



Ashington Central First School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 131021
Local Authority Northumberland
Inspection number 293690
Inspection dates 23–24 November 2006
Reporting inspector Penny Parrish

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Milburn Road
School category	Community		Ashington, Northumberland
Age range of pupils	3–9		NE63 0AX
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01670 810570
Number on roll (school)	450	Fax number	01670 810573
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Anne Jacklin
		Headteacher	Mr Mick Spencer
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2002		

Age group 3–9	Inspection dates 23–24 November 2006	Inspection number 293690
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Ashington Central is a larger than average school set in a former mining town close to the Northumberland coast. The school serves a community with high levels of social and economic disadvantage. About a third of the pupils, an above average proportion, are entitled to free school meals. An average proportion is identified with learning difficulties and disabilities. The majority of pupils are of White British background. A small number of those with a minority ethnic heritage are in the early stages of learning English as a new language.

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, with some outstanding features, that provides good value for money. It works within a challenging social context where many of the pupils need considerable help and encouragement to enable them to learn successfully. The school's mission statement of 'the best we can in all that we do' sums up the strong commitment of the headteacher and staff to creating innovative and effective provision to promote the children's good achievement and progress. Most parents strongly support what the school does for their children.

Pupils' personal development is good. They enjoy school, behaviour is good and they respond well to the interesting activities and projects provided for learning. Pupils are helped to understand the benefits of a healthy diet and lifestyle and the school is supported by most parents in this endeavour, although some express dissatisfaction with the need to provide healthy lunch boxes. Attendance rates are a little below the national average, because a small proportion of pupils are irregular attenders. Pupils are aware of their rights and responsibilities, and enjoy the opportunities for expressing their views that the new school council gives. The school contributes well to the community, for example, by working with a local artist to design the roadway to the school entrance.

The quality of teaching and learning is good, promoting good progress and achievement for all pupils. On admission to school, children's attainment is well below average overall, especially with regard to personal and social development and communication skills. Provision in the Foundation Stage is outstanding and the children make rapid progress. Remarkably, most children reach the learning goals set nationally for the end of Reception. By Year 2, test results show that good progress is maintained and standards are meeting, and sometimes exceeding, national averages in reading and mathematics. The picture is not quite as good in writing; although an average number meet national standards, too few reach the higher levels. In Years 3 and 4, the school's data show a decline in the pupils' rate of progress and fewer pupils reach the levels of attainment set nationally for the age group in reading, writing and mathematics. Throughout the school, boys' attainment tends to be lower than that of the girls although both make similar progress. The curriculum is good; a recent restructure is helping to invigorate learning, for boys especially. Pupils are well cared for and supported. Guidance for pupils on how well they are doing has been recently improved and puts them in a good position to make further improvements in their progress once the new systems become embedded and used consistently through the school.

Leadership and management are good, with outstanding strengths evident within the senior leadership team. Management systems and strategies are innovative and enable staff and governors to fulfil their roles and responsibilities well. The school is clearly set on an upward spiral of good improvement; the capacity for further improvement is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure the progress and attainment of pupils in Years 3 and 4 is as consistently good as in the rest of the school.
- Raise standards in writing.
- Raise the attainment of boys to match that of girls.
- Improve the attendance of pupils who find difficulty in attending regularly.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are average overall, progress is good and pupils achieve well. In the Foundation Stage, children get off to a flying start. Outstandingly good provision means that most achieve the learning goals set nationally for the end Reception, despite their early starting point. Results in national tests and assessments at the end of Year 2 reflect the work seen in school and are in line with the national average, showing good progress through Key Stage 1. Challenging targets are met and often exceeded year-on-year in reading and mathematics. Standards in writing are not as high. Too few pupils attain at higher levels and standards in writing are below the national average overall. In Years 3 and 4, school data show that the rate of progress slows, targets are not always achieved and standards fall back to below average. The school is focused on a thorough approach to resolving this weakness through improvements in teaching styles, a revised curriculum and improved guidance to pupils on their next steps for learning. There is clear evidence that these actions are taking effect, and helping boys especially to improve their attainment. Throughout the school, pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are supported well to ensure their good progress. Those using English as an additional language benefit from the good provision in the school, quickly gain in confidence and achieve well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development is good. The school has worked hard to achieve this success since the last inspection, when behaviour and pupils' attitudes were significant issues for development. The school is a very orderly community and behaviour is good. Occasional difficulties that arise are dealt with through well-established strategies, understood by all. The very good start in the Nursery helps all to settle quickly into school and to enjoy learning. This includes the high proportion with limited personal and social development on admission. A thoughtful curriculum and good relationships throughout the school ensure that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Links with other school in Europe and China, for example, broaden pupils' horizons and their understanding of other ways of life. Pupils work together well, develop sound basic skills and are well prepared for their future education and economic well-being. Attendance is a little below the national average; although most pupils attend school regularly, some parents find difficulty in ensuring the children come to school daily.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Classrooms provide a stimulating environment and recent initiatives have enlivened the style of teaching and the quality of teachers' marking. Good strategies are employed for establishing positive relationships with pupils, encouraging good behaviour and evident enjoyment. Well-planned, interesting activities cater effectively for the differing needs of pupils. Teachers' high expectations are made clear through the displayed targets set for pupils' learning and clear discussion of learning objectives set for each lesson and for termly topics. Typically, lessons have drive and a good sense of purpose. Occasionally in lessons, the pace is less intense and pupils gradually lose concentration. There are examples of outstanding teaching, in the Foundation Stage and the rest of the school, where teachers' understanding of how children learn is excellent and exemplary use is made of the teacher's subject knowledge. An innovative adjustment to the daily timetable has given valuable time for feedback to pupils on what has been accomplished and how their learning can improve. Pupils say that they appreciate these helpful opportunities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It fully meets national requirements, takes good account of national initiatives and addresses the need to develop pupils' basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology well. In the Foundation Stage, innovative provision of high quality meets the children's needs very well. In the older classes, canvassing pupils' views of the curriculum revealed that some, especially boys, did not find lessons interesting and stimulating. Consequently, the curriculum has been reviewed and reorganised well, providing improved links between subjects and activities of greater interest. Pupils' personal development needs are well considered and this is clear in the successful outcomes. A good range of enrichment activities enhance pupils' learning, and include sports teams, art activities, music, a literacy club and the recent introduction of French to the school curriculum. Interesting visitors into school and visits out of school broaden pupils' personal and academic skills and understanding well. Pupils are thoroughly enjoying and benefiting from involvement with a film making company, for example, and the long standing links with the local Creative Partnership. Recent initiatives in restructuring the curriculum are well placed to raise standards although the full impact has yet to be felt.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are well cared for throughout the school. Procedures for child protection, health and safety and the safeguarding of pupils are robust. Pupils' positive relationships with adults, right from the earliest stages in school, have a significant impact on their

confidence to learn. Effective communication within the school and with other professionals and external agencies ensures that vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties and disabilities receive carefully focused support that meets their needs and enables good achievement. Systems for guiding pupils on how to improve their learning have been revised recently and are beginning to show a positive impact on achievement and progress, particularly for the older pupils. Linked to the school's new marking and feedback systems, teachers and pupils are now building a good view of individual successes and where improvements are needed. Good efforts have been made to improve attendance. Although there have been significant improvements in punctuality, the school is finding difficulty in helping some parents to ensure their children's good attendance.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The inspirational leadership by the headteacher sets a common sense of purpose for the senior leadership team, staff and pupils. Leaders and managers at all levels set exceptionally clear direction for staff teams, leading to continuous improvement in the provision for pupils. The business manager enables innovative systems for staff communication, making sure that all are fully informed and able to contribute views that help to shape future practice. Self-evaluation is rigorous and results in effective action. Recent improvements in assessment systems and more detailed tracking of pupils' progress need more time to become embedded in the school's practice to impact fully on standards. The views of all staff, pupils, parents and governors are generally taken fully into account. Some parents expressed disquiet at not being consulted as fully as usual on the school's strategy for healthy eating. The development of the governing body since the last inspection is good; governors are now well involved in all aspects of the management and review of the school. Available resources are used well. The business manager and governors ensure that much is achieved on a relatively modest budget. The school clearly provides 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	1
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	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	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

Ashington Central First School

Milburn Road

Ashington

Northumberland

NE63 0AX

24 November 2006

Dear Children

Thank you for being so welcoming and friendly. You helped us to enjoy visiting your school very much and to find out about what you do and how well you work.

We found out these important things:

- Central First is a good school and most children make good progress in their work and in understanding how to stay safe and healthy
- there are lots of interesting things to do. This helps you to enjoy school and to concentrate well on your work
- you generally behave yourselves well, at work and at play
- the staff work very hard to provide interesting lessons and other activities that help you to learn well and to do your best work
- children in the Nursery and Reception classes do especially well.

There are some things where you can help your school to do even better:

- the children in Years 3 and 4 must work really hard to make sure your work improves now that you have clearer targets for learning and help from the feedback times that you told us you enjoyed
- some of the boys do not always do quite as well as the girls, so they need to try especially hard
- many of you are not as good at writing as you are at reading and numeracy, so this is where you need to improve your work
- although most children come to school every day, some do not have good attendance. Try very hard to come to school every single day.

Thank you again more for your kind welcome. We hope you enjoy a happy Christmas!

With very best wishes for the future

Mrs Penny Parrish

Lead inspector