diversity within their community and the wider world, for example, in family structure, gender and disability. They learn about different faiths and cultures and take part in activities with local churches.
- Leaders make sure that pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education. The close links that have been developed through the school's federation with Samuel King's Secondary School enable pupils in Year 6 to meet their new teachers and to experience life in a secondary school at first hand in good time for their transfer to Year 7. This helps pupils to feel confident and self-assured.
- Pupils take part in a range of activities that foster their attitudes of empathy and help them to develop as young citizens. For example, pupils learn to have care and concern for others through participation in a range of charitable works and learn about their impact on the environment through discussions about climate change.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Classrooms are generally orderly places in which pupils learn effectively because teachers have high expectations for their behaviour and apply rules consistently. Pupils who spoke to the inspector understand these rules, and explained how they enjoy collecting rewards for their class for good behaviour and hard work. On the few occasions when pupils are less attentive in their lessons, it is because the work that they have received is not sufficiently challenging.
- Pupils conduct themselves well around school, walking quietly as they move between rooms and the indoor and outdoor areas. They are respectful to visitors and are keen to talk about what they are their learning and why they enjoy school.
- Attendance at school is broadly similar to national averages. Leaders have established clear procedures for monitoring absences and work hard to foster good attendance habits. For example, leaders have introduced a breakfast club that is free of charge to parents and that has had a positive impact on pupils' attendance. Pupils who attend school every day enjoy receiving their certificates in special assemblies.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The very small cohorts of pupils in each year group mean that the proportion represented by one pupil can vary considerably from year to year. Statistics about pupils' outcomes can therefore show wide variation and comparison with other schools nationally can be unreliable. Information published in recent years shows that pupils made progress in line with the national average in reading by the end of key stage 2, but progress was more variable in writing and mathematics. Taking into account a

review of pupils' work and school records, it is clear that pupils make good progress from their individual starting points.

- Across all year groups, disadvantaged pupils who are currently in the school make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils with SEND also make strong progress from their individual starting points as a result of the good support they receive.
- Pupils currently in school are making strong progress in reading. Pupils talk enthusiastically about their favourite authors and about the books they have read. Those who read to the inspector did so with enjoyment and understanding, and were able to break down unfamiliar words in order to work out how to read them. Pupils read widely and often, and older pupils enjoy the opportunities they have to practise their reading skills by reading to younger children in school.
- Work in the books of pupils currently in school shows that most are making good progress in writing, especially in key stage 1 and in upper key stage 2. Pupils build well on the skills that they have learned in order to include more exciting vocabulary, a wider range of sentence types and more varied punctuation. Over time, pupils produce much longer pieces of writing that help them to practise these important skills. At times, the teaching of writing does not consistently demand the highest standards of spelling from pupils, especially in lower key stage 2. When this happens, it hampers the progress that pupils make in their writing.
- Pupils currently in the school are making strong progress in mathematics. They develop their problem-solving and reasoning skills in a range of ways. This is evident in work in their books and in their explanations of their answers during lessons. Younger pupils develop a good understanding of numbers, shapes and measures as a result of the good teaching they receive. They use mathematical language correctly and explain their thinking in appropriate ways.
- Pupils learn across a range of subjects, including science, history, geography, French, art, computing and design technology. Work in their books shows that pupils move steadily through the expectations of the national curriculum in these subjects. Where work in these subjects is less challenging, it does not stretch the most able pupils enough to ensure that they make the strong progress of which they are capable.
- As a result of the improvements that leaders have made to the teaching of phonics, younger pupils and children in the school are making strong progress in phonics. This improvement is having a positive impact on their reading and writing and is evident in work in their books. They learn to break up and blend sounds and letters in order to read and to write readable sentences with good attempts at the spellings of more complex words.

Early years provision

Good

- Leadership is effective and managers use a wide range of information, including from assessments and from parents' feedback, to help them arrive at an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the early years provision. This has enabled them to identify appropriate priorities for development, for example in improving the outcomes of boys.

- Children generally start in Reception class with skills broadly typical for their age. They settle in quickly because of the secure relationships that adults establish with children from the start. This helps children to make good progress so that by the time they leave the Reception class, almost all children reach at least a good level of development and are ready to transfer to Year 1.
- Leaders and managers have established a strong professional partnership with the private day nursery that shares the school site. For example, school leaders make sure that staff from the Nursery provision attend the school's phonics training in order to improve the subject knowledge of staff from both settings. Staff from the Nursery setting and from Alston Primary School work together to share important information to support children's transition to school. These initiatives help children to make a smooth and happy start in school.
- Leaders and managers work effectively with parents and with a range of other agencies. This enables them to keep parents informed about their children's progress and to secure support for children whose development is causing concern. Parents who spoke with inspectors said that they value the information they receive from the school.
- Teaching is effective. Children in early years are making strong progress in developing their literacy, phonics and mathematical skills as a result of the good teaching they receive. Children benefit from a wide range of resources both indoors and outdoors. They learn to select these for themselves, as well as taking part in activities that adults lead. Adults are skilled at recognising children's interests and preferences. They build on these to plan learning that encourages children to be curious and to try things out for themselves. Children quickly become engrossed in learning as a result.
- Adults plan amazing activities that enrich children's learning. For example, children learning about living things watched chicks hatching in an incubator, cared for African snails, and visited the local farm where they enjoyed seeing their teacher deliver a new-born lamb. These activities help children to make connections between their experiences that support their learning and to deepen their understanding further.
- Leaders and managers have established effective systems to assess children's learning and development. These help them to plan carefully for children's learning. Adults generally use questioning skilfully to encourage children to share their thoughts and ideas, so they can assess their understanding. This also helps children to develop their speaking and listening skills, as well as to think carefully.
- Children with SEND are well supported in early years. Leaders work closely together to identify children's needs and to secure support from other agencies where necessary.
- Children's behaviour in early years is good, because adults have established simple but clear rules and routines for them to follow. They learn to share resources and to cooperate with each other, and understand they are expected to tidy away when the time comes. Leaders and staff ensure that there are no breaches of the safeguarding and welfare requirements of the early years foundation stage.

School details

Unique reference number	112101
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	10052945

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 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	91
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Brian Cooper
Headteacher	Mr Ian Johnson
Telephone number	01434 381213
Website	www.alstonmoorfederation.org.uk
Email address	alstonoffice@alston.cumbria.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	21 February 2018

Information about this school

- This school is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is below average.
- Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils for whom English is an additional language is well below average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is slightly above average.
- The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan is above average.
- The school runs a breakfast club and an after-school club.
- The school has been part of the Alston Moor Federation since September 2015. The federation consists of one secondary school and two primary schools. The federation has a single governing body and is led by one headteacher.
- This primary school shares the same building and grounds as the secondary school within the federation.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed learning in all classes.
- The inspector looked at pupils' work across year groups and across a range of subjects.
- The inspector listened to some pupils reading, spoke informally with other pupils and observed behaviour in classes and around the school.
- Discussions were held with senior leaders, governors, teachers and staff. The inspector also spoke with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector looked at a range of documents, including the school's plans for improvement, safeguarding and recruitment information, behaviour logs, assessment information, and minutes of governing body meetings.
- The inspector spoke with some parents and took into account 27 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. The inspector also took into account 10 responses to the pupil survey and 10 responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Mavis Smith, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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