

# Inspection of a good school: Prudhoe Castle First School

Castle Road, Prudhoe, Northumberland NE42 6PN

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Inspection date: 6 February 2024

## Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

The executive headteacher of this school is Stephanie Gibbon. This school is part of the Cheviot Learning Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officers, Simon Taylor and Alice Witherow, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Paul Carvin.

## What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils have experienced numerous changes in staffing in this small school. Many are behind where they should be in their learning of key knowledge and skills, such as reading and mathematics. However, relationships are strong between pupils and the new staff team. Pupils are developing confidence in their abilities as a result of the nurture and support they receive in class.

Pupils live up to the high expectations of behaviour set by staff. Pupils are polite and courteous to one another. They show curiosity in class and are really keen to learn. The school is calm and the classes have a working 'hum' as pupils focus on their learning.

Children in the early years have many opportunities to learn through play. Adults ensure that the welfare needs of children that are two-years old are met. Children benefit from the much-improved indoor environment.

Visitors to school enliven the curriculum. For example, some help pupils think about rail and water safety. Pupils enjoy taking part in physical activities. They are successful in learning how to swim and many know life-saving techniques for those in difficulty in water. There is an impressive range of after-school clubs that cater for pupils' interests and talents. Pupils spoken to enjoy coming to this school with the 'Big Heart.'

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

Pupils have been let down by poor delivery of the curriculum, particularly in reading and mathematics, but this is changing. The school is beginning to transform the learning environment and the subject curriculum. The new senior leadership team is determined that all pupils and staff achieve to the best of their ability. They encourage subject leaders to share ideas and lead improvement. Teachers work together when planning and they share good practice. This helps the early career teachers (ECTs) to grow in confidence and skill. By checking what pupils know, leaders have a secure understanding of where there are gaps in pupils' knowledge.

A structured phonics programme is in place. Children in the provision for two-year olds and those in nursery learn how to distinguish between sounds. Staff are well trained, and there is a consistent teaching approach throughout school. The books that pupils read match the sounds that they are learning in class. However, a significant number of pupils are not ready for the key stage 2 curriculum because they have gaps in their phonics knowledge. Phonics teaching is not closing the gaps quickly enough for some pupils. Some pupils find reading hard. They are reluctant to read at home and do not read more broadly than their class texts. This means that some pupils have a limited vocabulary to draw upon when writing. They are also missing out on the joy of reading.

Staff have the necessary subject knowledge to deliver the mathematics curriculum well. They are effective in explaining new concepts. Learning activities match the needs of pupils. This helps pupils feel confident about mathematics. The school liaises with the feeder middle school to define which areas of the curriculum should be taught as a priority for catch-up.

The school has subject curriculum overviews in place. However, in some subjects these do not provide clear enough guidance to staff on exactly what should be delivered and when. This makes it especially difficult for supply teachers and those new to school to deliver the expected curriculum. It is made even more complicated by the lack of clear feedback to pupils. It is difficult to know what the next steps in learning are for some pupils.

There are significant improvements in attendance. The school has robust systems in place to follow up any school absence. The revamped curriculum is making a difference as pupils are enjoying their learning and want to come to school. Support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is also improving. Staff make lessons for pupils with SEND accessible by including practical learning activities. Leaders work closely with external partners to plan for pupils with SEND.

Children are thriving in the new provision for two-year-olds. Experienced early years staff are adept at engaging the children in songs and stories. There is a high level of talk. Adults constantly model how to behave. This results in the children understanding and following the daily routines. Early years is a happy place to be.

Pupils are highly knowledgeable about fundamental British values, such as rule of law. They have a strong sense of justice. Pupils enjoy taking on responsibilities such as school councillor. They help organise whole-school activities such as the disco and sports day.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

### (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There are significant differences in how rapidly pupils are learning phonics within certain cohorts. Some pupils do not read regularly for pleasure at home. The difference in attainment compared to their peer group, who have developed a wider vocabulary and can draw on a range of books to compare texts, is quite stark. The school should further develop their existing strategies to ensure pupils who need to catch-up quickly with their peers in phonics do so. The school should also continue to encourage pupils to develop a love of reading.
- In the majority of subjects, the school has identified the knowledge they want pupils to learn and when. In some subjects, this is not as clear. Some teachers do not know precisely what should be taught, for example those covering lessons or joining the school. The school should ensure that teachers know the exact content leaders want pupils to learn.
- Some teachers do not provide sufficiently clear, direct feedback. This means that some pupils do not have a firm understanding of how to improve. The school should ensure that there is appropriate feedback to pupils so that they deepen their learning.

## Background

When we have judged 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 predecessor school, Prudhoe Castle First School to be good in May 2019.

## 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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	146924
<b>Local authority</b>	Northumberland
<b>Inspection number</b>	10297461
<b>Type of school</b>	First
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2 to 9
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	76
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Paul Carvin
<b>Executive Headteacher</b>	Stephanie Gibbon
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://pcfs.cheviotlt.co.uk">pcfs.cheviotlt.co.uk</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- This school is part of the Cheviot Learning Trust.
- Prudhoe Castle First School converted to become an academy school in September 2019. When its predecessor school, Prudhoe Castle First School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- The executive headteacher and executive deputy headteacher took up their posts in February 2023. They lead this school and Wylam First School. Some subject leaders also work across both schools.
- The school does not use any alternative education provision.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, other senior leaders and the special educational needs coordinator. Meetings were also held with an ECT, class teachers and pupils.
- The lead inspector met also with representatives of Cheviot Learning Trust and the chair of the local governing board.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives into reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, the inspectors looked at curriculum planning, conducted joint lesson visits with leaders, spoke to pupils about their work and looked at pupils' books and samples of their work.
- Prior to the inspection, the lead inspector reviewed documents on the school's website, as well as published information about the school's performance and previous Ofsted inspections.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms, around the school and at playtime and lunchtime. They spoke with pupils about their views of the school and their learning, behaviour and safety.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- As well as speaking to parents at the school gate, inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View. The inspectors took the views of staff into account through a number of meetings as well as their responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

### **Inspection team**

Mary Cook, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

David Hodgkiss

Ofsted Inspector

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