

Inspection of a good school: Acomb First School

Bishops Hill, Main Street, Acomb, Hexham, Northumberland NE46 4PL

Inspection date:

25 April 2023

Outcome

Acomb First School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Acomb First School is the pride of the local community. Staff, pupils and families speak highly of all aspects of the school. They recognise the recent improvements that are supporting pupils to thrive and flourish.

Pupils experience a broad academic curriculum. All staff, including teaching assistants, have secure subject knowledge which enables them to teach the curriculum well. Pupils benefit from a wider curriculum which helps them to develop their personal and leadership skills. The school council is instrumental in shaping school developments. The council members eagerly share the work they have done to improve the playground, to run a healthy tuck shop and to support local and national charities.

Pupils behave well because staff have high expectations of them. Pupils and their families have no concerns about bullying. They have absolute confidence that staff would keep them safe by effectively managing any issues that may arise.

Parents and carers are effusive about the work of the headteacher, other leaders and staff. Families value the nurture and support provided to pupils, but particularly to those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). One parent's comment summed up the views of many: 'This is a lovely school, and despite its diminutive size, it packs a punch in what it provides for my child's development.'

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

Since the previous inspection, there have been significant changes in senior leadership. The current headteacher, in post for just over a year, provides highly ambitious and decisive leadership. This has improved many aspects of the school. She and other leaders have an accurate picture of what is working well and what still needs to be developed.

Leaders have reviewed and refreshed the curriculum in a number of subject areas. Pupils are now taught all of the subjects set out in the national curriculum. While many of the

curriculum plans have only been put in place this academic year, their impact is already apparent. Plans clearly set out what leaders expect pupils to learn. Staff have benefited from coaching and training so that they have the subject knowledge they need to teach the curriculum. Pupils talk enthusiastically about how they make use of what they have previously learned to help them to tackle new tasks. For example, in mathematics, pupils could explain how their knowledge of number facts and calculation strategies helps them to solve complex problems.

Teachers and teaching assistants typically use assessment well during lessons to identify and address pupils' misconceptions. Because many of the new curriculums are recently developed, assessment opportunities to check on whether pupils retain the knowledge over time are yet to be fully planned. Leaders have correctly identified this as a priority.

Leaders have invested significant resource in improving the teaching of reading. Pupils benefit from a well-taught phonics curriculum. Most quickly learn to read with fluency. Very well-considered training and support have developed expert teachers and teaching assistants who respond promptly to meet pupils' needs. Additional sessions for pupils who struggle with reading are helping them to catch up quickly. Pupils are excited to attend 'reading breakfasts' with the headteacher as a reward for reading at home. Daily story times are much anticipated, with pupils fully absorbed in the carefully selected texts.

Leaders have sought external expertise to help them to review support for pupils with SEND. Staff are clear about pupils' needs and the best ways to support them. Well-targeted support is helping pupils to access the curriculum alongside their peers. Pupils who have additional needs linked to their behaviour benefit from staff's clear expectations and the calm classrooms and corridors.

In the early years, staff effectively support children to develop their communication and language and mathematical skills. Curriculum plans set out the vocabulary that children should learn. Teaching assistants skilfully engage children in conversations to extend their vocabulary and thinking. There have been recent staffing changes in the early years. Leaders have secured external support to help with the development of the curriculum. In some areas of learning, for example, personal, social and emotional development and in expressive arts and design, this work is in the early stages. Current temporary staffing arrangements are preventing this work from being fully developed. Leaders are taking steps to secure more stable staffing.

Leaders have reviewed the curriculum for pupils' personal development. Increased leadership opportunities, clubs and visits are valued by pupils. The reading curriculum and assembly programme have been refocused. They now provide opportunities for pupils to learn about those with protected characteristics and to gain more experience of the diversity of modern Britain. Pupils are tolerant of others and respect differences.

Staff value the headteacher's support, recognising the steps she has taken to consider their workload and well-being. Governors are acutely aware of the additional pressures on staff and leaders in this small school. The chair of the governing body provides regular support to the headteacher to consider her well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff have received effective training which has ensured that they are alert to any signs that pupils may be at risk of harm. Safeguarding files reflect that leaders take suitable steps to access external agency support when pupils or families are in need of help. Leaders have strengthened the school's systems to ensure that safeguarding checks on adults working at the school are robust. Pupils are supported to understand how they can help to keep themselves safe, for example when accessing the internet. They are confident to raise any worries or concerns with staff.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some aspects of the curriculum in the early years have not been precisely defined. There are temporary staffing arrangements in place in early years. This limits the work that leaders can do to fully develop and implement the curriculum. Leaders should continue with their planned work to ensure permanent staffing arrangements and to complete the curriculum planning so that children can be well prepared for Year 1 in all areas of learning.
- Many of the curriculums which have been recently introduced and developed are in the early stages of being implemented. In some areas, subject leaders have yet to fully develop assessment processes to check that pupils are learning and remembering the new curriculum content over time. Leaders should continue with the work set out in their improvement plans to refine assessment so that they have a clear picture of the impact of the new curriculums.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in January 2018.

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	122170
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10255865
Type of school	First
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	4 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	66
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Julie Robson
Headteacher	Hannah Williamson
Website	http://www.acomb.northumberland.sch.uk/
Date of previous inspection	16–17 January 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Acomb First School is smaller than the average primary school.
- There have been significant changes to leadership, including governance, since the previous inspection. The current headteacher took up her role in April 2022.
- The school works in partnership with Little Oaks, a private nursery which operates from the school site. This provision is inspected separately by Ofsted.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- 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.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and the leader responsible for curriculum and reading. Inspectors held discussions with a number of governors, including the chair and vice-chair of the governing body, and met with the school improvement partner.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics and geography. Inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited lessons, spoke with pupils and

teachers and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also reviewed curriculum planning for the early years and examples of support plans for pupils with SEND.

- Inspectors reviewed the safeguarding checks on adults working at the school and met with leaders, staff and pupils to discuss the safeguarding arrangements in place. Inspectors reviewed examples of safeguarding files and behaviour records to check on the school's work to support pupils and families.
- Inspectors met with teaching and non-teaching staff and with groups of pupils, including the school council, to consider their views of the school. Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's online inspection questionnaires from pupils, parents and staff.

Inspection team

Claire Brown, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Stephen Fallon

Ofsted Inspector

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