

INSPECTION REPORT

LINTON FIRST SCHOOL

Morpeth

LEA area: Northumberland

Unique reference number: 122199

Headteacher: Mrs Sue Ellis

Reporting inspector: Mr Philip Snelling
3624

Date of inspection: 8 March 2000

Inspection number: 194406

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	First
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	4 to 9
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Linton First School Linton Morpeth Northumberland
Postcode:	NE61 5SG
Telephone number:	01670 860361
Fax number:	01670 860361
Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr George Jackson
Date of previous inspection:	5 - 7 November 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	
Philip Snelling	Registered inspector
Joan Cross	Lay inspector

The inspection contractor was:

Primary Associates Ltd
West Lancashire Technology Management Centre
Moss Lane View
Skelmersdale
Lancashire WN8 9TN

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33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Linton First School is much smaller than other schools of this type. There are currently 18 pupils on roll from four to nine in two classes, one for each key stage. Most of the pupils come from the village of Linton, which is in an area of economic disadvantage. This is reflected in the school's inclusion in the Coalfields Village Development Project, which is working to raise confidence and morale within the local community. Nineteen per cent of children are entitled to free school meals, which is similar to the average for first schools. There are no pupils who have Statements of Special Educational Need. The number of pupils on the school's register of special educational needs (12 per cent) is below the national average. There are no pupils who speak English as an additional language or from ethnic minority groups. Pupils enter the reception class at four years old with a wide range of abilities, though there are more with below average levels of attainment than above. Since the last inspection a new headteacher has been appointed who has been in post for three years.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Linton First is a lively school where staff are highly committed to developing pupils as individuals and where learning is fun. Very good teaching and energetic leadership make it a place where pupils achieve very high standards, particularly in their personal development, English and mathematics. The school places a high priority on developing links with village community. The cost of running the school is high but it gives good value for money because it offers a high quality of teaching and learning.

What the school does well

- The school achieves very high standards in speaking and listening, reading, writing and mathematics.
- Teaching is very good, and lessons are interesting and challenging.
- The attitudes of pupils to the school and their behaviour are first rate. They love school, get on well together and work very hard.
- The school places a high priority on pupils personal development which contributes much to their learning.
- The headteacher is very effective at drawing together staff, governors and children to work as a team.

What could be improved

- The school could make its next development plan even better than its present one.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

At the time of the previous inspection, in November 1996, this successful school was asked to build on its strengths by creating a clear school development plan, further developing its curriculum and reviewing its staffing arrangements to allow the headteacher more time for management tasks. It has made good progress in all of these areas. A clear and detailed school development plan has been established and the staff take a bigger part in writing it than before. The curriculum has been updated to take account of the national literacy and numeracy arrangements, along with improved provision for information technology. The school now employs an additional part-time teacher, which allows the headteacher to be released from class teaching for a short time each week. Under the leadership of the new headteacher there have been other improvements. The school has raised standards in literacy and numeracy, improved the comfort and attractiveness of the inside of the building and widened its links

with the village community. The quality of teaching has improved, partly because the headteacher and teachers regularly observe each other at work and discuss their observations together.

STANDARDS

National Curriculum test results to show the standards achieved by seven year olds are not included in this report. This is because there are too few pupils taking the tests in any one year for comparisons with the national average or similar schools to be statistically reliable. However test results over three years, together with the work seen during the inspection, show that at the end of Key Stage 1 pupils reach very high standards in reading, writing and mathematics.

Pupils throughout the school achieve very well. Pupils under the age of five make good progress in the reception class and comfortably attain the standards expected when they reach five. Work seen for pupils in Years 3 and 4 shows these children to be well on the way to achieving above average levels at the end of Key Stage 2. The overall picture is one of consistently high achievement from year to year for all pupils.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Because teachers make lessons interesting and learning fun, pupils enjoy school and try very hard with their work. They are very good at organising themselves and treat the school as theirs.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent. Pupils behave sensibly at all times, during lessons, breaks and lunchtimes.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. Pupils get on extremely well. Older and younger children mix freely and naturally. This helps the older ones mature and the younger ones to quickly develop independence.
Attendance	Usually well above average; better than in most schools.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged up to 5 years	aged 5-7 years	aged 7-9 years
Lessons seen overall	Very good	Very good	Very good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

Teaching has improved since the previous inspection and is now of a high quality. There is a consistent picture of good and very good teaching across the school. About 60 per cent of lessons seen were very good and 40 per cent were good. This includes the teaching of English, mathematics and science. All parents who completed a questionnaire strongly agreed that teaching is very good and their confidence is well placed.

Teachers expect a great deal of the children who respond readily. Teachers' enthusiasm is infectious and inspiring. The best lessons are run at a lively pace and include interesting and well chosen activities, so they are challenging but fun. Teachers are very clear about what they want the children to

learn, share these aims with them and check with them to see if they have understood. Teaching is purposeful and direct; for example new ideas are explained well to pupils. Any problems or difficulties children have are carefully noted and if not immediately solved, are picked up again later. Because relationships are so good, pupils are confident and not afraid to try things out or to ask if they do not understand. Organisation of most lessons is good, particularly given the wide age range in the reception and infant class. Very occasionally when part of a lesson is not so well organised the pace slips a little and for some pupils the level of challenge drops for a while.

There is high quality teaching for all pupils; whatever their level of attainment they achieve their best. Sufficient challenge is provided in all classes to stretch pupils of all ages and abilities. The children themselves are very enthusiastic about their work and they produce large amounts with great pride. It is usually well written, and neatly presented. Pupils are supported well by parents with their work at home and this plays a major part in extending their learning in school, to help them move on quickly.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The quality of the curriculum is good. A lot of emphasis is placed on reading, writing and mathematics but not at the expense of other subjects. A lot of the pupils benefit from lunchtime clubs using computers or playing recorders.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. Because of the small numbers, all pupils' needs are met through individual approaches. The school is very successful at giving all pupils confidence and helping them cope with the same curriculum.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for personal development is very good. The school is particularly effective at raising pupils' moral and social awareness and in helping them develop respect for each other.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school cares for its pupils well. It has good procedures for ensuring child protection. Health and safety issues are addressed well. Staff know the pupils and their backgrounds extremely well and are sensitive to their needs.

All statutory curricular requirements are met. The variety of interesting and practical activities is one reason pupils enjoy school so much. The weekly lesson that involves all the children coming together to set targets for 'making the school a better place' is an exceptional learning opportunity. It helps pupils develop mature responses and requires them all to take responsibility within the school community.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school and promotes it with tremendous enthusiasm and skill. This gives a strong lead in moving the school forward. The headteacher and staff together make a powerful team
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Sound. Governors are clear about the main strengths of the school and are aware of what needs to be developed further.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. Staff have a very good understanding of strengths and areas for development. One of the reasons teaching is so good is because teachers observe each other and share their observations. Information technology is improving rapidly because the school has rightly identified the need to make it better.
The strategic use of resources	Good. The school is making the best use of the resources it has and it plans ahead carefully.

The headteacher's leadership has a strong impact on all aspects of the school's provision. The school applies principles of best value well; for example in seeking the views of its parents and community when making major changes.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of the teaching. • The school expects their children to work hard. • How well led and managed the school is. • The children's behaviour. • The ease with which they can approach the headteacher and teachers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents identified no significant areas for improvement.

Parents have a very high opinion of the school. Inspectors are totally in agreement with parents that this is an effective school where teaching is very strong.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The school achieves very high standards in reading, writing, speaking and listening, and mathematics.

1. Although the number of children taking National Curriculum tests at seven each year is small, when you consider the pattern over three or four years, it is clear that results have improved and are consistently high. At the time of the previous inspection, standards for the oldest pupils in English and science were judged to be in line with the national average and in mathematics above. Standard of work seen during this inspection were better than average in all these subjects.
2. Pupils achieve well in reading and writing because the school puts a strong emphasis on developing their skills and confidence from an early age. For example, during literacy sessions in the morning, pupils under five join in with the older, Key Stage 1 infant children at the start of the literacy hour when they read a story from a 'big book'. The older pupils help the younger ones to be fully involved, for example by sounding out words for them. This makes the younger ones confident to join in, as shown when one five year old explained how words rhyme. Pupils' written work shows a wide range of different challenges. By Year 4, pupils write meaningful apologies to Cinderella or clear instructions on defending a tree house at the same time as learning about the poetic phrases used by Wordsworth and Auden.
3. Pupils' speaking and listening skills are also developed extremely well. Teachers spend a lot of time during the school day, both in lessons and times such as lunchtimes, talking and discussing with pupils. There are also occasions when all the pupils are given the opportunity to speak in front of other children and adults. For example, during a weekly target setting discussion, pupils put forward and explain their concerns to each other. Sometimes the school performs a major drama production in which all the children, including those under five, take part. In such a performance last Christmas, recorded on video, pupils showed exceptional confidence and skills in speaking. During a literacy lesson seen in the Key Stage 1 class, pupils read their lines from the 'big book' story with incredibly good expression.
4. In mathematics, the school puts a strong emphasis on mental arithmetic and number, so that pupils soon learn to carry out calculations quickly and accurately. Pupils develop good attitudes towards the subject because teachers make the lessons enjoyable. For example, pupils under five worked as a group in the 'garden centre' to develop their counting skills by filling pots with soil and counting the seeds.
5. One of the reasons why children achieve such high standards is because of the positive attitude the school takes to being small. Teachers see this as a real advantage, which allows them not only to plan work and set targets for each year group but for individual pupils. Their work is regularly assessed and detailed records are kept in portfolios. Analysis, for example of pupils' writing, is deep and thoughtful. It tells you exactly what they were asked to do, what the writing shows they have achieved and what is not there as well. The files give a very clear picture of the achievement and progress of children from year to year. On a day-to-day basis, teachers' marking of pupils' work is also exceptionally detailed. As well as writing comments about the quality of the work or the mistakes made, there is lots of praise as well. A most valuable comment is when marking includes 'what we'll try to do next' as a target for the child. Teachers also write down what they have talked to the pupil about. Regular homework makes a valuable contribution to achievement.

Teaching is very good, and lessons are interesting and challenging.

6. Teaching is good or very good for all pupils. Relationships between teachers and pupils are excellent and this results in a relaxed but purposeful atmosphere in the classrooms. Lessons are well organised to take account of the different ages and abilities of the children. For example when the children are all together, teachers aim questions of different levels of difficulty at particular groups or individuals. When pupils are working in groups, teachers give their attention to different groups at different times to teach them particular points at the right level. Sometimes during a lesson the teacher will assess the progress pupils are making and move them between groups to ensure they are being challenged at the right level.
7. Teachers are confident and they know how to teach particular subjects well. This was seen, for example, in a science lesson for the Key Stage 1 pupils. The explanation the teacher gave at the start fascinated the children because of the enthusiastic and interesting way in which it was given and the excellent subject knowledge that supported it. The very good use of resources and the 'hands on' approach brought the lesson to life. Pupils were intrigued at looking at a variety of seeds through magnifiers for clues as to how they grow and handling broad beans to remove the seeds from the pod. They were patiently encouraged to take off the seed coats and look at 'the little tooth' as one pupil described the embryonic root. Their fascination deepened as they split the beans to see where the root and leaves grow from before going on to record their observations carefully.
8. Reading and writing are also taught skilfully. Lessons for the literacy hour are meticulously planned with clear objectives for each age group and for individual children within them. Clear explanations and open, well directed questions are a particularly strong feature. Questions such as 'what are the differences between?' or 'what can you see on that page that helps us to read?' encourage the reception and infant children to think and to explain how they are going about reading new words. They are given strategies by the teacher to help them when they are stuck; for example, to read ahead to help them identify an unknown word. Children are supported to become better writers through being asked to write in lots of different ways, being given plenty of prompts and visual aids, and being given clear plans for presenting their ideas. Teaching of grammar and punctuation is effective. In a Key Stage 2 lesson, a point about apostrophes and plurals was cleverly put across and made relevant to pupils by linking it to a sentence on frying pans (it being the day after Shrove Tuesday).
9. In numeracy, teachers put a strong emphasis on developing pupils' mental agility and they are good at giving them the confidence to put forward their ideas. For example, in a Key Stage 2 lesson when the teacher was explaining the relationship between multiplication and division, one pupil was quick to jump in and say 'I know what you are doing; you are swapping numbers around' as he began to understand. Teachers give a lot of attention to making sure that pupils understand different ways to find answers so they can then use that knowledge to tackle new and more difficult problems. For example in the Key Stage 1 class, the teacher asked pupils to explain how they had worked out $9 + 8$ before going on to give them a range of ways of adding four numbers together. Pupils become very good at explaining how they have carried out a particular calculation; for example when pupils in Year 4 explained all the stages they had gone through to take away 67 from 670 'in their head'. Teachers' questioning is well directed to challenging different pupils at the right level for them.

The attitudes of pupils to the school and their behaviour are first rate. They love school, get on well together and work very hard.

10. One of the reasons pupils are so successful in school is because they themselves contribute so much to their own learning. The teachers expect pupils to give of their best in every way and create an atmosphere where this can be done. In return, pupils always try their best to please the teacher. Learning is seen to be fun and the children are keen to talk about how much they enjoy school. This is reflected in their very high levels of attendance and by the response of the overwhelming number of parents who share this view.
11. Pupils show very sensible behaviour, both in lessons and around the school at other times. This helps teachers in the mixed age classes when they want to concentrate their attention on one group whilst another works independently. For example in the Key Stage 2 class, the Year 3 pupils worked purposefully on word searches whilst the teacher concentrated on teaching Year 4 pupils about different ways of writing. In full class lessons, older pupils are very sensitive to the younger ones; for example they do not jump in and answer questions directed at younger ones to spoil their learning. However they are always willing to help them or explain a point for them when it is the right thing to do. Younger pupils benefit enormously from working with older ones. They try to work out answers to questions aimed at older ones and sometimes ask if they can go on to try their work when they finish their own.
12. Because lessons are interesting and relationships are good, pupils listen carefully, are keen and confident to offer views and show real enthusiasm for learning. The under five pupils, who had made the letter 'f' out of Playdoh, were bursting with excitement to show their finished products to the older children. When pupils are asked to share or cooperate they do this very well. For example, Key Stage 1 pupils sharing a computer worked closely together and they were confident enough to seek the teacher's help when they needed it. Older pupils are similarly confident to offer their views or read in front of their classmates without worrying about being wrong or making a mistake.
13. Another benefit of the small numbers and pupils' excellent attitudes and behaviour is that it leads to a seamless school day. Although breaktimes and lunchtimes are set and kept to, they are as full of activity as the lessons. For example, during lunchtime, pupils are busy at computers, recorder groups, organising and practising a dance performance or listening to a story being read to them. These extra-curricular activities make an important contribution to pupils' learning and their social development. Pupils' enthusiasm is reflected in their eagerness to finish lunch and start the activities.

The school places a high priority on pupils' personal development, which contributes much to their learning.

14. An excellent feature of the school's provision is the weekly target setting sessions where all the pupils gather to talk about issues and concerns. Whilst these are supervised by the headteacher, her role is one of guiding rather than leading. The pupils themselves decide what they want to discuss within the context of making the school a better place. The outcomes become targets for the week, which are recorded, referred to through the week and evaluated at the next session. Pupils also break into pairs to set personal targets confidentially with each other.
15. This nurturing of pupils' personal development is highly valuable. It helps pupils to become confident and mature, and develops their independence as learners. The lessons give children the opportunity to develop their speaking and listening skills when they have to put or defend

an opinion, or reflect on the views of others. It provides a forum in which children can raise their concerns and helps the younger and older pupils to understand and support each other. It also provides the means by which pupils themselves establish rules and standards of behaviour within school and take responsibility for ensuring they are kept. Parents at the meeting spoke highly of the value of these target setting sessions and rightly so.

The headteacher is very effective at drawing together staff, governors and children to work as a team.

16. Since her appointment, the headteacher has given a very good lead in drawing together the efforts of staff and governors to further improve the school. There has been a particular emphasis on widening links with the village community so that the school becomes central to village life. This has meant the school becoming involved in a project to help parents develop self-awareness and enthusiastic involvement in the Coalfields Village Development Project. For pupils in the school, these projects extend their opportunities to work with other adults; for example old and young working together on a 'Millennium Quilt'.
17. The governors of the school are active and supportive, and work closely with the headteacher. They are regular visitors to the school and have a sound knowledge of what it is good at and what the main areas for development are.
18. Part of the success of the headteacher's leadership is in the way that she has established a climate of commitment, and a team approach which values everyone's contribution. The result is a strong sense of community within the school, where all those involved are prepared to work hard and play their part. Parents hold the school in high esteem, believe it is well managed and provides their children with a high quality of education. Their views are sought on major developments within the school. Staff work well together and in doing so become more effective; for example when teachers observe each other at work in the classroom and discuss the outcomes. The involvement of pupils in activities such as the target setting gives them an active part in running their own school. The outcome is friendly and confident pupils who are proud of *their* school.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The school could make its next development plan even better than its present one.

19. The school's present development plan is perfectly adequate and sets out the priorities for development well. It has made good progress in achieving what it set out to do. For example it is very aware of the need to continue to move forward with developing information technology, even though pupils achieve standards as good as in most schools. The development plan has therefore set out for staff to be further trained in using computers, with new ones being brought in to help make best use of the latest technology such as the internet.
20. Where the school would benefit now would be to draw the governors a little bit more into looking at how well the current development plan has gone and putting the next one together. The current plan has been devised by the staff, with governors aware of its main priorities. They discuss how its implementation is coming along. They are not as involved in putting the plan together as they might be though they are just beginning a training programme to help them further raise their levels of knowledge and confidence.

21. The current plan includes criteria against which to judge the success of actions but these do not always show clearly enough what difference the changes are expected to make to standards or the quality of provision. For example, in implementing changes in religious education, the plan says that evidence will be looked for in improved skills but it does not say what pupils should know or be able to do that they could not do before. This makes it harder for governors to judge how successful the implementation of measures in the plan has been.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

22. The headteacher, staff and governors should:
- develop procedures and prepare a timetable for working more closely together in devising the school development plan;
 - show more clearly in the plan what difference the measures taken are expected to make to standards or the quality of provision.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed

7

Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils

8

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	57	43	0	0	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Nursery	YR – Y4
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	n/a	17.5
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	n/a	3

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs

	Nursery	YR – Y4
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	n/a	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	n/a	2

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	5
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	4

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	10.2
National comparative data	5.4

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.0
National comparative data	0.5

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	
Black – African heritage	
Black – other	
Indian	
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	
White	16
Any other minority ethnic group	

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y4

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	1.78
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	8.5
Average class size	9

Education support staff: YR – Y4

Total number of education support staff	0
Total aggregate hours worked per week	0

Qualified teachers and support staff: nursery

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	n/a
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	n/a

Total number of education support staff	n/a
Total aggregate hours worked per week	n/a

Number of pupils per FTE adult	n/a
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White		
Other minority ethnic groups		

This table gives the number of exclusions of pupils of compulsory school age, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Financial information

Financial year	98/99
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	£
Total income	77,333
Total expenditure	75,577
Expenditure per pupil	4,199
Balance brought forward from previous year	5,572
Balance carried forward to next year	7,328

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	19
Number of questionnaires returned	17

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	82	12	6	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	82	18	0	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	88	12	0	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	76	24	0	0	0
The teaching is good.	100	0	0	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	65	35	0	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	88	12	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	94	6	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	70	30	0	0	0
The school is well led and managed.	94	0	6	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	76	24	0	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	59	41	0	0	0