



Allendale First School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 122171
Local Authority Northumberland
Inspection number 292328
Inspection date 6 December 2006
Reporting inspector Moira Fitzpatrick

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

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|---|--------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Type of school | Primary | School address | Allendale |
| School category | Community | | Hexham, Northumberland |
| Age range of pupils | 4-9 | | NE47 9PT |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | Telephone number | 01434 683376 |
| Number on roll (school) | 90 | Fax number | 04434 683465 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body | Chair | Mrs Janette Barnes |
| | | Headteacher | Mr Christopher Bulman |
| Date of previous school inspection | 1 November 2001 | | |

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|-------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This school is smaller than average and is set in a large rural village. A high proportion of the pupils travel some distance from outlying farms and houses to the school. The school population is predominantly White British, with less than 5% of pupils from minority ethnic groups. There are no pupils who speak English as an additional language. Few pupils are entitled to free school meals. The percentage of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. When children start school in the Reception class, not all have had access to pre-school provision. There is a wide range of attainment, which is overall below what is expected by the time children are four years old.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The school's effectiveness, which is outstanding, ensures that all pupils make tremendous gains in their academic and personal development. Pupils of all abilities and backgrounds achieve very well, some from low starting points when they join the school in Reception. By Year 4, standards are significantly above average, with a high percentage of pupils reaching the level expected of 11 year olds.

Pupils are safe and happy in school because they are well known to teachers, well respected by peers and are confident about their ability to succeed. The school's outstanding care promotes exceptional personal development. The pupils love learning, behave very well and make the most of every minute in school. Their well developed independence allows them to rise to the many challenges the school offers. This has allowed the pupils to have a significant input to the day to day running of the school and to making improvements to the playground and to school dinners. These pupils understand very well the importance of the contribution they make. This, together with their very high standards in learning, prepares them very well for the future.

The curriculum and teaching are excellent. They fuel pupils' enthusiasm for learning and their conviction that they will succeed. The vibrant curriculum extends well beyond the school, allowing pupils to extend their horizons, find new talents and foster new interests. Access to computers by pupils to use and develop their information and communication technology (ICT) skills is restricted because of shortage of facilities and space. The school rightly has this as a priority to ensure that provision for ICT is of the same high quality as for other subjects. Teachers work hard to keep the level of challenge high in lessons. They know the pupils' needs very well and plan lively and purposeful learning in all subjects. Excellent provision in the Foundation Stage ensures that children make very good progress and are well prepared for the challenges of Year 1.

Leadership and management are excellent. The headteacher ensures that, at all levels, the work of the school is firmly focused on raising standards and the quality of provision. In this, he is very well supported by the very able deputy headteacher whose work in literacy has improved standards very well in recent years. School evaluation is rigorous and very effective because of the excellent teamwork that exists to ensure that action is taken to improve any weaknesses that are detected. Governors play a significant part in the life of the school. They ensure that the school is held to account for standards as well as playing a key role in involving parents and the community in enriching the life of the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve provision for access to learning with computers in order for pupils to have more opportunities to use and develop their ICT skills.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Achievement is excellent; all pupils make very good progress from their starting points and standards are very high. The progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is often outstanding because of the high quality support they receive. Children begin their education in the Reception class, where excellent provision ensures they make very good progress in all areas of their learning. Significant weaknesses in their communication skills and mathematical knowledge when they start school are rapidly overcome so that by the end of Reception the majority achieve the goals set in all areas of their learning and a few exceed them.

By the end of Year 2, results in national tests show that pupils consistently reach standards that are significantly above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. These very high test results have been maintained since the last inspection and the high standards are confirmed in the work seen during inspection. This is a remarkable achievement given the variations of ability year on year and the below average starting points of many of the pupils. The very good progress that is made by all ability groups is the result of high quality teaching and very good partnership with parents to support pupils' learning in the basic skills.

The very high standards are maintained in Years 3 and 4, so that by the time pupils leave the school at the end of Year 4, all reach the expected level for their age and a high proportion reach standards that are expected of 11 year olds. The school sets very challenging targets, which are regularly exceeded because it quickly spots any weakness in learning and takes effective steps towards improvement. The continued rise in standards in writing demonstrates the school's success with this, as does the outstanding quality of pupils' writing throughout the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. Pupils love school and their enjoyment of learning is excellent; they tackle challenges with enthusiasm and are confident that no matter what they are asked to do they will succeed and do it well. Their behaviour is always good and often exemplary. Because of these positive attitudes, even minor illnesses do not keep them away from school so their attendance is above average. All pupils feel safe and valued in school because they form very good relationships with adults and their peers and their successes are recognised. Younger children are very well cared for and supported by older pupils whose mature attitudes they admire and imitate. Pupils are proud of the many awards they have helped the school to achieve. They are vigilant about healthy eating and taking exercise and have set up a good system to give feedback to the school about the lunch menu.

From the earliest age children take on responsibility for helping the school run smoothly. By Year 4, they act as playground friends, organise the collection of recyclable

materials and make links with conservation groups to improve not only the school but facilities within the village by planting trees and helping create a pond for wildlife. The school council gives all pupils a say about what should be improved. The decision to restrict football in the playground has been very much welcomed, especially by younger children. By the time pupils leave school, they are very well prepared for the next stage of learning and the challenges of the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding because teachers want the best for every child and the pupils love learning. Teachers' very good knowledge of the needs of pupils means that they set challenging but attainable targets, then ensure that the interesting activities motivate the pupils to learn at a good rate. Teachers are skilled at developing independence in the pupils so that their confidence is very well fostered. The result is that they tackle challenges with energy and enthusiasm and are not reluctant to ask for help should they need it. Pupils say they enjoy learning with a partner or in a small group. Teachers recognise this and provide plenty of opportunities for this to happen. They also make very good use of resources such as the interactive whiteboard to engage pupils and involve them actively in the learning. Teachers' very high expectations are evident in the learning targets they set for the pupils who in turn have a very clear understanding of what they need to do to improve. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very well catered for in lessons. The accurate assessment of their needs and the careful tailoring of programmes ensure that they make the same very good progress as their peers.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding because it provides very well for the wide range of pupils' needs and is planned to respond to their interests and talents. Planning for literacy and numeracy is very thorough and leads to very good progress and above average standards. Teachers, and older pupils, rightly regret the limited computer facilities in the school. While this situation is overcome in part by shared use of facilities with the neighbouring middle school, the access is too fragmented for pupils to make the best progress of which they are capable. The Foundation Stage curriculum is very well planned to ensure that children learn through play and have plenty of opportunity to exercise choice. Pupils' understanding of their own and other cultures is well promoted and pupils have a very good sense of their local history and local traditions.

Pupils learn about their feelings and relationships through the well planned personal, social and health education programme, so that they have plenty of opportunity to explore their feelings and learn about staying safe. Enrichment to learning through extra-curricular activities, visits and visitors, as well as through involvement in the

local community and local environment, is excellent. Throughout the school, high quality displays are testimony to the richness and excitement of the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides excellent care, guidance and support for the pupils. Pupils feel safe and valued because the climate of care and support that pervades the school is exceptional. The needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very well met by careful identification of their needs, very good links with parents and external agencies, and by the high quality support they receive both from teachers and peers. The sense of security created by the school's systems enables pupils to meet the challenging targets that are set for them.

The school has rigorous systems for checking pupils' progress and well-being with prompt and effective action taken when things are not as they should be. Child protection measures are in place and well understood by all in the school. Health and safety and risk assessments are undertaken regularly. All who work in the school are vetted for working with pupils. Parents are unanimous in their view that the school looks after their children very well; many express gratitude for how happy and successful their children are.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management in the school are excellent. This small staff works very closely to monitor the work of the school regularly and rigorously. The school's strengths and areas for improvement are very well understood by staff and governors who know and support the school very well. All staff feel valued for the contribution they make and fully support the headteacher's relentless drive for high standards. The headteacher's pursuit of high standards does not rest only with the pupils. He has the professional development of colleagues equally high on the agenda and this makes a considerable contribution to the expertise and dedication of staff. The school's success at maintaining very high standards is the result of the headteacher's vision and his ability to turn this into effective action through excellent teamwork.

Governors bring a wide range of expertise to the service of the school and make excellent links with parents and the community to promote and strengthen what the school does for pupils. They also create many opportunities for the pupils to contribute to the wider community. Parents feel well involved in the life of the school and are pleased that they are consulted about proposed changes, for example, to school dinners.

The school has improved very well since the last inspection and is very well placed to continue to do so. By maintaining very high standards and very good achievement the school gives very good value for money.

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Inspection judgements

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| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | School Overall |
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Overall effectiveness

| | |
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| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 1 |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 1 |
| The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage | 1 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 1 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 1 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes |

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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|---|---|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 1 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 1 |
| The behaviour of learners | 1 |
| The attendance of learners | 2 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 2 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 1 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 1 |

The quality of provision

| | |
|---|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs? | 1 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 1 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 1 |

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

Leadership and management

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 1 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 1 |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets | 1 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 1 |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 1 |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 1 |
| Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements? | Yes |
| Does this school require special measures? | No |
| Does this school require a notice to improve? | No |

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Allendale First School

Allendale

Hexham

Northumberland

NE47 9PT

8 December 2006

Dear Children

Congratulations on your excellent achievement and hard work. You have helped to make your school so very good that it is outstanding. Thank you all for helping me with my work by telling me about your school and how much you love it. I enjoyed my visit very much because of the exciting things you do and because you were very kind and helpful.

Your school is helping you to develop a lot of important qualities. You learn very well because your teachers work hard to plan interesting activities and you yourselves try very hard with everything you do. Well done! It was a pleasure to see how kind and thoughtful you are with each other and how you help each other in lessons. This really makes a difference because as one of you said, 'There's always someone to help you if you get stuck.' Your considerate behaviour means that your classrooms are calm places where everyone feels safe and happy. Your love of learning is clear in the lovely work which brightens the walls of the school and what a lot of exciting activities you do throughout the year! You are very lucky to have teachers who take so much care over your learning.

It was lovely to see how much you do to keep your school running smoothly through the school council and your work as monitors. You have made some very good improvements and understand that it is possible to make a difference if you try. Your work on recycling, fundraising and the environment are all important to the world you live in now and it prepares you very well for the future. I agree with some of you older pupils that a bit more time working on computers would be a real benefit to your learning. I have asked your headteacher and teachers to make improvements to this in the future.

I felt very lucky to hear you practise for your Christmas concert. Your singing is lovely, and you all enjoy it so much – it must put a smile on the face of anyone who hears it.

My very best wishes for the future go out to all of you. Keep up all the lovely things you do that make your school so very special.

Yours truly

Mrs Moira Fitzpatrick

Inspector