

Appletree Gardens First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108584
Local Authority	North Tyneside
Inspection number	309732
Inspection dates	20–21 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Christine Inkster HMI

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	279
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Canon Jim Robertson
Headteacher	Mrs Jillian Burrell
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2004
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Appletree Gardens Monkseaton Whitley Bay Tyne and Wear NE25 8XS
Telephone number	0191 2523546
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Age group	3–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average size first school situated on the outskirts of Whitley Bay. The pupils are mostly of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is lower than the national average, but higher than found in the local area; most of these are in the early stages of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is higher than the national average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is similar to that found nationally. A very small number of pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The school is linked to a children's centre and offers extended services to families before and after school. The school has achieved the Basic Skills Award and 'I can' accreditation for 'supporting communication' in the Foundation Stage. An acting headteacher has been appointed on a temporary basis from June until December 2008, as the permanent headteacher is seconded to work with the local authority for two years. The deputy headteacher will become acting headteacher in January 2009.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory and improving school. Standards are broadly average and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Some aspects of provision are good. The school has a good Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and there is an ethos of friendliness and warmth where pupils feel valued. The school's particular strengths are in the good care, guidance and support and a rich curriculum which promote pupils' good personal development and well-being. The school makes a very positive contribution to community cohesion through links with the children's centre and work with a wide variety of outside agencies. Pupils have opportunities to learn about other religions and cultures through members of local, national and global communities and this helps to promote tolerance and understanding of others.

Children enter the school with skills and knowledge that are broadly typical for their age, although their skills in communication, language and literacy are not as strong. They make good progress in the EYFS and by the time they enter Year 1 most have reached and some exceed the goals expected for their age. In the national assessments at the end of Year 2, standards are broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics, representing satisfactory progress. In Key Stage 2 pupils continue to make satisfactory progress and leave school in Year 4 with average standards for their age. Boys' attainment has not been as strong as that of girls, especially in English, but the school has taken appropriate steps to begin to address this.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. In the best lessons, the pace is good and activities are well planned to interest and engage learners. However, this is not consistent across the school and sometimes pupils have too much direction from the teacher and the pace of learning slows. Expectations of what pupils can achieve are not always high enough. The newly installed interactive whiteboards are used well by teachers but opportunities to involve pupils in their use are underdeveloped in some classes.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and this is shown by their good behaviour and positive attitudes towards learning. They are very polite and courteous to visitors and show respect towards staff and one another. Pupils are proud of their school and enjoy opportunities to contribute towards decision making through the school council and in helping others through fundraising. There is good pastoral care for pupils and arrangements for safeguarding pupils are fully in place.

There has been staffing turbulence in recent months, particularly in the leadership and management of the school. The main strengths in leadership and management are evident in the good support for pupils' personal development. The acting headteacher and new senior leadership team have introduced many worthwhile initiatives and the impact of their actions is now beginning to be seen in improving pupils' progress and in some areas of teaching and learning. Several of the school's middle managers are also new to their roles and have taken on additional responsibilities. Governors have led the school effectively and decisively through this period of uncertainty and are highly supportive of the school, offering practical help where possible. They monitor the work of the school well through governor visits and challenge the school to improve more effectively as a result. The school has addressed most of the issues from the last inspection, particularly in improving the provision for outdoor learning in the Reception classes. It has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children settle quickly and get off to a good start because induction arrangements into the Nursery are good. Staff make sure they get to know the children very well through careful observations and outstanding assessment procedures. They compile very comprehensive learning records for each individual and for groups of pupils that give a complete picture of their strengths and needs. Children make good progress as a result of good teaching and a stimulating curriculum that motivates them to learn and by the end of Reception, most have met or in some cases exceeded their early learning goals. The variety of opportunities for learning provided in the outdoor areas is effective and helps pupils to develop their independence. They are very confident in choosing activities, often working cooperatively. Their personal, social and emotional development is good because of the high standard of care they receive. Close partnerships with parents, external agencies and the children's centre ensure that all children are well supported and that their welfare is a priority. During the inspection pupils and parents were involved in a sponsored 'puddle jump' which was greatly enjoyed by all. The Early Years Foundation Stage is well managed and staff work highly effectively as a team.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the skills of the new leadership team in improving standards and levels of achievement.
- Improve the attainment of boys, particularly in English.
- Improve all teaching and learning to that of the best.
- Ensure pupils have more opportunities to use the interactive whiteboards to enhance their learning.

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.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The standards reached by pupils are broadly average and their achievement is satisfactory. Children join the school with skills and abilities which are broadly typical for their age, though they are not as strong in communication, language and literacy skills. They make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and nearly all reach the goals set for them in all areas of learning, and some exceed them. In the national tests at the end of Year 2, standards have been broadly in line with the national average in recent years. Evidence seen during the inspection, shows that pupils reach age-related expectations by the time they leave the school in Year 4. Throughout the school, girl's attainment is stronger than boys, particularly in English. The school has taken appropriate steps to begin to address this. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those for whom English is an additional language also make satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of pupils are good. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school is good. They listen attentively and enjoy their lessons. Pupils feel safe in school

because they know there is someone who will help them if they have a problem. Their attendance has improved as a result of the school's focus and is now satisfactory. Pupils have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and the majority choose to eat a healthy school lunch. They say they are keen on sport, for example, basketball and gymnastics and many take part in activities at lunchtime or after school. Older pupils talk enthusiastically about their residential visits to Kielder Forest, Powburn and High Borran. Pupils' moral, social, spiritual and cultural development is good. Their experience of Japanese culture and art last year led to high quality work across the school. The school council takes its responsibilities seriously. Members are particularly proud of their involvement in the provision of new playground equipment and are proud of their good contribution to the school community. Pupils look after each other and demonstrate maturity when carrying out their responsibilities as monitors, often helping younger pupils. Pupils are prepared satisfactorily for transfer to middle school and their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Some lessons are good. In most lessons pupils behave very well because there are good relationships between staff and pupils. In the best lessons, pupils are well informed about how well they are doing and what they have to do to achieve. Clear plans identify appropriate activities to address the different needs of pupils. Teachers use resources, including the new interactive whiteboards, to explain tasks and to clarify pupils' thinking and this helps to motivate them. Pupils who struggle with basic literacy and numeracy skills, as well as pupils learning English as an additional language, receive effective targeted support in small groups. Teaching assistants have very recently been assigned a more focused role and now contribute well to pupils' learning. Where teaching is less effective, there is too much teacher direction and this does not give pupils enough opportunity to practise their skills and develop independent learning. As a result, the pace slows and some pupils become disengaged in their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Pupils benefit from a good curriculum which contributes very well to their good personal development and enjoyment in learning. Art, music and the study of French are important parts of school life. Pupil's confidence and self-esteem are promoted well through these subjects. The school is making very positive efforts to establish more links between subjects and ensure that the curriculum is well matched to the needs of pupils. Teachers are planning effectively, incorporating the new Primary Strategy and ensuring that basic skills in literacy and numeracy are taught across the curriculum. Philosophy is taught and promotes thinking about moral and social issues. Personal, social and health education promotes pupils' personal development well. The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) across the curriculum is developing rapidly and teachers are now employing interactive whiteboards as tools to enhance learning. However, these are used by pupils more regularly in some classrooms than in others. An extensive programme of extra-curricular activities is provided and these are extremely well attended. A wide range of visits and visitors, making effective use of local links and partnerships, adds greatly to the richness of the curriculum, for example in Eid celebrations. The opportunity to undertake two residential visits is highly valued. Pupils celebrate their local identity, having

recently enjoyed clog dancing and singing Northumbrian songs. The school is working towards the Healthy Schools Award and sports Activemark.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support of pupils are good. All required systems and checks are in place to safeguard the pupils' health and well-being. Staff are highly committed to ensuring that pupils enjoy their learning and that they understand how to keep safe. Vulnerable pupils are very well supported in the school. Bi-lingual teaching and support are provided for pupils with English as an additional language to ensure their needs are met. The development of the children's centre in the school is strongly promoting more direct communication with parents who welcome the parenting classes and related activities. The school has good links with a range of other professionals to further enhance pastoral guidance and support. Parents who responded to the questionnaire are overwhelmingly positive about the school and particularly appreciate the care that teachers take 'to make school a happy and stress free experience.' Academic guidance is good. Pupils understand what they need to do to improve their work because of effective marking and verbal feedback. The school has taken positive steps to ensure that all pupils know and understand their individual learning targets. Tracking systems are now being used more effectively to target support where it is most needed.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Senior leaders are successful in promoting good pastoral care, which is a key contributor to pupils' good personal development. The acting headteacher and new leadership team have an accurate and realistic view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are putting in place appropriate and effective measures to secure improvements where they are needed. Evidence seen during the inspection shows these new initiatives are now beginning to have an impact on standards, achievement, teaching and learning. The governors and the permanent headteacher have effectively reorganised the leadership structure to widen the roles and responsibilities of middle managers. Some of this work is at an early stage, as some staff are new to their posts, but they are very enthusiastic and willing to focus on improvements. Community cohesion is well developed and strongly promotes racial harmony and tolerance. Governors bring a wide range of expertise to their roles and provide robust challenge to the school when involved in regular monitoring visits. They have taken decisive steps to promote improvements in the school through a period of recent turbulence. They are highly supportive of the school and several offer practical help in classrooms.

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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

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/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
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

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

22 October 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Appletree Gardens First School, North Tyneside, NE25 8XS

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to Mrs Sewell, Mr Dixon and I when we inspected your school recently to see how well you were learning. A special thank you to those pupils who talked to us and told us what they thought about the school. I am writing now to tell you what we found out.

You go to a satisfactory and improving school. Standards are broadly average and achievement is satisfactory. The good care, support and guidance which the school offers ensure that your personal development is good. Some of your parents and carers wrote to say that they are pleased with the opportunities it provides for you. These are some of the things which we found were good.

- Your behaviour is very good and you are polite and courteous to visitors.
- Your teachers provide good care and support for you.
- The youngest children get a good start to their education.
- There is a warm, friendly atmosphere in school because you have good relationships with staff and with each other.

There are still some things which the school could improve. We have asked the school leadership team to.

- Ensure that the new school leaders take effective steps to raise standards and levels of achievement in your work.
- Ensure that boys achieve as well as the girls, especially in English.
- Improve teaching to make sure all pupils make as much progress as they can.
- Give pupils more opportunities to use the interactive whiteboards.

You can help by coming to school every day and by working as hard as you can.

We send you our very best wishes for the future.

Christine Inkster

Her Majesty's Inspector