

INSPECTION REPORT

Acomb County First School

Acomb, near Hexham

LEA area: Northumberland

Unique reference number: 122170

Headteacher: Mrs E J Jackson

Reporting inspector: Mr M Massey
No.23785

Dates of inspection: 27 - 28 March 2000

Inspection number: 194639

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
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	4 - 9 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Bishops Hill Main Street Acomb Hexham Northumberland
Postcode:	NE46 4PL
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr C Davidson
Date of previous inspection:	January 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	
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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6 - 9
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	10 - 12
There is good provision for children under five and as a result they make good progress.	
The good teaching and commitment to high standards leads to pupils producing good quality work in English and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 1 and excellent writing by the time they leave the school at nine.	
The very good relationships in the school contribute substantially to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.	
Teachers ensure that pupils use their literacy and numeracy skills well in other subjects and this makes lessons more relevant and interesting.	
The school is well led and managed by the headteacher and governing body.	
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	12
Individual education plans for older pupils do not give clear targets for learning in mathematics and as a result they make slower progress than they could.	
Communication with parents could be improved to more effectively involve them in their children's learning.	
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	13
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	14 - 16

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Acomb County First School is situated in the village of Acomb, near Hexham, in Northumberland. There are 72 pupils on roll, 39 boys and 33 girls, taught in three classes. The headteacher teaches pupils in Years 3 and 4 for four and a half days a week. The school mainly serves the local community, although some pupils come from out of the school's local area. Pupils come from diverse social backgrounds and the attainment of pupils on entry is average, overall. Children are admitted to the school at the beginning of the autumn term in the school year in which they are five. Children who do not have a place in another nursery school can be admitted part-time in the term following their fourth birthday. Twelve percent of the school's population is on the school's register of special educational need, which is below average. There are no pupils with statements of special educational need. Very few pupils speak English as a second language and they receive no additional support. Around 10 percent of the school population are known to be eligible for free school meals, which is below average. Some of the accommodation is old and unsuitable for the delivery of some areas of the National Curriculum, for example physical education.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Acomb County First School is a good school. It consistently achieves high standards. The teaching is good overall and the pupils have very good attitudes to school. The leadership and management of the school is good. The school gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- The good teaching and commitment to high standards results in high standards in English and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 1 and the excellent quality of writing in English by nine year olds.
- There is good provision for children under five and as a result they make good progress.
- The very good relationships in the school contribute substantially to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Teachers ensure that pupils use their literacy and numeracy skills well in other subjects and this makes lessons more relevant and interesting.
- The school is well led and managed by the headteacher and governing body.

What could be improved

- Individual Education Plans for older pupils do not give clear targets for learning in mathematics and as a result these pupils make slower progress than they could.
- Communication with parents could be improved to more effectively involve them in their children's learning.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good progress since the last inspection in January 1997 and has successfully improved in the areas identified in the last report. A very good religious education policy has been introduced and implemented. This has underpinned the good improvement seen in the raised awareness that pupils have of other cultures. The school's prospectus and governors' annual report to parents have been improved and now cover all the statutory requirements with the exception of a statement on disability. High standards have been maintained in the National Curriculum test results for seven year olds. There has been a good improvement in the standards of English for nine year olds.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by seven year olds based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	Compared with				Key
	All schools			Similar schools	
	1997	1998	1999	1999	
Reading	A*	A	A*	A	well above average A
Writing	A*	A	A	B	above average B
Mathematics	A*	A	A	B	Average C
					Below average D
					Well below average E

The high standards for pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 have been maintained over the last three years, since the last inspection. The pupils' attainment in reading is very high, placing the school in the top five percent of schools nationally when compared to all schools in both 1997 and 1999. These standards are being maintained for the present cohort of pupils at the end of Key Stage 1. The school's oldest pupils are achieving excellent standards in English. In mathematics and science standards are sound. This reflects the very good English teaching seen during the inspection. Some pupils with special educational needs do not have their mathematical needs accurately identified on their Individual Education Plans and as result do not achieve well in this area. Both boys' and girls' attainment is above the national average, with boys achieving at least as well as girls in reading and mathematics, contrary to national trends. Based on the attainment of children when they enter the school pupils make good progress and standards are above what could be expected. The school is committed to maintaining high standards. It has set very challenging targets for the future and is monitoring pupils' progress to ensure that the targets are met. Children under five make good progress and are in line to exceed the expected levels in language and literacy and mathematics. Many children are already achieving above the expected level.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very Good. Pupils are enthusiastic and sustain high levels of concentration, responding well to high expectations from teachers.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Pupils behave well in the dining room and limited playground area, showing good tolerance of others. Well-structured and challenging lessons contribute effectively to the good behaviour in class.
Personal development and relationships	Good. Pupils get on well together and accept responsibility willingly, regularly helping around school with a variety of jobs.
Attendance	Very good. Pupils arrive punctually and are eager to start work.

The pupils' very good attitudes to school and the high attendance are significant strengths and contribute effectively to the high standards that they attain.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Aged up to 5 years	Aged 5-7 years	Aged 7-9 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good	Satisfactory

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.

Overall, the teaching in the school is good. In the lessons seen 58 percent of the teaching was good and the rest was satisfactory. Children under five are well taught by an enthusiastic teacher. She

has good subject knowledge. As a result activities are well presented and challenging and children make good progress. The teaching of numeracy and literacy is effective and teachers are very good at promoting these aspects in other subjects, such as science. Teachers present challenging tasks for higher attaining pupils, who make good progress as a result. However, a small proportion of older pupils with special educational needs do not have their needs accurately identified in mathematics which means that they make slower progress than they are capable of. The teaching of English to pupils in Years 3 and 4 is very good and pupils make particularly good progress in their writing. Pupils good mental mathematics abilities at the end of Key Stage 1 are the result of the teacher's good subject knowledge leading to effective planning and teaching.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The curriculum is broad and balanced. Extra-curricular provision is very good.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory. There is good support for pupils in literacy. Small proportions of older pupils do not have appropriate mathematical targets in their Individual Education Plans.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. Pupils are well supported by teachers and make good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is excellent. There is very good provision for pupils' moral and social development and cultural development is good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Satisfactory. Good records are kept on pupils' progress and there is a high level of care shown to pupils. Some procedures, such as child protection, are not formalised.

The school meets all statutory requirements. The curriculum provision for religious education and design and technology are good. There is very good provision for the use of literacy and numeracy in other subjects, such as history and design and technology. The very good extra-curricular provision significantly enhances pupils' opportunities for learning and improves their range of experience. Staff know pupils well and work hard to ensure that children are secure and work hard in a challenging and supportive environment.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good. The headteacher provides strong leadership and is committed to improving provision and standards. She is well supported by a dedicated staff who accept responsibility readily.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body fulfil their statutory responsibilities well and have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school analyses results of National Curriculum tests and other assessments effectively. Areas for improvement are identified accurately, for example in spelling, and procedures put in place to raise standards.
The strategic use of resources	Resources are soundly used and areas of expenditure are clearly indicated in the school development plan. Overall, the school gives good value for money.

The headteacher's teaching load is too high and prevents her from fulfilling her management responsibilities as well as she would like to. She is a strong leader with a clear sense of direction and commitment to high standards who provides very good support and advice to the recently appointed newly qualified teacher. The school improvement plan identifies appropriate priorities although success criteria are sometimes not specific enough. The school pays appropriate attention to the principles of best value.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like school. • Behaviour in the school is good. • Teaching is good. • They would find it easy to approach the school with any concerns. • Pupils are expected to work hard. • The school is well led and managed. • The school helps pupils to become mature and responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrangements for homework. • A more interesting range of activities outside lessons.

The inspection team fully agrees with the positive views expressed by parents. The team also agrees that improved information could be given to parents about how they can help their children at home. The team does not agree that a more interesting range of activities could be provided given the present level of staffing. It is of the view that activities provided outside of lesson time are very good for a school of this size.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

There is good provision for children under five and as a result they make good progress.

1. Children under five are presented with a wide variety of activities on a daily basis, which effectively cover all the areas of learning. The classroom is imaginatively laid out to enable children to access activities easily and they are encouraged to accept responsibility for engaging in activities independently. Classroom routines are well established and the nursery nurse supports learning very effectively. As a result children are confident and take part in activities enthusiastically, for example when they use earphones and a tape recorder to follow a story in a book. Literacy lessons are well structured to take account of the children's age and abilities. Children recognise the title of a book and name the author and illustrator correctly. They have good speaking skills and concentrate well in order to be able to answer the teacher's questions. Children make up their own rhymes in response to imaginative game situations created by the teacher. In writing, the majority of children form their letters independently and write clearly and legibly. In reading, they talk about the pictures in books and recognise some initial letter sounds.
2. Children's creative, language and mathematical skills are further developed when they use the class shop to buy various items. In mathematics, the teacher prepares some very effective photographic resources using a digital camera to produce side and plan elevations of common objects, such as scissors in a container. The children identify with this approach, recognising the objects and quickly learning how a plan differs from a side elevation. New technology is excellently used in mathematics by the introduction of a control program to the children who become confident in using the commands such as forward and left.
3. The pace of lessons is good and children's behaviour is very good. There is a good learning ethos in the class with the teacher exerting a calm control that children respond to very positively.

The good teaching and commitment to high standards leads to pupils producing good quality work in English and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 1 and excellent writing by the time they leave the school at nine.

4. Teachers have a good subject knowledge and as a result lessons are carefully planned to ensure that all pupils are challenged and encouraged to support one another in their learning. A good example of this was seen in a mathematics lesson in Key Stage 1 where the teacher's personal knowledge of pupils' abilities also contributed substantially to the success of the mental mathematics session. In this lesson pupils started by doubling and halving numbers up to 40, based on their learning from previous lessons. The teacher specifically asked individual pupils questions at a level appropriate for them and therefore all the pupils concentrated because they felt it might be their turn next. Pupils who did not know the answer immediately were given some time to think before enlisting the help of another pupil in order to work out the answer. This was handled well by the teacher and pupils responded positively and tried hard. A particular feature of the mathematics teaching in Key Stage 1, where the teacher is the subject co-ordinator, is the encouragement given by the teacher for pupils to explain how they arrived at their answers. Because of this pupils explain their methods clearly and often there is a discussion about the different, but equally valid, methods used. The plenary session at the end of the mathematics lesson is very well used by the teacher to extend the learning of all the pupils and particularly to challenge the higher attaining pupils. This part of the lesson is carried out at a brisk pace, which is particularly enjoyed by the higher attainers who work confidently with numbers up to 1000.
5. Reading is given a high priority throughout the school and by the time pupils leave the school at nine they are fluent readers who use books well to find information. Teachers have a good understanding of the use of literacy in other subjects and pupils research work on Ancient Greece using the skills learned in their English lessons. Writing has been given a high priority by the school and the development of pupils' skills is exemplary. Teachers encourage pupils to use language to enhance their stories and make them come alive and as a result stories are interesting and often detailed. By the time they are nine, standards in writing are excellent.

The teacher plans writing activities very well, insisting that pupils develop their characters and a structure to their story. In conversation with pupils it quickly becomes obvious that they have a clear understanding of what they have to do and are not afraid of making changes to early planning drafts. They talk about how their characters will develop, who might be a "good" character and who might develop "bad" traits. As a result their final stories are long and detailed and contain some excellent use of descriptive writing. The handwriting policy used by staff results in writing that is clear and legible with good punctuation and spelling that makes stories a delight to read.

6. The very good use of the nursery nurse significantly enhances pupils' learning. In the Reception class she is an integral part of the classroom organisation in the mornings. Pupils relate well to her and she has a very good relationship with the teacher. Her good knowledge of the children and exactly what the teacher is trying to achieve means that she offers appropriate support at the correct level. She is well used throughout the rest of the school, for example working with older pupils on literacy skills in a small group situation. This extra attention enables lower attaining pupils to make good progress in their learning and is a contributory factor in the good results obtained by pupils in the end of key stage tests and in English in Year 4.

The very good relationships in the school contribute substantially to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

7. There are very good relationships at all levels within the school between adults and pupils. There is a mutual respect for others and a clear understanding of the needs of others. This atmosphere has a strong impact on the moral and social development of pupils. Pupils are aware of the needs of others and treat one another sensibly both in class and at playtimes. The good behaviour on the cramped playground is a good example of this, with older pupils often helping and playing with younger ones. Rules for good behaviour are discussed with pupils and they make up a set of class rules, such as those on display in the Reception classroom, so that everyone is aware of how they should behave. Pupils are given good guidance on acceptable behaviour and the teachers' high expectations are transmitted effectively to them. In lessons such as science, or in the Reception class shop, teachers encourage pupils to work collaboratively. They discuss problems and solutions and respect one another's views, often arriving at an agreed decision after weighing up all the varying points that others have raised, demonstrating a high level of maturity.
8. The headteacher creates an excellent ethos during assemblies to encourage pupils to reflect on what they have been listening to or on other issues that may have significance to them and pupils respond appropriately. Further excellent opportunities are presented in lessons such as religious education when dealing with sensitive subjects like death in the Year 3 and 4 class. This is due to the high quality of planning and thought put into the use of specific texts in order to engage the pupils' attention. The pupils discuss their feelings with one another and with the teacher and are extremely well supported by the teacher on these occasions.
9. Staff have worked hard to provide opportunities to develop pupils' cultural understanding. They have put in a tremendous amount of work following the last inspection on establishing a comprehensive religious education policy that meets the needs of the pupils. Volunteers visit the school regularly at lunchtimes to run a Quest Club, which enables pupils to learn about other faiths and beliefs and meet a variety of other adults. This adds to their personal experiences and they obviously enjoy the sessions, which are well attended. In religious education lessons pupils learn about other faiths and extend their knowledge of other cultures through studying family life, for example in the Jewish or Islamic tradition. Pupils' knowledge of their own culture is effectively promoted through activities such as the dry stone walling and the visits organised by the school.

Teachers ensure that pupils use their literacy and numeracy skills well in other subjects and this makes lessons more relevant and interesting.

10. Teachers show an exemplary awareness of the need to build on literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects. A very good example of this was seen in science, in the Year 3 and 4 class, when the teacher used recently covered work on calculating volume in mathematics to introduce a science lesson. In design and technology pupils use their literacy skills to structure the content of a poster to illustrate their work. Children under five practise their reading skills using tape recordings and become increasingly familiar with the use of books. In subjects like

religious education and history, pupils' reading and writing skills are effectively promoted through the integrated planning approach used by the school. This approach contributes substantially to the reinforcement and extension of learning and the high standards achieved by the school in English and mathematics.

The school is well led and managed by the headteacher and governing body.

11. The headteacher provides good, clear leadership to the school. She has a high teaching commitment and works exceptionally hard to fulfil this while leading and managing the school. This exemplifies her dedication and determination to provide the best education possible for the pupils and this is transmitted to the other staff at the school, who respond well. The fact that she manages to combine these tasks successfully is a tribute to her professionalism. She monitors teaching and standards in the school and is providing excellent support to the newly qualified teacher in the Reception class. Areas for improvement are discussed following monitoring visits and this improves the quality of teaching. She receives good support from the local education authority link inspector to allow her to fulfil this task. As a result of monitoring, new initiatives are effectively introduced and the staff are constantly seeking to improve. Relevant developments are clearly indicated in the school development plan and appropriate finances are allocated to initiatives, although in some cases success criteria are not specific enough.
12. The governing body are actively involved in the development and running of the school. Many of them work in the school and have a good knowledge of how the school runs. Governors have specific responsibilities, such as literacy or special educational needs. They visit the school regularly and make reports back to the full governing body. They use these visits and other first hand knowledge to contribute to the development planning process. The chair of governors has a good knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and acts as a critical friend to the headteacher, for example when discussing standards. He has a good knowledge of the progress of the newly qualified teacher and would like to improve further the current monitoring procedures that the governors have. However, the main concerns of the governing body centre around the urgent need to improve the accommodation and they are working hard to bring this about.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Individual Education Plans for older pupils do not give clear targets for learning in mathematics and as a result they make slower progress than they could.

13. The small proportion of pupils who are on stage 3 of the register of special educational needs do not have their needs clearly identified in their Individual Education Plans. The literacy targets for these pupils are not specific enough. However, there is effective classroom support for these pupils through the additional literacy strategy approach used by the school. As a result pupils continue to make good progress in English. In mathematics, there are no targets identified on pupils' Individual Education Plans and no additional specific support in class for these pupils. Work is not always set at an appropriate level for them. A scrutiny of pupils' work shows that they often cover the same type of work as other pupils but complete less. In lessons these pupils sometimes have difficulty understanding the task without extra teacher attention and as a result lose concentration and make slower progress than they are capable of.

Communication with parents could be improved to more effectively involve them in their children's learning.

14. Although homework is set regularly throughout the school there is no set pattern, except for reading. This makes it difficult for parents to know when homework has been set, for example homework may be set on two occasions but on different days during consecutive weeks. As each class has a different system, which is not made clear to parents, and this results in confusion. Home-school reading records are kept and these are useful aids to parents but are sometimes used as a record of books read, rather than passing useful information about how parents could help their children to improve. The school does provide some very good information evenings for parents which has clearly improved parents' understanding of new initiatives. The newly established homework books in the Reception class, with specific targets illustrated, is a good initiative. The lack of specific curriculum information, for example about

the work to be covered in the forthcoming term, means that parents are unaware of how best they can help their children. Reports are lengthy and give targets for improvement for pupils but do not tell parents how their children are doing when compared to others, for example whether they are at the level expected for their age.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

15. In order to raise standards further the governing body, headteacher and staff should:
- Improve the standards of lower attaining pupils in Key Stage 2 by:
 - Ensuring that pupils Individual Education Plans contain specific targets in mathematics;
 - Reviewing targets systematically to ensure that work is at the correct level;
 - Monitoring pupils' progress against targets to ensure that they are making at least sound progress in their learning.
 - Improve communication with parents so that they can more effectively support their children at home by:
 - Providing parents with clear written information about how and when homework will be set in each class;
 - Using home-school reading records for both staff and parents to record information about pupils' reading;
 - Giving parents clear information about what is to be taught during the term.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	12
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	16

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	0	58	42	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 – Y2
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	0	72
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	0	7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery	YR – Y2
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	0	9

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	2

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	4
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	2

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	2.5
National comparative data	5.7

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0
National comparative data	0.5

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	1999	7	5	12

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	7	7	7
	Girls	5	5	5
	Total	12	12	12
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	100 (95)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	82 (80)	83 (81)	87 (84)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	7	7	7
	Girls	5	5	5
	Total	12	12	12
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (89)
	National	82 (80)	86 (84)	87 (85)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	2
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	70
Any other minority ethnic group	0

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	0	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y2

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	24
Average class size	24

Education support staff: YR – Y2

Total number of education support staff	2
Total aggregate hours worked per week	34

Financial information

Financial year	1998-99
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	£
Total income	133490
Total expenditure	135996
Expenditure per pupil	1744
Balance brought forward from previous year	9384
Balance carried forward to next year	6878

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	72
Number of questionnaires returned	36

Percentage of responses in each category

My child likes school.

My child is making good progress in school.

Behaviour in the school is good.

My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.

The teaching is good.

I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.

I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.

The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.

The school works closely with parents.

The school is well led and managed.

The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.

The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
75	25	0	0	0
56	31	8	0	6
53	39	3	0	6
31	42	17	0	11
61	36	0	0	3
52	33	6	3	6
64	36	0	0	0
53	44	3	0	0
44	44	11	0	0
56	33	6	3	3
53	39	3	0	6
50	36	11	3	0

