

Bellingham First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122183
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	301755
Inspection dates	25–26 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Sheila Mawer

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	40
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Allen
Headteacher	Mrs Wendy Goddard
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2003
School address	Redesmouth Road Hexham Northumberland NE48 2EL
Telephone number	01434 220230
Fax number	01434 220230

Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This very small rural first school serves the immediate village and surrounding area. Pupils are taught in two mixed-age classes. Socio-economic conditions are mostly average. Nearly all pupils are from White British families and the proportion claiming a free school meal is very low. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is lower than in most schools. Due to the small numbers of pupils, attainment on entry to the school varies from year-to-year, but overall it is broadly average. A supply teacher has, until recently, covered a three year period of long term absence in the mixed Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 class.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school's effectiveness is satisfactory. Within this overall judgement, pupils' personal development and their care and support are good and strengths of the school. The school has a strong family atmosphere, and pupils feel safe and happy. Their smiling faces and outstanding behaviour are testament to the excellent relationships between staff and pupils. Parents overwhelmingly praise the school for its warm and caring community. Pupils work hard in lessons and enjoy the extra responsibilities they are given to work independently. The school council is very proud of its contribution to improvements in the school. By the time they leave Bellingham, pupils are confident and articulate and have developed excellent social skills. This, together with their strong awareness of healthy living, is preparing them well for the future.

The teaching and the curriculum are satisfactory; as a result, pupils achieve satisfactorily, reaching above average standards in reading, average in writing and below average in mathematics. They achieve best in English across the school and do better in reading than writing. In mathematics, standards remain a relative weakness, particularly in problem solving and mental calculations. In the Foundation Stage, teaching is good and children make good progress because staff organise a variety of enjoyable and well planned, play-based activities. Across the rest of the school there is not enough consistently good teaching to ensure that pupils achieve well rather than satisfactorily. In Years 1 and 2 for example, more able pupils are not sufficiently challenged in their learning. Teaching is improving in Years 3 and 4 and standards are rising because assessment is used well to target individuals for additional support. Marking and target setting are weak and not helping pupils to improve their work enough. Generous levels of adult support are used well in the mixed age classes to help the few children who have learning difficulties to make good progress. The school has established positive partnerships with neighbouring schools and the local community and this has strengthened curriculum provision.

Leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. Positive and sensitive leadership by the headteacher has helped the school to face its staffing difficulties with strength and fortitude. Her good leadership provides a clear focus for development, but unavoidable absence has slowed improvements to a satisfactory pace. The situation is now more stable and the headteacher and governors are working closely with the local authority advisers and neighbouring schools to bring about further improvements. Governance is satisfactory and has improved since the last inspection. Governors have a clearer understanding of the schools' strengths and weaknesses through their regular meetings and visits to the school. While they are now in a better position to hold the school to account, they have not ensured that priorities are costed in the school improvement plan, to enable expenditure to be fully monitored and evaluated. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in mathematics across the school.
- Improve the challenge in the teaching and learning in Key Stage 1 to raise standards and progress for more able pupils.

- Raise the quality of marking and target setting so pupils know what they need to do to improve their work.
- Make sure that priorities are fully costed in the school improvement plan.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory overall and good for pupils with learning difficulties. Pupils reach standards that are broadly average by the time they leave the school and make satisfactory progress. Children in the Foundation Stage make good progress and most start Year 1 having achieved the goals expected of five-year-olds. Standards in 2006, by the end of Year 2 are average. They are just above average in reading and writing and below average in mathematics. By Year 4, pupils in 2006 reached the standards expected for their age. Reading was above average, but writing was average and mathematics was below average, with a particular weakness in mental arithmetic.

The school's records and inspection evidence show that pupils in the current Year 2 are making satisfactory progress and reaching average standards. Progress is patchy in Years 1 and 2, particularly for more able pupils who are not achieving well enough. None are on target to reach the higher Level 3 in writing or mathematics because tasks lack sufficient challenge. There is an improving picture in Years 3 and 4, through stronger teaching. Standards are rising and pupils are making good progress. Across the school mathematics is the weakest subject and a continuing area for development to bring it up to the same standards as English.

Personal development and well-beingGrade: 2

Pupils' considerable understanding of how to live healthy and active lives contributes positively to their good personal development. The school's promotion of healthy living is recognised in its Healthy Schools award and gaining Activemark. Older pupils chart their progress in keeping fit and healthy, while children in Reception know that washing your hands helps to prevent germs from spreading. Pupils are good learners and have sound basic skills and, together with their mature attitudes, they are well prepared for the future. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They are extremely considerate towards each other and have highly developed social skills. Spirituality is promoted well through a strong focus on their own environment. There have been no incidents of bullying for many years because, as one pupil said, 'We're all friends here'. Pupils enjoy learning and are extremely proud of their school. The normally good attendance fell to below average in 2005 and 2006 because some parents took their children away on holidays during term time. The school has put measures in place to address this and attendance is improving.

The school council is well established and involved in improving playtime facilities and planning fund raising and visits. They often prepare their own questionnaires to seek the views of all pupils, but planning and running meetings are left to adults. This restricts opportunities to learn the skills of democracy and take responsibility. Pupils' contribution to the wider community is strong. The school is an integral part of the village and pupils' sense of belonging to a close community is strongly promoted through shared events throughout the year.

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Grade: 2

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Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall with some strengths. In the Foundation Stage teaching is effective and good attention is paid to meeting the children's needs in the classroom they share with Years 1 and 2. Their personal, social and early language skills are promoted especially well through many opportunities for structured play. In Years 1 and 2 the teaching is satisfactory. At times questioning is not open-ended enough to enable pupils to learn well. Too little account is taken of pupils' different abilities when planning new work and more able pupils in particular are not challenged enough in their learning. In mathematics, tasks are often too easy or repetitive.

The teaching in Years 3 and 4 is good, using assessment information of what pupils have already learnt to plan work that meets their different needs. The independent tasks in particular provide good levels of interest for pupils to do well. While standards are rising in mathematics in Year 3 and 4, there is not enough emphasis across the school on problem solving and giving pupils work that make them think hard, particularly in mental calculations. Pupils' work is marked regularly but comments do not give enough constructive advice on how work could be improved.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum provides every pupil with a wide range of experiences, helping to ensure that they enjoy school. It is strengthened further by using the expertise from neighbouring schools and through local visits. All pupils benefit from weekly French lessons from a highly skilled

teacher from the adjoining middle school. The school rightly focuses on developing the core skills of literacy and numeracy and there are good examples of writing being used well, for instance in a recent study of the village. There is too little emphasis in the curriculum on improving problem solving and mental calculations in mathematics and challenging more able pupils in their learning. In the Foundation Stage, the curriculum is good and children enjoy a wide range of activities. The outdoor area is used well for imaginative play and to help children plan some of their own learning. Closer links are being established with a private nursery on the same site and this is helping the children to move happily into Reception. A good range of after school activities for all age groups are well attended by nearly all pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care and support are exceptionally good and strongly endorsed by parents. Pupils appreciate overwhelmingly the encouragement they receive from staff and say they feel entirely safe in school. Thorough systems to safeguard pupils are in place and risk assessments are rigorously carried out. During a local visit, the levels of care, safety and support for all pupils were very good. Strong links with the adjacent middle school help pupils to settle quickly into new routines and provides continuity to their learning.

The quality of academic guidance is satisfactory. Procedures to track progress are improving and helping the school to identify pupils who need additional support. Group targets are set for literacy and numeracy and pupils are involved in helping to set and review them. In most cases the targets are too general and not matched sufficiently to the individual needs of pupils. Parents are better informed of how well their children are doing than they were at the last inspection, through regular open evenings.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school has emerged from a long period of staff absence during which progress and development slowed. In spite of this the headteacher has faced the challenges with skill and determination. She has an accurate picture of the school's provision and self-evaluation clearly highlights the strengths and weaknesses. She has ensured that standards are rising in Years 3 and 4 and has begun a more sustained period of monitoring and support in Years 1 and 2 with the help of the local authority, to enable better progress to be made. In the current situation the capacity for further improvement is satisfactory. The decision to use funds to employ a part-time teacher in the Foundation Stage is having a positive impact on achievement.

The school improvement plan is satisfactory and based on wide consultation with staff, parents and governors. Priorities are more clearly focused on how improvements will be made, monitored and evaluated than they were at the last inspection. There is still a weakness in making sure that priorities are fully costed in the school improvement plan. The governing body is very supportive of the school and has a clearer understanding of how well it performs through meeting more regularly and establishing closer links with subject leaders. Although satisfactory in their roles as governors, they are not yet sufficiently involved in the strategic direction of the school.

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Annex A

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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
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	1
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
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 and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

26 April 2007

Inspection of Bellingham First School Northumberland NE48 2EL

Dear Pupils,

Thank you for giving me such a warm welcome when I visited your school recently. I enjoyed talking to you all and your comments helped me to learn more about your school. I was able to see that yours is a satisfactory school and some things about it are good or better.

Here are the things I think are best about your school.

- The exceptionally good care and support you receive from staff in the school.
- Your outstanding behaviour and the excellent relationships you have with each other that keep you happy and smiling.
- How good you are at knowing how to keep healthy and safe.
- How keen you are to learn and take on more responsibility in school.
- Some of you make good progress in your learning and results are improving.
- Some of the teaching is good and makes you think hard.
- You are lucky to enjoy learning about many different subjects and taking part in clubs, concerts, visits and sports events.

There are always things that could be better. I think many of you could do better in mathematics when you are given increased opportunities to solve problems and work out more difficult mental sums. Some of you need harder work in reading, writing and mathematics and the chance to answer questions that will really make you think. I have asked the school to improve your targets and teachers' marking, to help you learn even more.

I am sure you will want to help your teachers make these improvements. You can do so by continuing to always do your best work and reaching the challenging targets that you will be helping to set.

Best wishes,

Sheila Mawer

Lead inspector