



Spittal First School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 122185
Local Authority Northumberland
Inspection number 292333
Inspection dates 6–7 December 2006
Reporting inspector Gillian Salter-Smith

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

Type of school	First	School address	Spittal
School category	Community		Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland
Age range of pupils	4–9		TD15 1RD
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01289 307413
Number on roll (school)	100	Fax number	01289 307413
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs D Purvis
		Headteacher	Mr Robert Curry
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2002		

Age group 4–9	Inspection dates 6–7 December 2006	Inspection number 292333
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a small school situated in an urban area. Pupils come from areas of significant social and some economic deprivation. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is about the national average. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion with learning difficulties and disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need, is similar to the national average. The school provides facilities for use by Sure Start and the Berwick Family Centre. Privately run, out-of school care includes a breakfast club, an after school club and a holiday club. The school has achieved Healthy School Status.

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. Most parents are very supportive of the school and are right to appreciate the good level of care their children receive. The school has become an important centre of support for children and their families in the local community. The outstanding partnerships created with Sure Start and the Berwick Family Services have been recognised by the local authority in the award to last year for best practice in extended services.

Levels of development when children start school are below average. Standards are broadly average at the end of Key Stage 1 and by the time they leave school in Year 4. Pupils' achievement is good and most pupils make good progress from a low starting point because they are well taught and cared for. Pupils' progress is most secure in mathematics. Standards in writing in Year 2 and in Year 4 are lower than those in mathematics and reading, especially for boys. As the result of the school's focus on improving writing, standards rose in 2006 particularly for the most able pupils. The school is aware of the need to create more opportunities for demanding writing tasks.

Most pupils enjoy school and behaviour is good. They feel safe and secure and appreciate the good support of their teachers and other adults. They enjoy learning in lessons and find most of the work challenging. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves fit and healthy and many enjoy the many sporting activities the school offers. Pupils learn to make a contribution to their own community through the work of the school council and by older pupils taking care of younger pupils. Good development of social skills and secure basic skills prepare them well for their futures.

Good communication with parents, the local nursery and playgroups help children to settle into the Reception class quickly. Well planned play and guided learning activities help pupils to make progress in all areas of learning so that most pupils meet the expected levels by the end of Reception. The vastly improved outdoor learning area is used well to promote learning in all areas of the curriculum.

Leadership and management are good and are leading to improvements in standards, for example in reading across the school and writing for higher attaining pupils. The recent formation of a senior leadership team and releasing the headteacher from classroom teaching have led to a much closer focus on the right priorities. The assessment of pupils' progress is well established and accurate and leads to a good match of lesson activities to pupils' needs. However, the systems used to track pupils' progress are not yet consistent across the school and the use of this information to identify pupils underachieving is not yet frequent enough.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing, especially for boys, by providing more varied and demanding opportunities to write in subjects other than English.
- Develop consistent systems to track pupils' progress so that individual pupils' underachievement can be picked up and tackled more quickly.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

By the end of Year 4, achievement is good and pupils reach broadly average standards in reading, writing and mathematics with writing being the weakest subject relatively. Standards shown by the results of the 2006 optional tests for Year 4 pupils improved on the previous year, especially in writing, due to the school's focus on improving writing. Boys' standards are lower than girls' in reading and writing but better in mathematics. Most pupils made good progress in mathematics and writing, including the most able. A small group of lower attaining boys did not do as well as they should in reading. The school has since introduced more rigorous teaching of reading which is leading to improved progress.

Standards by the end of Year 2 are broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics. The 2006 assessments of pupils at the end of Year 2 showed improvement on the 2005 standards, especially for the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels in reading and writing which, in 2005, were below the national average. In Reception, pupils make good progress and most pupils reach the expected levels of development for their age. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported and make similar progress to all other pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Pupils enjoy coming to school and the rate of attendance is just above average. Unauthorised absence is higher than usual because many families take holidays during term time. Pupils enjoy the challenge of the work they do in lessons. The vast majority behave well in lessons and around the school. A very small number of pupils, often those with social and emotional difficulties, find it more difficult to behave well. The rare incidents of bullying are taken seriously and pupils feel they are dealt with effectively. Pupils have a good understanding of how to develop a healthy lifestyle. School meals provide healthy options but the school has not yet found a way to ensure that pupils taking a packed lunch eat as healthily as they could. Pupils take on a wide range of responsibilities within the school. Older pupils enjoy looking after the younger pupils and the well organised school council has helped to improve the playground facilities. Pupils make a good contribution to the local community. They have helped to design a local paddling pool and enjoyed talking with elderly people about life in World War II. These responsibilities and the development of good basic skills help to prepare them well for their futures. Work in lessons develops pupils' awareness of different religions. However, in this predominantly White British area, pupils have little direct contact and understanding of the diversity of cultures in modern day Britain.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good and lead to pupils making good progress. Good relationships between pupils and teachers are based on trust, respect and high expectations. Pupils value the reward system that encourages positive attitudes to learning and considerate behaviour. Well planned lessons include a good range of learning activities that motivate pupils and encourage work in pairs and groups. Teachers' good subject knowledge helps them to plan clear steps in learning.

Systems to assess pupils' work regularly are in place and the school has carried out moderation exercises to ensure their accuracy. This helps teachers to plan activities that challenge more able pupils and provide pupils with individual learning targets in reading and writing. Pupils find these targets help them to know what they need to concentrate on. Numeracy targets are not yet fully in place across the school. Work is marked regularly and pupils find teachers' comments on how to improve very useful, though they are not always expected to respond to them. Regular homework, often supported well by parents, contributes to pupils' progress.

Teaching assistants are well briefed by teachers on how to support lower attaining pupils and those with learning difficulties and disabilities. Most individual educational plans for these pupils are helpful for planning learning but, in a few, the targets set are not specific enough.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good curriculum that meets pupils' needs. Statutory requirements are met. More able pupils are challenged in lessons and, when appropriate, some pupils take lessons alongside older pupils in a nearby middle school. The curriculum includes modern foreign languages for all pupils and philosophy which helps to develop pupils' thinking skills. A programme of personal, social and health education supports pupils' good personal development. Basic skills of literacy and numeracy are well planned and taught as separate subjects but opportunities to use basic skills, such as writing, in subjects across the curriculum are not fully developed. Visitors to the school and local visits bring excitement to learning. Many pupils benefit from a good range of extra-curricular activities, particularly in sports.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Positive relationships between staff and pupils underpin good care, support and guidance. Health and safety checks of the school environment are in place and risk assessments for all visits are carried out. All staff have had recent training in child protection procedures. The required checks on staff working with children are in place.

The extended school arrangements provide much additional support for pupils and their families and the school has become an important centre of activity within the community. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported and the school works well in partnership with local agencies to provide appropriate support for them.

Pupils' progress is assessed regularly but there is no common system in place to record their progress and identify pupils who are underachieving. The school has plans to improve the system.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has worked successfully in close partnership with local agencies to establish the school as a centre for additional family support at the heart of the local community. His strong commitment to the well-being and achievement of every pupil is shared by all staff. They are a strong team who work hard to do their best for the pupils. The recently established leadership group and the release of the headteacher from a heavy teaching commitment have led to significant improvement in the strategic leadership of the school. A cycle of school improvement, based on regular checks on pupils' progress, analysis of key assessments and the monitoring of classroom practice is now established. This has led to clear priorities for improvement and actions that have led to increases in pupils' achievement, for example, most recently by more able pupils in writing.

Governance is good and is very supportive of the school. Governors take on a vigorous monitoring role and ensure that the school is held to account. There has been a significant underspend in recent years, in part due to fluctuations in the number of pupils on roll, and prudence in spending. It is set to be reduced within the next two years. Value for money is satisfactory.

Significant improvements have been made since the last inspection, for example, in the provision and use of information and communication technology equipment, the good quality outdoor play area and the increased responsibilities taken on by pupils. The school is well placed to improve further.

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Inspection judgements

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

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
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	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

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

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

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

Spittal First School

Spittal

Berwick-upon-Tweed

Northumberland

TD15 1RD

6 December 2006

Dear Pupils

Many thanks to you all for making me feel so very welcome in your school. I enjoyed meeting and talking to so many of you and seeing all of you hard at work in lessons. It is important that you know what I found out about your school.

You have a good school that helps you to do well in your work and takes good care of you all. I agree with you that your teachers and the other adults in school are friendly and help you to do your best. You make good progress in your work, especially in mathematics. Some of you need to improve your writing skills. Your teachers agree with me that it would be a good idea to find more exciting ways to practise writing, not just in literacy lessons. Your teachers keep a close eye on how well you are doing. They are improving their systems for this in order to make sure that no one gets behind.

It was good to see that so many of you enjoy school, behave well and enjoy learning. It was also good to see that you take your responsibilities seriously. The school council is doing a good job on your behalf by making sure that your points of view are heard. I could see how much you enjoy the improvements to your playground that they helped to design.

Your school is a special part of the community. It is a centre for help and support for families in many different ways.

I do hope that you continue to do well and enjoy your time at Spittal First School.

Yours sincerely

Gillian Salter-Smith (Mrs)

Additional Inspector