



The Sele First School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 122242
Local Authority Northumberland
Inspection number 292350
Inspection date 5 October 2006
Reporting inspector Janice Stephenson

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

Type of school	First	School address	The Sele
School category	Community		Hexham, Northumberland
Age range of pupils	3-9		NE46 3QZ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01434 602808
Number on roll (school)	472	Fax number	01434 606077
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Professor Andrew Hall
		Headteacher	Mrs Margaret Anderson
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The Sele First School is larger than average and has a Nursery with 78 part-time places. Virtually all pupils are from White British families. The school has a smaller than average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. Very few pupils claim free school meals. When children start school, their levels of knowledge and understanding vary widely but are generally above those expected for their age. The Sele is a very popular school and about a quarter of children are admitted from outside the area. There is a before and after school club.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The Sele First School provides a first class quality education within a safe, secure and very stimulating environment. The school judges itself to be outstanding and it is right to do so. As one parent said, 'you cannot better this school. The place has a happy and caring philosophy'. It is a school where the achievements, personal development and well-being of pupils are the first priority for everyone involved. The supportive yet challenging culture allows pupils to flourish as individuals, making excellent progress and reaching very high standards. Outstanding links with parents, schools and other agencies contribute to the excellent provision it offers.

The leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The school's success is down to the unremitting determination of the headteacher, staff and governors to provide the very best education for the pupils in their care. Pupils are provided with an interesting range of rich and exciting learning opportunities, both in and out of school, and are taught the basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics very well. Consequently, they have the tools necessary to be confident, successful learners. This is borne out by the outstanding achievements of pupils.

Children make a very good start to school in the Nursery and Reception classes and by the end of Key Stage 1, standards are consistently well above average. The proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels is also well above average. This excellent progress continues in Years 3 and 4 so that, by the time they leave school, pupils are achieving standards that are much higher than national expectations. This is because the quality of teaching is consistently very high across the school. All staff know the pupils exceptionally well and provide experiences that are interesting and challenging. Assessment systems are rigorous and provide staff with a very clear picture of what needs to be done to ensure that all pupils reach the highest standards they can.

The school's strong commitment to a broad and dynamic curriculum means that pupils have rich opportunities to develop their skills and talents in a wider range of subjects including art, music and sport. All pupils have an excellent understanding of how to stay healthy, keep themselves and others safe and how to become responsible members of their school and local community. The school sees these skills as being paramount to the pupils' becoming successful young citizens.

Governors have used the school's finances extremely imaginatively. They have transformed an old but beautiful building into a splendid modern learning environment, fit for education in the 21st Century. The school gives excellent value for money and is exceptionally well placed to continue to be very successful.

What the school should do to improve further

- There are no significant areas for improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The pupils achieve exceptionally well and attain standards that are well above average. Very effective and consistently high quality teaching ensures that all pupils, no matter what their backgrounds or abilities, achieve very well. Children join the school with levels of attainment that are above those typical for their age. They make very good progress in the Foundation Stage so that, by the time they enter Year 1, they are working beyond the learning goals expected for their age. This very good start is continued in Key Stage 1 and, by the age of seven, pupils are attaining standards that are consistently well above average. This learning accelerates in Years 3 and 4 and, by the time pupils leave the school, they are attaining standards that are significantly well above national expectations. Many pupils in each year group achieve much higher levels than those expected nationally. Standards in writing are now rising rapidly because the school has adopted different teaching styles and resources that capture and engage the interest of all pupils.

Standards in all other subjects, including information and communication technology (ICT), are very high because the school believes firmly in a broad and rich curriculum, as well as ensuring that pupils' individual skills and talents are very well developed.

Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make very good progress because work is carefully tailored to their needs and abilities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The pupils' personal development and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. Pupils are very regular attendees who enjoy school very much. Parents said their children really enjoy school. One pupil enthusiastically declared, 'I like school so much that I would like to come in the evenings and at weekends'. Pupils are exceptionally polite, friendly and behave brilliantly because they realise that this makes living in the school community so much easier. They take every opportunity to care for each other, so that everyone feels safe. This can be seen in the work of older pupils who help the younger ones either as reading and mathematics 'buddies' or 'Munch Bunch' leaders who help out at lunchtimes. Pupils are very proud of the contribution they make to the school and sincerely believe that they 'make a difference'. This is borne out by the fact that they now eat their packed lunches in the gym because it offers them more social space and they have new equipment to play with in the yard. The pupils understand the benefits of healthy eating and parents say that their children tell them what constitutes a healthy lunch box. The 'Altogether Active' programme and the good amount of time allocated to physical education ensure that all pupils fully understand the importance of physical activity.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Consistently high quality teaching ensures that pupils achieve very well and attain very high standards. Relationships are excellent and pupils respond extremely positively to teachers' high expectations for work and behaviour. Lessons are planned meticulously and excellent resources, including very good ICT, are used to further support and extend pupils' thinking and learning. Pupils listen very attentively and concentrate exceptionally well. Teachers are expert in challenging and motivating pupils, inspiring them to work harder and to achieve very well. Information from assessments and tests is used very effectively to pinpoint each pupil's progress and carefully identify the next steps in learning. Well matched, interesting and challenging work brings meaning, relevance and enjoyment to learning. Staff are always on hand to extend pupils' knowledge and understanding through sharp questioning and supportive comments. Teaching assistants are highly skilled and work very effectively to raise standards for pupils of all abilities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The excellent curriculum is rich, vibrant and adapted extremely well to suit the needs of all pupils. Innovative approaches, such as the 'Early Birds' reading club and the mathematics programme for gifted pupils, support the learning of particular groups of pupils. The many excellent additional opportunities, including teaching older pupils French and Japanese and the breakfast and after school clubs, all contribute to pupils' highly successful learning experiences. Achievements in music, physical education and the arts are very good because the school carefully builds opportunities for these subjects into the school day and beyond. For instance, around 100 pupils are learning a musical instrument and older pupils performed at the SAGE in Gateshead with the Southbank Sinfonia.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school's outstanding level of care, guidance and support for all its pupils enables them to be highly successful learners. Virtually all parents are pleased with the school and realise that staff are working extremely hard to ensure that their children are happy, safe and secure learners. This emphasis on being secure is seen in the way the youngest children settle happily into their classes. Child protection procedures and all other checks to safeguard pupils' welfare, health and safety are in place. Highly skilled support staff provide excellent support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. Pupils' academic progress is meticulously tracked and they know exactly what they need to do to improve their work through clear targets and teachers' effective marking.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher's outstanding leadership and management are pivotal to the school's success. She is extremely well respected and an excellent role model to everyone. One child said, 'Mrs Anderson is the best headteacher ever, because she knows everyone in the school and she organises brilliant things'. She is supported extremely well by an excellent deputy headteacher, senior leaders, staff and governors. There is a superb team spirit amongst everyone and all are encouraged to develop and use their particular skills to promote pupils' learning and well-being. Improvements since the last inspection have been excellent and the school is very skilful at evaluating its provision and performance. There is a thorough and very rigorous monitoring programme in place to ensure consistently high quality teaching in all classes and subjects. The leadership team is highly motivated and is always seeking new challenges. When initiatives are put into place, the team provides training for staff and then monitors and evaluates its success in improving standards.

Governors are very knowledgeable about the school and are rigorous and challenging in their desire to ensure continuous improvement in standards and the best education for all pupils. The chair of governors contributes significantly to the work of the school and he says that it is 'a rich and wonderful place to be'.

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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?	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

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

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	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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

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

The Sele First School

The Sele

Hexham

Northumberland

NE46 3QZ

6 October 2006

Dear Pupils

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school recently. I really enjoyed being in your school. You helped me to understand how it works and what makes it such a brilliant place.

I was very impressed with everything that I saw during my visit. You are all very successful and enthusiastic learners who work really hard and behave extremely well. I wonder if you know that your work is a whole lot better than it is in most schools. Isn't that brilliant and something to live up to? You told me that you enjoy school very much and this shows in the obvious pride you have when talking about all the different things you do. I will never forget the fantastic work that was on display. It's some of the best I have ever seen. One of you said to me, 'This school is great because it's fun and exciting'. I agree with you!

I could see you enjoy helping to make important decisions about your school. I was very interested to hear that some of you are now enjoying your lunches more because you have additional seating space in the gym. Also, you told me about the new exciting equipment for outdoor play. This will mean you will never get bored at playtimes.

The main aim of all the adults in your school is to give you a very good start in life. I think you are very lucky to go to such an excellent school, where staff work so hard to make lessons fun and help you to learn so much. Your headteacher has excellent ideas about how to make the school an even better place for you to be.

I hope you will continue to enjoy school as much as you do now and that it will help you to become happy and successful adults.

Jan Stephenson

(Inspector)