

Wooler First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number 122236

Local Authority Northumberland

Inspection number 292348

Inspection dates15–16 March 2007Reporting inspectorMargaret Shepherd

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

Type of school First

School category Community

Age range of pupils 4-9
Gender of pupils Mixed

Number on roll

School 101

Appropriate authorityThe governing bodyChairMrs Sarah DavidsonHeadteacherMrs Deborah Currans

Date of previous school inspection1 May 2001School addressRyecroft Way

Wooler

Northumberland NE71 6EB

 Telephone number
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Age group 4–9

Inspection dates 15–16 March 2007

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The school is smaller than average and serves a large isolated rural area. The social and economic circumstances are very mixed, with a high proportion of seasonal employment. Children enter the school with average standards. The school is predominantly White British, with a very small proportion of Chinese pupils who have English as an additional language. Most of the school staff had been extremely well-established for over twenty years, but in the past 18 months there have been considerable staffing changes, including a different headteacher as well as a newly qualified teacher.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 2 Good

Grade 3 Satisfactory
Grade 4 Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school, which parents value greatly. The headteacher has very effectively managed the transition from the well established staff team, to the current mixture of short and long term serving members of staff. Her clear vision for taking the school forward, combined with her determination to sustain the strengths of the school, works very well in ensuring that the school steadily develops its provision. Achievement is good. Children join the school with standards that are average and leave it with standards that are above average. Standards in writing are well above average due to the school making this a priority for improvement. Pupils write sensitively across a range of different styles and produce pieces of work with good grammar and spelling. The school is very successful in providing equal opportunities, resulting in good achievement across all groups of pupils.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good with some outstanding features. Staff provide good levels of care, support and guidance and use the advantages of being a small school very well. Pupils willingly take responsibility for each other, with older pupils caring for younger pupils in the context of one big happy family. Pupils contribute well to the school and the local community. Behaviour is outstanding around the school and in lessons. Pupils thoroughly enjoy their learning and settle quickly to complete their tasks. Attendance rates are good. Pupils have a good understanding of safe and healthy living, which is particularly related to where they live. There is strong emphasis on swimming in order to keep healthy and to keep safe in a town with a river running through it. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils are very respectful during prayers and appreciate their own and other cultures. They are well prepared for their future lives through developing good levels of basic skills and by attending events that help them to understand the economics of their own locality, such as the annual agricultural day.

Teaching and learning are good. A key feature is the high quality partnership between teachers and teaching assistants. The school provides a well balanced curriculum with plenty of opportunities to enrich learning through visitors into school and visits out. Provision in Reception is satisfactory and by the time they enter Year 1, standards are at the expected level. There are not enough opportunities for children to develop independent learning skills through play, either in the classroom or in the outdoor area.

Leadership and management are good. Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Many of the different subjects have new co-ordinators. Teachers are keen to develop their new roles and are in a good position to extend their responsibilities through the school. There has been improvement since the previous inspection and there is a good capacity to succeed in future. The school provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the provision for independent learning through play in Reception in the classroom and adjoining outdoor area.
- Extend the leadership and management roles of the subject coordinators.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good and standards are above average. Children enter the school with standards that are broadly average. They make satisfactory progress in Reception and standards are at the expected level by the end of that year. Progress accelerates in Years 1 and 2 because the provision matches these pupils' needs very well. National test results show that standards at the end of Year 2 have been consistently above average over time. They were particularly high in 2004. In 2006, standards in writing were well above average. This was a result of the school working hard to improve their provision in this area of the curriculum. This inspection confirms the standards in the national tests. Writing remains a strength, with pupils producing lively and interesting work, such as the Year 2 pupil who began an account with, 'It was pitch black last night and I nearly fell out of my seat.' Data shows that progress of pupils last year in Years 3 and 4 was satisfactory. The inspection judges that progress has improved this year in these two classes and is now good.

Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress because the support staff work very skilfully with individuals in lessons. These pupils develop very good levels of confidence due to the sensitive support they receive. Pupils with English as an additional language achieve well. Teachers plan carefully to support them in acquiring English vocabulary, which allows them to express themselves more clearly. More able pupils achieve well throughout the school, and outstandingly in mathematics in Year 4, due to the high quality specialist support that individuals receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

This is good with outstanding features. Pupils have a good understanding of healthy living. Their knowledge about keeping safe is very well tuned to the particular hazards of their own environment; for example, in their understanding of the dangers of farm machinery. Attendance levels are good and pupils thoroughly enjoy coming to school. They have very positive attitudes towards their work and settle very quickly to complete their tasks. Behaviour is excellent. The Reception class teacher is skilful in helping children to manage inappropriate behaviour and this sets the trend throughout the school. Pupils appreciate the importance of contributing to their school community and the wider community of the town. Older pupils look after younger pupils very sensitively during occasions such as lunchtimes. Spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils are very respectful in prayers and respond sensitively to opportunities to express their feelings; such as, in their paintings of storms. Their understanding of their own and others' cultures is good because the school organises very interesting whole school events or visits to places like the Sage in Newcastle. Links with a school in India are very effective in extending pupils' appreciation of their own lifestyles compared with children living in very different circumstances to their own. Pupils are well prepared for their future lives. They have good basic skills. Experiences such as the agriculture day help them to understand the economics of their own rural community.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. All staff work in fruitful partnership with their teaching assistants. The management of behaviour is outstanding and ensures that pupils can concentrate on their learning. Teachers organise a good balance of practical tasks and discussion within lessons. In Reception, too much time is spent in whole class sessions. This reduces opportunities for children to extend their learning through independent activities and does not allow enough time for adults to work with small groups or individuals to support their particular needs. Staff use the assessment systems well, particularly since they have been simplified. Work on supporting pupils in assessing their own learning has only just been introduced. Staff are beginning to use these strategies in lessons but they are not used consistently.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a well-balanced and interesting curriculum. Staff have worked very hard to produce annual and termly plans to meet the needs of mixed age classes and the new systems are working well. The interactive whiteboards supports the development of information and communication technology skills effectively. The school is aware of the need to provide more computers in classes to extend opportunities for pupils to develop their skills further. The curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is good. The school works hard to ensure that these pupils' progress is tracked carefully and that their curriculum is flexible enough to match their changing needs. The Reception curriculum does not provide enough opportunities for learning through play across each of the areas of learning either in the classroom or outdoors. The school uses visitors and visits out very effectively to enrich pupils' learning experiences and this has a positive impact on their academic and personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The whole staff use the advantages of being a small school to support individuals to very good effect. They all know the pupils very well and share their knowledge of individuals with each other. This results in sensitive and good quality care, guidance and support. The effectiveness of the school's partnership with parents is evident in their very positive views of the work of the school. A parent wrote of her child, 'Her learning and personal development are clearly flourishing in an environment where her individual needs are responded to on a daily basis.' The school has recently introduced a well organised system for setting targets. There has not yet been enough time to evaluate the success of this strategy. Safeguarding systems are in place and pupils say that they are confident to turn to a wide range of different people if they had any worries. Links with the middle school are good and pupils feel well prepared for their transfer. Parents say that they are very pleased with the sensitive way that their children are supported when they join the school, either at the beginning of Reception and or partway during their education.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The good quality leadership and management of the senior staff and governors have ensured that academic and personal standards are good despite the significant changes to staffing over the past 18 months. The headteacher provides very effective leadership. She has a very clear vision of how she wants to take the work of the school forward and manages change whilst sustaining the existing strengths of the school. Together with the governors, she manages to combine the skills of the well-established staff with those of the new in order to extend the quality of the school's provision. The whole school promotes equal opportunities excellently, considering carefully how every pupil's needs should be met. The reorganisation in the roles of coordinators and governors' subject responsibilities means that the leadership and management in these areas are in the early stages. Teachers are very keen to develop their work in these new roles. The organisation and monitoring of finances is thorough. There have good levels of improvement since the previous inspection despite the changes in leadership and staff. The combination of the determined leadership of the headteacher, the governors' good understanding of the school and the community, the commitment of the whole staff team and the good levels of self-evaluation means that there is a good capacity for future improvement.



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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4		
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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	3
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?	2
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	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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement	2
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	1
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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Wooler First School

Ryecroft Way

Wooler

Northumberland

NE71 6EB

19 March 2007

Dear Pupils,

Thank you for being so welcoming to me when I came to your school. You were all so friendly and helpful in answering my questions. I was really impressed with how you all work so hard in your different subjects. I thought that your writing was particularly good and full of interesting ideas. Your teachers work really well with the teaching assistants and this makes sure that you all learn new skills and understand what you have to do in lessons. Your standard of work is higher than expected for your age.

Your behaviour is excellent. The older pupils look after the younger ones really well. You have a good understanding of how to keep safe, particularly when you are out in the community in places like farms and the river running through your town. Your assembly was wonderful and I thought the volunteers made really good choices about swapping their eggs in the end. You say your prayers really respectfully and you have an excellent understanding about the culture around you and in India. You have some really interesting visitors into school and visits out in the community. The pupils that I talked to remembered the visits very well and I thoroughly enjoyed the song and the dance that they remembered from your time at the Sage. Your headteacher and governors work very well together to make your school an even better place and all the staff in your school look after you very well.

In the Reception class, your staff are going to give you more help in choosing different activities for yourself and make sure that you have lots of activities to play with on your own or with your friends. This will happen in your classroom and in the outside area. Through the whole school, you will see more of the other teachers in your classrooms. They will be looking to see how you are learning across lots of different subjects. You can help these teachers by explaining what you are doing and how it is helping you to improve your work.

I really enjoyed my visit to your school and I hope that you all do your best in future to make it an even better place to learn.

Yours sincerely,

Maggi Shepherd

Additional Inspector