



Lowick Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School

Inspection Report

Better
education
and care

Unique Reference Number 131221
Local Authority Northumberland
Inspection number 295449
Inspection dates 9–10 November 2006
Reporting inspector Andrew Scott

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

Type of school	First	School address	30 Main Street
School category	Voluntary controlled		Lowick, Northumberland
Age range of pupils	4–11		TD15 2UA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01289 388268
Number on roll (school)	38	Fax number	01289 388268
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Ged Thomas
		Headteacher	Mrs Christine Thirlwell
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Lowick C of E First School is a small school serving pupils from the village of Lowick and surrounding area. The school works in close collaboration with Holy Island C of E First School and the headteacher of Lowick is its acting headteacher. The seven pupils from Holy Island attend Lowick school when the tidal conditions are such that a whole session/day can be taught. When the tide limits access, pupils remain on the island in their own school, being taught as one class.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Lowick First is an outstanding school. Together with Holy Island C of E School, it provides an excellent environment for pupils to develop and learn. Inspired by the headteacher, the school has a very clear sense of direction, good and imaginative priorities and the energy and combined will to get things done. Already a good school for many years, the school has improved further much to the delight of parents and pupils who hold it in high esteem. As one parent said, 'My son has a real feeling of self-worth, which is invaluable to his future development.'

Pupils' achieve extremely well. Children enter the Reception Year with broadly average capabilities and make excellent progress, with most exceeding the goals expected of children of their age by the end of the year. Pupils continue this rapid rate of progress through all classes and standards are well above average by the end of Year 2 and consistently high by the end of Year 4. All pupils achieve equally well, a testament to the school's strong policy of educational inclusion.

Pupils' personal development is excellent. Parents are rightly complimentary and refer to the emphatic progress made by their children in self-confidence and maturity. Pupils behave very well and look after one another as part of an extended family. They thoroughly enjoy their work, especially fascinating activities such as the Victorian Day. Their opinions are sought and valued by teachers, so pupils feel wholly involved in the life of the school. Pupils respect the need for a healthy lifestyle. They appreciate the healthy school lunches and join wholeheartedly in the many physical activities provided. As a result of their personal progress, they are extremely well equipped for their future life.

A particular strength of the school is the rich and varied curriculum that strengthens pupils' learning not only in English and mathematics, but in all subjects and broadens the pupils' awareness of the world at large. The school makes full use of its locality, such as marine studies on a Holy Island beach, but also makes sure that pupils experience urban life through visits to cities. Teaching focuses accurately on the needs of individual pupils, and is skilfully planned making careful use of assessment. Pupils receive very good advice about their work from teachers and benefit greatly from being involved in their own assessment.

The leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The headteacher has built on the strengths of the school and has spearheaded further progress in recent years. She has a creative and enlightened approach to school development and has enabled staff not only to share her vision but also to play their full part in the school's success. The accommodation for administration, headteacher's office and staffroom is poor and makes it difficult for staff to operate with ease and professional dignity.

Subject leaders are efficient but do not yet analyse standards and teaching or lead their subjects with sufficient rigour. Governors work hard, are well involved in the school's development and ensure that the school is heading in the right direction. The school's accurate self-evaluation identifies clearly what needs to be improved.

Therefore, the school is in an excellent position to develop further and offers excellent value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Enable staff to develop further their roles as subject leaders to ensure that pupils benefit from the best opportunities in all subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils achieve outstandingly during their time at the school and standards are consistently high by the time the pupils are ready for the next stage of their education. All pupils, including those with learning difficulties and the very able achieve equally well because of first-rate teaching and individual support.

Children generally join the Reception class with skills and abilities that are average for their age. They make excellent progress through the Reception Year and most children exceed the goals expected for children of their age, especially in knowledge and understanding of the world and in their personal and social development.

Pupils continue to make excellent progress in Years 1 and 2 and the results of the national tests at the end of Year 2 are usually well above average in reading, writing and mathematics. The results can fluctuate when year groups are so small because a single pupil's results have a great effect on the whole and this happened in 2005, when the results fell to average because the year group contained more pupils than usual with learning difficulties. However, the Year 2 results rose again in 2006. Standards are consistently high in Year 4. There are no national test data for this year group but the results of reliable assessments made by the school show that Year 4 pupils reached high standards in 2006 and the school's records show that the results of these annual assessments are consistent from year to year. Inspection findings agree with the school's assessments.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development is excellent. Parents certainly believe this and speak warmly of the great strides their children make in self-confidence and maturity. The strong family atmosphere of the school enables pupils to get on with one another extremely well; older pupils automatically look after younger ones in lessons and in the playground. Tutor groups help to reinforce this camaraderie. Behaviour, by the pupils' own admission, is not perfect but it is very good and only falters when the pace of learning is not swift enough.

Pupils clearly enjoy coming to school, as shown by their consistently good attendance. Pupils play a full part in the school, often influencing decision-making, as in the design a new school badge. There are close and beneficial links with the community such as

the twice weekly lunches with older residents of the village. Pupils are highly responsible around school, are extremely considerate and very aware of each other's safety.

Pupils lead a very healthy lifestyle. They practise what they preach in healthy eating, stimulated by good old-fashioned cooking in the school's kitchen. They participate eagerly in clubs after school and all swim once a week. Pupils are very well aware of cultural differences and are increasingly familiar with the multi-cultural nature of modern Britain. Therefore, their spiritual, moral, social and spiritual development is excellent and so is their preparation for life ahead.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

In lessons, teaching is well-structured and challenging. Teachers plan for different groups, especially year groups and provide close, individual support for pupils. The teaching assistant plays a valuable role in this. The clarity of the learning objectives, well supported by resources, helps pupils to absorb new ideas quickly. Teachers are adept at asking questions to check understanding. Occasionally, lessons are not so inspiring when pupils have to work their way through routine exercises and they are less well engaged with learning.

Overall, pupils' learning is outstanding especially because of the rich and imaginative planning done jointly by all teachers that gives pupils a wide variety of skills and knowledge. It is extremely hard to cater for the complexities that the ever-changing tide-table inflicts on the pupils but, through constant communication and great flexibility, teachers achieve this. Excellent assessment also ensures pupils' individual needs are fully met, so that learning is naturally reinforced and that pupils constantly receive a high level of challenge.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The richness of pupils' experiences in and out of the classroom is first-rate. Resourceful termly planning provides a thoroughly cross-curricular approach to learning through topics such as Africa and themed days like the Victorian day that took place during the inspection. The school takes full advantage of its location and local expertise. Pupils have joined forces, for example, with Holy Island pupils to look after a beach on Holy Island. Not only have they carried out studies with a marine biologist, but they have also learned about environmental issues by tidying up and monitoring any debris on the shore. Such enrichment, which also includes many clubs, visits and visitors, is invaluable in broadening pupils' horizons.

Inclusion is outstanding; all pupils are intrinsically important. The school has an innovative approach to enhance the Foundation Stage so that the village playgroup operates in the same room. New building will shortly add much needed extra space for Reception children, especially for outdoor learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school take excellent care of its pupils. The formal procedures are all firmly in place, and regularly reviewed and updated. Staff training on all health and safety matters is very pertinent and systematic, especially in areas like child protection. The informal level of care is especially impressive, simply because it is just part and parcel of life at the school. Each pupil feels wholly valued and secure because teachers know them individually and take a great interest in their emotional and physical well-being.

The school has very thorough systems to monitor pupils' progress and so is able to draw very sensible conclusions. This enables teachers to know where to direct extra help if pupils are underachieving. Pupils appreciate the guidance from teachers through marking or advice. Pupils are being increasingly encouraged to assess their own work and that of others, and this undoubtedly influences their attitudes to learning. As one teacher said, 'Pupils do not see the need for smiley faces (in marking); they don't need that affirmation any more.'

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

There is an impressively cohesive and thoughtful leadership; the headteacher is clearly the driving force. She is very clear-sighted, decisive and innovative and has brought about, in a comparatively short time, distinct improvements to the school, especially by fostering a robust sense of teamwork among staff. High standards have been maintained and pupils' personal development is even better, whilst the curriculum has blossomed and teachers are more involved in the decision-making of the school.

The school's self-evaluation is accurate and identifies what the school does well and what could be improved. The headteacher monitors teaching frequently and provides valuable advice to the teachers. Subject leaders are knowledgeable about their subjects but do not all yet fully evaluate and develop them rigorously enough.

The school has improved very well in recent years. Exciting developments have taken place to the building and curriculum, for example. No direct comparison can be made with the previous report because of the change to Church status, which is an important step in strengthening the bond with Holy Island School. Governors are totally involved in the school's progress, notably in the closer federation of the two schools, and are very active in monitoring key aspects, such as risk assessment. Parents think highly of the school and understandably highlight the ethos, the quality of staff and the progress their children make. Overall, the school is in an excellent position to develop 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?	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	NA

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	2
The attendance of learners	2
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

Lowick Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School

Main Street

Lowick

Northumberland

TD15 2UA

10 November 2006

Dear Children

I am writing to thank you very much for the part you played in the inspection of your school. I very much enjoyed meeting you and seeing you in action. You have helped me to gain a clear picture of your school.

Like you, I believe that your school is a bit special. I am very impressed by the consistently high standards in your work, which show that you achieve extremely well. You certainly enjoy your learning and work very hard. You are also becoming much more aware of how well you are doing through helpful marking and self-assessment, and this is making you more confident learners. Your teachers set you challenging work and plan very carefully to make sure that you all achieve equally well. I especially liked the way teachers provide exciting and varied activities. Subjects are taught together and so you learn how to use your knowledge and skills through enjoyable experiences, such as sorting materials on your Holy Island Beach.

I know that the school takes extremely good care of you and so you feel very safe. Teachers also are interested in what you have to say, not just through the pupil council, but in all lessons. As a result, you become confident speakers and skilful listeners at the same time. You lead a very healthy life through a wise diet and plenty of exercise, and you gain a good deal out of the area in which you live. It was a shame that I missed seeing you entertain some older residents of the village at one of your regular lunches with them.

Your headteacher has helped to make the school even better than it already was. She has many imaginative and sensible ideas to improve the school and she makes sure that all staff are happy, work very well together and have your best interests at heart. The headteacher and I have agreed that this excellent school could be even better if the school looked carefully for ways to improve each subject. You can help in this and I am sure that your teachers will appreciate your opinions.

I wish you all every success for the future!

Yours sincerely

Andrew Scott

School Inspector