

Inspection of Norham St Ceolwulfs CofE Controlled First School

West Street, Norham-on-Tweed, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland TD15 2JZ

Inspection dates: 27 and 28 September 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Outstanding

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils have experienced numerous changes in staffing in this small school. Relationships are still building between pupils and the new staff members. Some pupils miss their previous teachers and are yet to fully trust newer members of staff.

Until recently, the curriculum did not meet the needs of all pupils. Many are behind where they should be in their learning of key knowledge and skills, such as reading, writing and science.

Pupils like coming to school to see their friends. They know each other well. In the older years, friendship groups chop and change and this can cause some upset. Bullying is rare, but pupils are confident that staff will sort out any difficulties they have. They feel safe in school. There are some low-level distractions in lessons. Staff, who have high expectations, manage these situations well. At playtimes, pupils play well together.

Yoga sessions after lunch provide pupils with a time to be still and reflective. Pupils speak fondly of outdoor learning. They enjoy the activities undertaken, such as outdoor cooking. Visitors to school help pupils think about everyday risks. Leaders ensure that pupils learn about water safety and how to swim. There are a number of after-school clubs.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

There has been a period of constant change in leadership and staffing, leading to a decline in standards. The new leadership team is committed to bringing about stability. Its members are supported by leaders from a neighbouring school, the local authority and the diocese. Leaders are building up a picture of the gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills. New ambitious curriculum planning is being introduced and is being taught in some subjects. Leaders are changing systems to make sure that pupils with special educational needs and/or learning disabilities (SEND) are identified quickly.

Younger pupils have good phonics knowledge and read at the expected level for their age. However, there have been inconsistencies in the phonics programme, leading to some older pupils not being able to read as well. Leaders have introduced a highly structured phonics programme with tailored support for staff. This is to ensure a consistent approach across both of the executive headteacher's schools.

When writing, pupils do not apply their phonics learning to spelling. Some have weak pencil grip and control; others form letters incorrectly. Many write sentences that are simplistic for their age. Leaders are introducing a different approach to writing and spelling, starting at a very basic level. Teachers make sure that pupils practise improving sentences and build up their stamina for writing longer pieces of work.

The mathematics curriculum is well structured so that pupils build on their prior knowledge. Leaders are targeting what will make the biggest difference for pupils. There is a focus on instant recall of basic number facts, including multiplication tables. Teachers use a range of practical resources to help pupils understand new concepts. They check pupils' understanding and adjust lessons to match their needs.

The religious education (RE) curriculum is designed to build up pupils' knowledge in small steps. There are well-considered learning activities. Older pupils know many facts about the Christian faith. They join in discussions about the creation story using subject-specific words. However, in some subject areas the curriculum has been disjointed, leading to gaps in learning. In science, pupils struggle to recall key scientific knowledge and have some misconceptions. Pupils' practical scientific enquiry skills are not sufficiently well developed.

Early years and key stage 1 pupils of different ages sometimes work together. The older pupils share their knowledge on measuring. The younger children respond well to this; they listen and have a go at measuring too. Outside, a wealth of learning activities are set up for early years children. However, outdoor learning activities are not modelled well enough. There are few high-quality interactions between staff and children. Nursery children do not have any significant time with their teacher. Staff miss opportunities to correct misunderstandings and to extend learning.

Older pupils often talk over each other and adults. They miss out on important instructions and information because they are more concerned about speaking. They do not listen well to one another. In discussions, some assume that they are talking on behalf of others when expressing their own viewpoint.

Pupils' attendance is good and pupils say that they enjoy coming to school. Through personal and social education, pupils have a good sense of what is right and wrong. They have some understanding of events in the wider world, such as flooding in Pakistan, but struggle to recall detail. Pupils know how to keep healthy physically. Leaders are introducing more learning on mental well-being.

As a result of the instability in staffing, the governing body makes decisions on a short-term basis, rather than with a long-term strategic view. They have a limited understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Monitoring is undertaken by 'link' governors, who do not share their findings sufficiently well. The support offered by the diocese and local authority has brought about some improvement in outcomes but there is still much to do to provide a good standard of education.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in school. Staff have a clear understanding of what to do, and what to be aware of, to ensure that pupils are kept safe. Pupils and families who need support are identified. Leaders make sure partner agencies give the right help to families.

Safeguarding is part of the curriculum. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe online, especially when browsing the internet.

Leaders put safeguarding first when employing new staff. Staff receive regular training and updates. They have a clear understanding of the school's procedures for safeguarding and implement them effectively.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- A new ambitious curriculum with clear intent has recently been introduced for pupils. However, prior to this, weaknesses in curriculum design have led to knowledge gaps, including in personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. Leaders must continue to assess what the gaps are in pupils' knowledge and ensure that measures are put in place to fill these gaps.
- Recent efforts to improve pupils' early reading and phonics are not yet established. Pupils, particularly in key stage 2, have gaps in their ability to read. Leaders must continue to improve teachers' subject expertise and use of assessment. This includes matching books more closely to pupils' phonics knowledge and providing opportunities for pupils to practise their phonics in literacy lessons.
- Leaders do not ensure that the children in early years foundation stage (EYFS) have rich interactions with adults. Expected learning behaviour and vocabulary are not modelled well enough. Consequently, children struggle to maintain concentration and miss out on key learning. Leaders should ensure that staff are specifically trained in supporting children in EYFS in all areas of continuous provision.
- Governors do not have a full understanding of why the school requires improvement. This is partly due to governors taking responsibility for one area and not using information to inform the rest of the governing body. This means that some governors are not in a position to challenge the headteacher appropriately. Governors should ensure that all information to inform strategic decisions is shared effectively.
- When working in groups, pupils struggle to listen to others before voicing their own opinion. They frequently talk over the teacher and others do not get a chance to speak. Leaders should ensure that pupils learn to self-regulate so that they can listen to instructions and one another.
- Due to instability in leadership and staffing, local authority and diocesan support has been in place but has had limited impact. Improvements have not been sustained. The local authority and diocese should continue support to the new headteacher to ensure stability and that the current rate of improvement is maintained.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use Ofsted Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further guidance on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for published performance information about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	135064
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10229060
Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	3 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	27
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Douglas Watkins
Headteacher	Gary Hilton
Website	www.norham.northumberland.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	10 May 2010

Information about this school

- There have been numerous changes to leadership and staffing in recent years.
- An executive headteacher commenced work on 1 September 2022. He works in school for 1.5 days a week.
- The school is being supported by staff from St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School.
- This is a Church of England school. Its most recent section 48 inspection took place in February 2016. The next section 48 inspection will be within eight years of that date.
- The school does not use any alternative education providers.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors met with the executive headteacher.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in four subjects: reading, mathematics, RE and science. To do this, they met with curriculum leaders, visited lessons, looked at pupils' work, listened to pupils read and met with teachers and pupils. Inspectors also looked at curriculum documentation for these and other subjects.
- The lead inspector met representatives of the local governing body.
- The lead inspector met with the education adviser and the diocesan representative who support the school.
- Responses to the pupil, parent and staff surveys were also taken into consideration.

Inspection team

Mary Cook, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Nichola Irving

Ofsted Inspector

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