

# Haltwhistle First School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	122201
<b>Local Authority</b>	Northumberland
<b>Inspection number</b>	314236
<b>Inspection dates</b>	7–8 May 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Andrew Scott

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–9
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	262
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Cllr Lawrence Thompson
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr John Roberts-Green
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 June 2004
<b>School address</b>	Woodhead Lane Haltwhistle Northumberland NE49 9DP
<b>Telephone number</b>	01434 320467
<b>Fax number</b>	01434 320345

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<b>Age group</b>	3–9
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

This larger than average first school serves a small rural town. Socio-economic conditions are broadly average with some elements of disadvantage. Nearly all pupils come from White British families. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities tends to be average but is below average at present. The school has just entered into a federation with South Tynedale Middle School.

## 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, where pupils thoroughly enjoy learning and make good progress. Parents are understandably very pleased with the quality of their children's education and especially value the warm and caring atmosphere, the approachability and dedication of staff and the attention to their children's needs. Indeed, the high level of pastoral care, the personal development of pupils and the links with families and the community are outstanding features of the school's work.

All pupils achieve well because of effective teaching. Standards are consistently above average by the end of Year 2 and are likely to remain so this year, if not improve slightly. Standards by the end of Year 4 have tended to be at levels typically expected of nine-year-olds and so progress in Key Stage 2 has been satisfactory rather than good. However, recent initiatives are already paying dividends and projected standards this year are higher.

Pupils are very eager to learn because teachers provide interesting lessons and varied activities. In lessons, skilful explanations and adept use of resources consolidate learning. Good questioning skills check pupils' understanding and encourage speaking and listening, a particular weakness of some pupils when they enter school. To promote literacy and numeracy, and to put learning in context, teachers are increasingly making the most of opportunities in other subjects to develop these aspects. They are also exploiting the excellent range of visits, visitors and activities. Provisions for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are good, helped by effective planning and close adult support. However, teachers do not use their assessment of pupils' progress systematically enough to fine tune their planning and give pupils clear guidance in what they need to do to improve further, especially in Key Stage 2.

Pupils are a credit to the school and their parents. Their behaviour is extremely good, in and out of lessons. They play a vital role in the school's development and an excellent part in the local and wider community. They lead a safe and healthy lifestyle through diet and exercise, and benefit from the proximity of the middle school's facilities and the town swimming pool. Attendance is satisfactory and the school is striving to improve this. All in all, pupils are well prepared for life ahead.

The firm, decisive leadership of the headteacher, well supported by senior staff and governors, has enabled the school build on its strengths seen at the last inspection. The clear sense of direction and the philosophy of a rounded education are shared by all staff; they also feel valued and empowered to develop their own skills. The school is aware of its strengths and weaknesses but is not rigorous enough in evaluating them and in assessing the progress of its action plans. Its self-evaluation, therefore, tends to be slightly generous. Nevertheless, with improving standards, a more stimulating curriculum and the strength of the new federation, the school is well poised to develop further.

## Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

### Grade: 2

The Early Years Unit gives children a good start to their schooling. Parents speak fondly of the warm and caring atmosphere that relaxes and engages children and ensures a smooth transition into Year 1. Children begin in the Nursery with skills and abilities that are below what is expected for their age, particularly in personal and social development, as well as elements of language, notably speaking and listening. Because of the school's emphasis on these areas, children make

good progress and, by the end of the Reception year, they reach levels expected of five-year-olds in all areas of learning. Teaching is good because it is based on regular assessment and well focused on key skills; there is an encouraging 'can-do' approach and adult support is effective in enabling children to develop a sense of independence and a keenness to learn. The Unit is well led and there are good plans for improvement, especially in developing the classrooms. Plans are in hand to develop the outside learning facilities for Reception pupils.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Ensure greater rigour in the monitoring of the school's work and in assessing subsequent actions.
- Consolidate and develop academic guidance to improve pupils' progress, especially in Key Stage 2.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

All pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, achieve well. Standards are usually average by Year 4 but are on track to be above average this year. Having entered Year 1 with levels of attainment expected for their age, pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. As a result, standards by the end of Year 2 have been consistently above average in recent years, although the proportion of pupils achieving the higher levels is average. Recognising this, the school has improved the level of challenge for more able pupils and evidence suggests that more pupils will reach the higher level this year.

Until recently, pupils have made satisfactory rather than good progress through Years 3 and 4. Standards by Year 4 have tended to be close to the county average. However, this year, the school's data and pupils' work show reading and mathematics on track to be above average. Writing remains broadly average but the school has already brought in initiatives to help overcome this, including the 'Big Writing' programme. These are beginning to have an impact. Overall, progress now is good and is strengthened by above average attainment in information and communication technology.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development, are outstanding, with particular strengths in social and moral maturity. Attendance is satisfactory and the school is working hard to improve this further. Nevertheless pupils say they greatly enjoy coming to school and parents endorse this. Attitudes to learning and behaviour are excellent. Bullying is rare and any incidents are dealt with swiftly and appropriately. Pupils learn to look after themselves well. They value initiatives which help them feel safe and happy, such as the buddy bench in the playground and the impact of school council members.

Pupils' contribution to the school and wider community is outstanding. They regularly raise funds for numerous organisations. Singing in the local care home, links with children in Taiwan and annual visits from children of Chernobyl exemplify their sense of community both locally and globally. There are strong links with the local church and pupils also have ample scope to learn about other cultures and religions. The school's promotion of healthy lifestyles has resulted in healthy eating and a very active engagement in sport. With good academic achievement and well developed social skills, pupils are well prepared for their next school.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Pupils value their teachers and work very well for them. Typically, lessons have clear objectives and good demonstrations of new learning, as well as high expectations and interesting activities. Pupils relish the challenge of work that is generally well tailored to their needs but which requires considerable concentration and effort. Learning is best when there is scope for pupils to work things out for themselves and when the activities are fun. Occasionally, lessons across the school vary in quality with some having fewer strengths or simply proceeding with less pace and vigour than might be expected. Lesson planning is good but teachers do not always use assessment data to specify the issues of individual pupils. Marking is good in Key stage 1 but opportunities are sometimes missed in Key Stage 2 to give clear guidance on how pupils can improve their work. Teaching assistants are usually well involved but not fully deployed. The school's monitoring of lessons reveals these minor flaws, but leaders do not routinely follow up on them to secure improvement.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 2

The school has a good curriculum, enriched by some excellent extra activities. There is a good focus on English and mathematics and the school responds well to comparative weaknesses through initiatives such as the teaching of phonics. The school has recognised a need to put learning in greater context by developing key skills through all subjects, and teachers are beginning to implement this. The wide and varied programme of special themed weeks, specialist visitors and interactive visits certainly motivates the pupils and broadens their knowledge and understanding.

Parents rightly praise the inclusiveness of the school, especially the support, in terms of curricular provision, for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The tailored programme for pupils with speech problems, for example, is sensitive and successful, and the school values the quality of the local authority support. There is also some good provision for pupils with gifts and talents through extra activities. Accommodation and resources are good; the ample space includes a recently improved computer room, although the pupils would like more time in it.

### Care, guidance and support

#### Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support of pupils are good overall. Parents are rightly full of praise for the outstanding pastoral care. Staff are very sensitive to the individual needs of pupils and, consequently, pupils are confident individuals with high self-esteem. Safeguarding procedures are in place and high standards of health and safety are promoted, supported by close collaboration with other agencies. Partnership with parents is a real strength of the school and runs from initial contact in the onsite children's centre through to pupils' transition to the middle school. Parents greatly appreciate the information they receive about the school's work and their children's progress.

Academic guidance is satisfactory. Good systems have been introduced recently to check on pupils' progress regularly, but these are not yet being fully used to tackle individual pupils'

areas of weakness. Although pupils are used to judging how well they are doing in their work, they are not all clear about how to improve.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and senior staff are tireless in ensuring that this is a happy school where children prosper. The ethos of encouragement and praise motivates staff and pupils alike. The leadership is sharply focused on the raising of academic standards and on pupils' personal development. Challenging targets for improvement are set, and prudent steps are put in hand to accomplish them by, for example, staff training and the upgrading of resources, such as the computer room. As a result, the school provides good value for money.

The school's evaluation of its work is satisfactory rather than good, because it tends to be over-positive. The monitoring of teachers' work by senior staff is well focused and helpful, but it is carried out with a light touch and with insufficient rigour to ensure subsequent improvement. The governing body has a shrewd grasp of how things stand. They value the positive ethos and high morale that has been engendered in the school over the last few years, yet they acknowledge that elements of practice might be sharper. The school eagerly anticipates its part in the federation of Haltwhistle schools.





## 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?	2
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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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	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

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
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

9 May 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Haltwhistle First School, Northumberland, NE49 9DP

I am writing to thank you for the part you played in the recent inspection of your school and to let you know what we found out. My colleagues and I really enjoyed getting to know your school. Would you also please thank your parents for sharing their thoughts with us in the questionnaires?

Like you, we think yours is a good school. Some parts of it are excellent, including you! We especially liked your impressive behaviour and your wonderful attitudes to learning. You clearly love learning and concentrate very hard in lessons. Because of the school's warm and caring atmosphere, you all get on very well with each other. You play a full part in the school community, the town and further afield. The visit by children from Chernobyl must be especially exciting. It is slightly puzzling, therefore, why your attendance is not a bit better.

You all make good progress because your teachers provide good lessons that are interesting and usually challenging. You are doing well at the moment in all subjects, although those of you in Years 3 and 4 still need to improve your writing. I know your teachers are already working hard to help you. You clearly appreciate the wide range of extra activities that occur throughout the year, including the Pirates Week for Year 3 that we saw. We know that the school takes great care of you and that you feel safe and sound at all times. Your headteacher, and all the staff and governors, have good ideas to improve the school, including the federation with the middle school.

We think that the school could be even better if teachers give you very clear targets, on a regular basis, to help you improve. We also feel that, sometimes, the school needs to be more thoughtful in judging the way it operates, so that it is absolutely sure it is doing the right things for you.

We wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Scott

Lead inspector