



Whittonstall First School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 122235
Local Authority Northumberland
Inspection number 292347
Inspection dates 30 November –1 December 2006
Reporting inspector Christine Inkster

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

Type of school	First	School address	Whittonstall
School category	Community		Consett, County Durham
Age range of pupils	3–9		DH8 9JN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01207 560325
Number on roll (school)	73	Fax number	01207 560325
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Dr R Briel
		Headteacher	Mrs Sheila Coulson
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2002		

Age group 3–9	Inspection dates 30 November –1 December 2006	Inspection number 292347
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Whittonstall First School is a small rural school in Northumberland. Pupils are mainly from a White British background and the proportion entitled to free school meals is very low in comparison with the national average, as is the percentage of pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities.

The headteacher is currently on secondment at another school, but maintains a strategic overview of the development at Whittonstall First School. The senior management team are responsible for running the school in her absence. The school has been successful in gaining the Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark award twice and the Northumberland Healthy School Standard award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Whittonstall First School is a good school with some outstanding features. The headteacher ensures that pupils and staff benefit from a wide variety of partnership and networking arrangements. The professional development of the senior management team has been enhanced by taking on the leadership role during the headteacher's temporary absence. They have ensured that the school continues to move forward.

Children enter the Foundation Stage with skills and knowledge broadly in line with those expected for their age. They achieve very well and are well prepared for Key Stage 1. By the end of Key Stage 1 pupils' results are above the national average and demonstrate good progress from their starting points. Overall, pupils progress well and leave school with standards that are above those achieved nationally. Those pupils who are more able and those who have learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress. This is because of the good teaching and excellent support they receive.

The school knows itself well. Regular monitoring of provision gives a very clear idea of the strengths and areas for improvement. Governors and staff work well together to plan improvement. The plans put in place are regularly evaluated to ensure that the actions taken are making a difference to pupils' achievements. For example, strategies to raise standards in writing resulted in notable improvements. This was a key issue in the last inspection and is an example of the school's good capacity to improve further.

The quality of teaching and learning in the school is good overall and some is outstanding. Where teaching and learning are outstanding, pupils are highly involved in assessing their own and others work and are able to explain precisely what they have to do to improve. However, although developing, this is not fully embedded to the same degree across the school. Strengths in teaching and learning include the well planned opportunities for speaking and listening through 'talk partners' and the effective use of questioning.

The well planned curriculum caters appropriately for the individual needs and interests of pupils. Plans are in place to revise the curriculum and develop further links between subjects, in line with new initiatives and to make learning more relevant and purposeful for pupils.

The personal development and well being of pupils is outstanding. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are excellent. They demonstrate their ability to take responsibility for aspects of their own learning, by, for example, setting personal targets for improvement, which are shared with parents. They appreciate all that the school does for them and show a high level of care and concern for each other. They enjoy opportunities to take responsibility such as acting as playground buddies or lunchtime monitors. Pupils are prepared well for their future economic well-being, for example, by taking part in a Young Enterprise scheme. They make a positive contribution to the community in many ways, including becoming involved in a range of fundraising activities.

What the school should do to improve further

- Build on the current strengths in teaching and learning by sharing excellent practice.
- Ensure consistency in the use of strategies to enable pupils to assess their achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Attainment on entry to the Foundation Stage varies, but is broadly typical of children of a similar age. Children make good progress, with most achieving well, by the end of Reception. Pupils of all abilities make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics in Key Stage 1. Results in the 2005 national tests were above average in all subjects and a high proportion attained the higher levels. In 2006, pupils achieved similarly high standards. Writing has shown the most significant improvement over time, with the exception of 2006, when the results dipped slightly. However, results in mathematics have not shown the same level of improvement over time.

Standards in reading, writing and mathematics are above average by the time pupils leave school. The school clearly identifies areas for improvement and takes the right steps to bring these about. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities receive high quality support and make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. Their behaviour is excellent and they flourish in the very caring, supportive and inclusive environment provided by the school. Pupils really enjoy school and this is one reason for the high levels of attendance. Pupils are very keen to learn and are growing in self-confidence and self-esteem. Older pupils appreciate opportunities to take responsibility, particularly in providing support for younger pupils. This is apparent even amongst the youngest children in the Nursery, whose development has been enhanced by sharing the learning environment with Reception children.

Pupils develop very good relationships with adults and with each other. Pupils are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles: they know about healthy food and enjoy regular opportunities for exercise. They trust the adults who work with them and feel safe in their care. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. Through opportunities to participate in Indian dance and learn other languages, pupils are developing an awareness of cultural traditions other than their own. Pupils make a positive contribution to the community in many ways, for example, becoming involved in fundraising activities and taking on roles of responsibility. They have participated in a Young Enterprise scheme which has enabled them to develop skills needed for the workplace. They are developing good basic skills and the ability to work together as part of a team. The school council plays an influential role in school life, for example, in designing the play area and promoting healthy lifestyles.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good and is outstanding in some areas. It leads to pupils making good progress. Teamwork and very good relationships between staff and pupils promote success and a positive approach to learning. Skilled teaching assistants work effectively in supporting the learning of individuals and groups. Teachers have good subject knowledge and they plan well to meet the needs of the different age and ability groups in each class. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and challenge them to give of their best. The use of specialist teaching engages and motivates pupils. Every effort is made to make learning fun and to involve pupils actively.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is of good quality. It is broad, balanced and relevant with a particularly clear focus on developing reading, writing, communication, number and ICT skills. In the Foundation Stage, the stimulating curriculum promotes good progress. Pupils of all ages benefit from visits, for example, to explore local farms or to the theatre and regular visitors enhance the curriculum and widen the experience of pupils. A particular strength of the curriculum is the provision for regular speaking and listening opportunities during lessons, which develop pupils' thinking skills. Pupils enjoy a range of extra-curricular activities, including residential visits, an after-school club, sports and arts.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding because all teachers and support staff understand the needs of pupils extremely well, and have their best interests at heart. Pupils are confident to talk to staff about any concerns they have and demonstrate great care for one another. The school's highly effective systems for tracking progress ensure that pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities have their needs identified early. They benefit from very good support from additional staff and programmes which help to meet their particular needs. Teachers provide good guidance to pupils on how they can improve their work through marking and feedback. Challenging targets are set for pupils, which encourage them to achieve their best. Procedures to protect pupils are clear and understood by all. The school carries out regular risk assessments and has thorough health and safety checks in place. Procedures for safeguarding learners meet requirements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are very effective. The head teacher provides very good strategic leadership. During her absence on secondment, senior members of staff are continuing to provide vision, direction and drive for school improvement. The work of the teachers and support staff is regularly monitored and evaluated in order to secure further improvements. Good teamwork is well established and there is a strong commitment and determination among staff and governors to raise standards. Priority is given to the professional development of all staff and is linked closely and effectively to school improvement. This is enhanced by the extensive links with other schools, which are providing valuable opportunities for staff to share good practice and further develop their skills. The governing body provides excellent strategic direction and is closely involved in all aspects of the work of the school. The governors act as a 'critical friend' and hold the school to account. They ensure that their statutory duties are met.

There has been good improvement since the last inspection in the key area identified. The capacity of the school to sustain and make further improvements is good and the school gives good value for money.

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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?	2
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	2
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	1
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	2
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?	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?	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

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	1
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	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

Whittonstall First School

Whittonstall

Consett

County Durham

DH8 9JN

1 December 2006

Dear Children

Thank you so much for your help when I visited your school with my colleague, Mrs Hatton, on 30 November and 1 December 2006. We particularly enjoyed talking to you about the work you were doing and what you thought about your school. Please would you pass on my thanks to your parents and carers for returning the questionnaires and tell them we took all their views into account.

I thought you might like to know what we thought about your school.

- Your school is a good school and some areas of its work are excellent.
- We were very impressed by your excellent behaviour and the way in which you support and care for each other.
- Your results in reading, writing and mathematics are above average.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good and some is outstanding.
- We know your teachers work very well as a team and have your best interests at heart. They look after you very well and ensure that you are safe.
- Your headteacher, senior teachers and the governors are leading and managing the school very well.

Your teachers work very hard and they want to make your school even better. To help them do this, I have asked if they could:

- learn from each other and share ideas to ensure that all teaching becomes outstanding.

Thank you for all your help and I wish you all every success in the future. You should be very proud of yourselves and your school.

Mrs Christine Inkster

Additional Inspector