



Acomb First School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 122170
LEA Northumberland
Inspection number 281176
Inspection dates 28 November 2005 to 29 November 2005
Reporting inspector Mr David Ford

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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|------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Type of school | First | School address | Bishops Hill |
| School category | Community | | Main Street |
| Age range of pupils | 4 to 9 | | Acomb, Hexham NE46 4PL |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | Telephone number | 01434 603870 |
| Number on roll | 22 | Fax number | 01434 603870 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body | Chair of governors | Mrs Jane Wrigley |
| Date of previous inspection | 1 March 2000 | Headteacher | Mrs Jo Bentley |

| Age group | Inspection dates | Inspection number |
|-----------|--|-------------------|
| 4 to 9 | 28 November 2005 - 29 November 2005 | 281176 |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one additional inspector.

Description of the school

Acomb First School caters for pupils from ages 4 to 9 and works in association with a local nursery. The school serves the village of Acomb and surrounding communities. The school is very small, with only 22 pupils on roll, and 23 more attending the nursery. Pupils enter the school with broadly average standards, overall. There are no pupils from minority ethnic groups in the school and none who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average.

After an extended absence of the previous headteacher, the school is now being managed by an acting headteacher. A major programme of new building and refurbishment recently caused disruption to the school's work but is now complete.

Key for inspection grades

| | |
|---------|--------------|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding |
| Grade 2 | Good |
| Grade 3 | Satisfactory |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate |

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school which provides well for its pupils. The school has accurately identified areas for further improvement although its self-evaluation is generally less positive than the findings of the inspection.

Teaching is good. The good Foundation Stage provision in reception and effective links with the nursery enable pupils to make a good start. Pupils continue to make good progress throughout the school so that they achieve standards above average in English and mathematics by the time they leave. They also achieve well in all other subjects although the presentation of work is not always of the same high standard and the pupils would benefit from more practice of extended writing.

Pupils enjoy school. It provides a safe and secure environment to support their learning. Relationships are good and pupils are well behaved. Staff work well as a team and their good knowledge of pupils as individuals helps them to provide good guidance and support. Pupils are clear about the school's expectations of them and respond positively. The school has effective partnerships with other schools.

The acting headteacher provides good leadership and management. She has worked effectively with all partners to stabilise the school, oversee a considerable programme of refurbishment, set in train a programme of further development, and direct finances carefully to the most important targets. Value for money is satisfactory. The school has successfully dealt with the issues raised in the previous inspection and has considerable capacity to continue to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- The teachers should raise standards in English still further by giving pupils more practice of extended writing in all subjects.
- The teachers should insist on higher standards in the pupils' presentation of their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are above average and pupils achieve well. Pupils enter the school with average levels of pre-school skills. They make good progress throughout the school and reach above average standards by the end of Year 4.

The school's very good links with the nursery, which is housed in the same building, ensure that pupils are well prepared for school. They make good progress and, by the time that they are five, most have reached or exceeded the standards expected for their age. Pupils thrive on the individual attention they receive and the results of national tests results at the end of Year 2 are good. (Statistical comparison with national averages is unreliable since the number of pupils concerned is so small).

Pupils' good progress is maintained in Years 3 and 4. Although there are no nationally published results of tests at the end of Year 4, the school's monitoring and use of reliable assessments show that, overall, pupils reach standards above average for their age, and achieve the challenging targets set for them. Although pupils generally achieve well in English, the standard of their written work could be improved further with more practice for writing at length in all subjects. The presentation of their work is also not always as good as it should be.

All groups of pupils make equally good progress and there is no significant difference between different subjects. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress as a result of carefully planned provision based on well-focused individual education plans.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils like coming to school, enjoy their work and take pride in their achievements. Relationships are very good and all adults and children get on well together. Attendance is very good and pupils' behaviour is good. Pupils are attentive in lessons and work well, both independently and when in groups.

Social, moral, cultural and spiritual development is good. Pupils have a good sense of right and wrong, know about a range of cultures and reflect on what they have learned. Their social development is enhanced by out-of-school activities, including the breakfast club and collaborative working with other schools.

Pupils feel safe in school. They know what to do if they have concerns and are confident that staff will respond positively. Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. They enjoy the fruit available in school and understand the importance of a healthy diet. They have two hours of physical exercise, including swimming, each week.

The school actively encourages pupils' participation in decision-making. All pupils were consulted about the recent building work and their views were carefully considered.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned and managed and the teachers have a very good knowledge of their pupil as individuals. Teachers provide clear instructions and carefully match work to the range of ability in their class, setting the right targets for each pupil. Pupils of all abilities, therefore, learn effectively and make consistently good progress throughout the school. Standards are rising in English

but teachers still need to give more opportunities for pupils to write at length in other subjects and pupils need to improve the presentation of their written work.

Teachers make particularly good use of resources, such as interactive whiteboards, and involve pupils actively in their work. Good questioning techniques keep the pupils on their toes and pupils are keen to answer. Pupils are clear about what they have to learn and work well, individually and in groups.

Teachers and support staff work very well together. The teaching assistants' clear understanding of the purpose of the lesson helps them to support the pupils well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The inspection judges the curriculum to be good although the school's view is that it is satisfactory. The school gives the right balance of time to the different subjects, with a major emphasis on numeracy and literacy. The curriculum is carefully planned so that pupils of similar abilities but different ages, work together on particular topics. This approach is very successful and ensures that the needs of the mixed age classes are met very effectively.

The planning for pupils' personal, social, health and citizenship education is good. Although the teaching of literacy has raised standards in English, more emphasis needs to be given to extended writing in other subjects.

The curriculum is enhanced by a good range of visits and visitors and the local schools' partnership is well used to provide an extended range of sporting activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The standard of care, guidance and support is good. Parents have a good opinion of the school and know that their children like school and are safe and well cared for. Pupils work and play in a safe environment and the school's procedures to ensure their health and safety are good. The school ensures that pupils understand what they should do if they are worried or concerned, and that they understand the procedures to be followed in the event of an accident. Pupils are taught to be independent and to act responsibly, in and out of the classroom. All staff know their pupils well as individuals and monitor their progress effectively. The staff provide clear, specific advice and guidance to pupils, and teachers set targets for pupils that are well-matched to their potential.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The school's unsettled period, owing to the long-term absence of the previous headteacher, was resolved in June of this year with the appointment of an experienced acting headteacher. Parents are very confident in

the school's new leadership and are clear that the school is meeting the needs of their children. However, the appointment is temporary and the school needs a permanently appointed headteacher as soon as possible to ensure its stability.

The acting headteacher is providing good leadership; she has taken quick and decisive action, with the support of the staff, governors and local authority, to set the school on an even keel and plan for school improvement. Consequently, the school is now well placed to continue to improve. The headteacher and staff have made a thorough evaluation of the school's performance and provision, which accurately identifies the school's strengths and shows clearly where improvements are needed.

The governance of the school is good. The governing body has a well-organised committee structure and governors understand the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They have worked closely with the local authority concerning financial management, and this good working relationship has contributed effectively to the steady improvement. The accommodation, which has recently been refurbished, is very good. Resources are used effectively by all staff. The school's finances are deployed effectively; however, recent investment in the school by the local authority, which has been crucial for the school's efficient management, has resulted in high costs per pupil. Therefore, despite the pupils' good achievement and the good quality of the school's provision, the value for money is satisfactory.

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Inspection judgements

| | | |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|
| <i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i> | School Overall | 16-19 |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|

Overall effectiveness

| | | |
|--|-----|----|
| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 2 | NA |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 2 | NA |
| The quality and standards in foundation stage | 2 | NA |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 2 | NA |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | Yes | NA |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes | NA |

Achievement and standards

| | | |
|--|---|----|
| How well do learners achieve? | 2 | NA |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 2 | NA |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 2 | NA |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress | 2 | NA |

Personal development and well-being

| | | |
|---|---|----|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 2 | NA |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 2 | NA |
| The behaviour of learners | 2 | NA |
| The attendance of learners | 2 | NA |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 2 | NA |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 2 | NA |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 2 | NA |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 2 | NA |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 2 | NA |

The quality of provision

| | | |
|---|---|----|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs? | 2 | NA |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 2 | NA |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 2 | NA |

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

| | | |
|--|-----|----|
| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 2 | NA |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 2 | NA |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review | 2 | NA |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 2 | NA |
| How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money | 3 | NA |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 2 | NA |
| The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected | Yes | NA |

| | |
|---|-----|
| The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy | |
| Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily | Yes |
| Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise | Yes |
| Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse | Yes |
| Learners are educated about sexual health | Yes |
| The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe | |
| Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements | Yes |
| Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place | Yes |
| Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism | Yes |
| Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them | Yes |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution | |
| Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships | Yes |
| Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them | Yes |
| Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community | Yes |
| The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being | |
| There is provision to promote learners' basic skills | Yes |
| Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams | Yes |
| Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form | NA |
| Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy | NA |

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

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29 November 2005

Dear Pupils

I really enjoyed visiting you in Acomb when I came to inspect your school. I'm grateful for the friendly way in which you welcomed me and your help in finding out about the school.

You told me that you like coming to school and I'm not surprised. Acomb First School is a good school and everybody who works there tries very hard to help you to do well. Teaching is good, your lessons are well planned and all the staff make sure that you understand what you have to do. Mrs Bentley has done a really good job in making sure that you can all work and play together in such a friendly way and I was very pleased that you all know what to do if you have any problems.

One of the best things about your school is that everyone knows each other very well and this helps to make sure that you can all learn at your own pace. You do well in your school. You work hard at your lessons and so you achieve a lot. I know that you are very pleased with the new building and all of the computers and whiteboards that are really helping with your education. I must say that I enjoyed all of our conversations but I was particularly impressed with your knowledge of healthy eating which came up in a chat over one of your school's delicious lunches.

As I said Acomb is a good school and it is going to get better. Your teachers know that they can help you to improve your writing. They want to give you more chance to write in subjects like history and science and we all agree that your handwriting could be improved. You're really lucky to go to Acomb First School. It is a friendly place where everybody wants the best for you, thank-you once again for being so helpful to me.

Yours sincerely

David Ford

Inspector