



Holy Island Church of England First School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 122294
Local Authority Northumberland
Inspection number 300319
Inspection date 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	Main Street
School category	Voluntary aided		Lowick
Age range of pupils	4-9		Northumberland TD15 2UA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01289 389231
Number on roll (school)	7	Fax number	01289 388268
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Brother Damian SSF
		Headteacher	Mrs Christine Thirlwell
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2003		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a very small school serving pupils who live on Holy Island. The school works in close collaboration with Lowick First C of E School and the headteacher of Lowick is its acting headteacher. The pupils from Holy Island C of E First School 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. The Holy Island teacher accompanies the pupils when they are taught at Lowick, which is about two thirds of the time.

Socio-economic conditions are very mixed but average overall. There is little movement in the pupil population. Most pupils come from White British families but there are two Dutch pupils. There are no pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and children enter the Reception Year with broadly average capabilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Holy Island First is an outstanding school. It forms a very special partnership with Lowick First School with unique opportunities for pupils to develop and learn extremely well. Inspired by the acting headteacher, the school has a very clear sense of direction, correct and imaginative priorities and the energy and will to get things done. Already a good school at the last inspection, the school has improved further. Parents and pupils hold it in high esteem and especially value the school's teacher for her rapport with pupils and impact on their progress.

Pupils achieve extremely well and standards are high. Children enter the Reception Year with broadly average abilities, make very good progress and generally exceed the goals expected of children of their age by the end of the year. This very good progress continues through all classes and attainment by the end of Years 2 and 4 is usually high, although there are no pupils in Year 4 at present. The school ensures that all pupils achieve equally well.

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 in 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. They respect the need for a healthy lifestyle and appreciate the healthy lunches they receive. Pupils 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 the main subjects but in all subjects and the pupils' awareness of the world at large. The school makes full use of its locality, such as the nearby beach for marine studies, but makes sure that pupils experience urban life through visits to cities. The school building is unsuitable for many aspects of the curriculum. Although there are plans to develop the building, they are not progressing as fast as the school would like.

Teaching is very focused on the individual child and based on careful assessment and skilful planning. Pupils receive very good advice about their work from teachers and enjoy involvement in their own learning through self and peer assessment.

The leadership of the school is outstanding. The acting 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 play their full part in the school's success. She works closely and successfully with the Holy Island teacher, who is assuming greater responsibility. Governors work hard, are well involved in the school's development and ensure that the school is heading in the right direction. Therefore, the school is in an excellent position to develop further and at present offers excellent value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Carry out plans to upgrade the accommodation as soon as possible.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils achieve outstandingly well during their time at the school. It is hard to specify trends of attainment because of the very small numbers of pupils, often only one in each year group, but standards are usually high. Children generally enter the Reception class with skills and abilities that are broadly average. They make excellent progress through the Reception Year and tend to exceed the goals expected for children of their age, especially in knowledge and understanding of the world and in their personal and social development.

In Years 1 and 2, pupils continue to make excellent progress and usually achieve high standards in reading, writing and mathematics in Year 2. This is impressive because standards can fluctuate significantly when year groups in schools are so small. In 2005, there were no pupils in Year 2 to provide any comparison with schools nationally. In 2006, school records show that pupils' attainment was very high. There are no pupils in the current Year 4.

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. 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 of a new school badge. There are close and beneficial links with the community such as the twice weekly lunches with older residents of Lowick. They are highly responsible around school and 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. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupils are well prepared for the future in their personal development and in their basic skills of literacy and numeracy.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching is outstandingly good. In lessons, teaching is well structured and challenging. Teachers allow for different groups, especially different age 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 make progress. 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.

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 of the ever-changing tide-table but, through constant communication and great flexibility, teachers achieve this. Excellent assessment ensures that 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 curriculum is excellent. 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. It is admirable that pupils not only look after a beach on the Island but also have carried out studies with a marine biologist, in addition to learning 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.

Social and educational inclusion is outstanding and each pupil is important. The potential isolation of pupils in such a small school is readily overcome by the bond with Lowick School. As a result, pupils who are the only ones in their year groups benefit academically and socially from learning alongside other pupils of their age at Lowick. New building work will shortly add much needed extra space at Lowick for Reception children, especially for outdoor learning. The school building on the island is not suitable to cover many aspects of the curriculum. The plans to develop the building are exciting and appropriate to effective learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school takes 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

Leadership and management are outstanding. The leadership is impressively cohesive and thoughtful and 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 acting headteacher monitors staff frequently and provides valuable advice to them. The Holy Island teacher is very effective at managing the island school itself and its pupils. She is highly valued by the community. One parent believes that she is excellent at motivating and supporting the pupils and wrote, 'nothing is too much for her'.

The school's self-evaluation is excellent. The school has improved very well since the last inspection. The main issues have been fully tackled and an exciting plan to improve the accommodation has been created. This would turn the school's building into a discovery centre, providing vital study facilities and strengthening bonds with other schools who would use the centre. 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, therefore, 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	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	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

Holy Island Church of England First School

30 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 shows 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 local beach.

I know that the school takes extremely good care of you and so you feel very safe. Teachers 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.

Your acting 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. Your teacher on the island is also excellent. I have asked the school to do its best to carry out its plans to improve your school building as soon as possible.

I wish you all every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Scott

School Inspector