

Inspection of Cotherstone Primary School

Cotherstone, Barnard Castle, County Durham DL12 9QB

Inspection dates: 28 and 29 February 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

This school was last inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 11 years ago and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between graded inspections under section 5 of the Act. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy attending Cotherstone Primary School. It is a small, welcoming and close-knit community. The school provides a nurturing environment where pupils can 'believe, aspire and thrive together'. Staff know pupils very well. Pupils are happy, confident and respectful. The school ensures that the curriculum is relevant to the needs and interests of the pupils, for example drawing on many pupils' love of nature. As a result, pupils are enthusiastic about their learning.

Teachers have high expectations of all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils behave very well in lessons. Teachers regularly praise pupils and recognise their achievements. Pupils are motivated by the house points that they receive. Pupils learn to read and write well but are less secure in their mathematical understanding.

The school supports the personal development of all pupils well. Pupils are safe. They understand that every person is unique and that differences between people should be celebrated. The school has provided pupils with opportunities to learn from a wide range of visiting speakers, such as a Buddhist monk, a representative from the nearby Sikh community and a footballer who is blind.

Pupils enjoy a range of educational visits and experiences that deepen their understanding of the curriculum.

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

The school has developed a curriculum that is broad and ambitious. Pupils develop a rich body of knowledge and skills. From the early years through to Year 6, the school has thought carefully about the important knowledge that pupils should remember. The school plans opportunities for pupils to revisit this knowledge regularly over time. Leaders have ensured that the curriculum is ambitious for all pupils, including those pupils with SEND. The school regularly reviews the support plans for pupils with SEND to make sure they meet individual needs.

The curriculum is taught well. Teachers have secure subject knowledge. They provide pupils with clear explanations and instructions. Teachers focus on developing pupils' vocabulary. This work begins in the early years. The school has recently developed its curriculum in mathematics. There is now a greater focus on improving pupils' fluency, reasoning and problem-solving skills. These changes are in the early stages of development. The school does not check what pupils know and remember effectively. Assessment procedures in the foundation subjects are not consistent. As a result, the school does not consistently identify the gaps in pupils' knowledge or their misconceptions.

The school has prioritised the teaching of reading. Staff have received the training they need to ensure the reading curriculum is taught consistently well. Staff quickly identify and support pupils who are not keeping up with the programme. Effective

teaching is helping pupils to develop into keen, confident and fluent readers. In Nursery, children prepare well to learn to read. They learn songs and rhymes that help them to begin to recognise letters and sounds. Older pupils, who need support with reading, follow a programme that helps them to catch up quickly. By the end of key stage 2, pupils achieve well in reading and writing.

Pupils behave well. The school has embedded routines that all pupils follow. In lessons, pupils are keen to answer questions and they work hard. At social times, pupils enjoy mixing with their peers. They use the outdoor resources cooperatively. Older pupils act as role models for younger pupils each week on the 'buddy bench'. This is when older pupils praise younger pupils for the work they have recently completed.

The school provides pupils with a range of opportunities to develop their leadership skills. For example, pupils enjoy roles on the school council, or as play leaders. Pupils have a deep understanding of the importance of tolerance in society. Pupils enjoy extra-curricular activities such as music, sport and baking. The school teaches pupils to keep themselves safe online and offline.

Governors are ambitious for the school. They have an accurate understanding of the strengths of the school and the areas that need further development. Staff are proud to work at the school. They value the recent training opportunities they have received. Parents and carers are highly supportive of the school's work. They appreciate the levels of high-quality communication. They praise the quality of care that their children receive as well as the opportunities for personal development.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The implementation of the new mathematics curriculum is in the early stages. This means the impact of the new curriculum has not been realised. Pupils have not always made the sustained progress in mathematics of which they are capable. The school must embed the new mathematics curriculum consistently so that pupils secure and deepen their fluency, reasoning and problem-solving skills.
- The school does not check what pupils know and remember consistently. This means that they do not identify and address the misconceptions that pupils have. The school must ensure that teachers check pupils' knowledge and understanding systematically so that gaps in knowledge and skills can be quickly identified and addressed.

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 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

Unique reference number	114020
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10315549
Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	54
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Peter Nicholls
Headteacher	Julie Gibson
Website	www.cotherstone.durham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	12 February 2013, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Information about this school

- Cotherstone Primary School is part of the Bowes Cotherstone Federation along with Bowes Hutchinson C of E (Aided) School.
- The two schools share an executive headteacher and a governing body.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

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

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 the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspection team held meetings with the executive headteacher, senior leaders, teachers and pupils.

- The lead inspector met with members of the governing body, including the chair.
- The inspection team carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector observed some pupils read to familiar adults.
- The inspectors also looked at religious education and art and design books. They discussed the school's curriculum, including the early years curriculum, with leaders.
- Inspectors met with the leader in charge of the personal, social, health and economic curriculum and pupils' personal development.
- The lead inspector spoke with a representative from the local authority.
- The inspectors observed pupils during breaktimes and at breakfast club. They spoke with pupils and leaders about opportunities for pupils' personal development.
- 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.
- The inspection team took account of a range of other information, including the school's development plan, school policies and minutes of governors' meetings. They also considered reports from the local authority.
- The lead inspector considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View. He also took into consideration the responses to the surveys for staff and for pupils.

Inspection team

Dan McKeating, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Jessica McKay

His Majesty's Inspector

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