

Prudhoe Castle First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122218
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	314237
Inspection dates	10–11 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Gordon Potter

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	120
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Doreen Elwell
Headteacher	Mrs Jane Bland
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2003
School address	Castle Road Prudhoe Northumberland NE42 6PH
Telephone number	01661 833122
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Prudhoe Castle First School is a smaller than average school. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is around average. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need is above average but that of all pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below average. The overwhelming majority of pupils are of White British backgrounds. The headteacher was appointed in September 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Prudhoe Castle First School offers a good standard of education. Pupils make good progress because they are well taught. It is a school at the heart of the community that cares deeply for its pupils and gives them good support. The school's reputation is good and parents appreciate the way teachers help their children to feel safe and secure in school.

Pupils' achievement is good and standards are above average. The school's results in the 2006 national assessments for Year 2 pupils were significantly above average in reading, writing and mathematics and have been since 2004. The 2007 results were even better and continue the pattern of rising standards. While standards in writing are above average, they are not as good as those in reading and mathematics, because not as many pupils reach the higher levels. The results of tests conducted by the school for Year 4 pupils show that standards are well above those expected for their age. In mathematics, their progress is particularly good, but writing remains as a relatively weaker aspect of the pupils' performance.

The quality of teaching and learning is good, and in some lessons teaching is outstanding. Classrooms are bright and welcoming and teachers provide clear learning objectives and a wide range of activities. Lessons are tailored effectively to meet the needs of pupils of different abilities. Most lessons provide opportunities for pupils to think for themselves, to research information and to discuss ideas with others. The curriculum meets requirements and is enhanced by well planned and stimulating activities. However, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to improve their writing skills further in subjects across the curriculum.

Very good relationships and sensitive support from a caring staff strongly promote pupils' good personal development. Pupils know that there is always someone to turn to if they need help. Attendance is above average and pupils enjoy their schooling. The vast majority of pupils are well behaved, although a small minority find it difficult to sustain concentration when they are writing in lessons. They are keen to participate in the wide range of after-school clubs and activities provided. They readily take on responsibilities, such as participating in the school council. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep healthy and stay fit, as the school strongly promotes these qualities. A focus on basic skills and regular enterprise activities prepare pupils well for their future economic well-being.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher is building a strong team ethos and encouraging others to develop their leadership roles. The sharing of expertise and knowledge is helping the headteacher to establish a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and she is steadily imprinting her vision on the school. The school has brought about good improvement since the last inspection, especially in the Foundation Stage and in the marking of pupils' work. It knows that the key to raising standards further is to improve pupils' writing. The school provides good value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The effectiveness of provision in the Foundation Stage is good. Children start Reception with levels of development typical for their age and make good progress. Children are well nurtured and cared for in a safe and stimulating environment. The Reception children work in a well planned classroom that supports learning in all areas of the curriculum. There are strong links with parents and outside agencies and children visit the Nursery with their parents before they

start, ensuring that the adults working within the school get to know the children prior to them starting school. Both the indoor and outdoor curriculum is well planned with a range of activities that excite and support new learning. Leadership and management of the Foundation Stage are good and ensure that adults plan well together as a team and have a clear understanding about how young children learn. As a result, children show increasing levels of confidence and independence and make particularly good progress in their communication, language and literacy skills. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because early assessment highlights their needs.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing by providing more opportunities for pupils to use and improve their writing skills in different subjects.
- Increase the capacity of a small minority of pupils to concentrate for more sustained periods.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good and standards are above average. Children reach the levels expected for their age in all areas of learning by the time they start Year 1. Pupils then make good progress in Key Stage 1 and reach above average standards by the end of the Key Stage. The school's results in the 2006 national assessments were significantly above average in reading, writing and mathematics and have been since 2004. There is a rising trend in reading and mathematics; increasing numbers of pupils exceed the levels expected for their ages. While standards in writing are also above average, they are lower than those in reading and mathematics. Pupils make further good progress in Years 3 and 4 and the results of tests conducted by the school in Year 4 show that standards are well above those expected. In mathematics, their progress is particularly good, but writing remains as a weaker aspect of the pupils' performance. Pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similarly good progress as their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. Pupils enjoy coming to school, work hard and are friendly and polite. They feel safe and secure and behaviour around the school is good. While behaviour in lessons is also good, a small minority of pupils find it difficult to concentrate for sustained periods of time, particularly when undertaking written tasks.

Pupils make good progress in learning how to stay healthy; they eat healthy lunches and appreciate the opportunities to take exercise. Attendance is good. There are excellent opportunities to contribute to the local community with pupils being involved in "Britain in Bloom" activities at the local railway station and singing at events in the town. Pupils care about those less fortunate than themselves and regularly raise funds to help them. They say that there is no bullying in school. Older pupils look after younger children, helping them to play together and organising games for them.

The school council makes suggestions for improvements around school and knows that the school takes notice of its views. This was especially so when pupils were involved in the appointment of a new headteacher. Basic skills in literacy, mathematics and information and

communication technology (ICT) are good and together with enterprise activities and the development of group work skills help prepare pupils for the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good and there is some outstanding teaching. This means that all pupils make good progress. Lessons are well planned to meet the needs of all learners, including extension activities for the most able. Clear learning objectives and individual and group targets ensure that pupils know what they have to do in their work. Pupils are able to work together to discuss the work they are doing and plan together. They assess one another's work so that they can understand how they can improve. Teachers use skilful questioning to encourage pupils to think more deeply. Marking is good and shows pupils what they have achieved and what they need to do to make their work better. There is a range of interesting activities and lessons have pace. Relationships in classrooms are good. Behaviour is good, especially so when pupils are actively involved in their learning. In some lessons, work is less interesting and teachers do not take the opportunity to have discussions with the class about what they have learned and the difficulties they may have faced.

The school is good at meeting the needs of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Teaching assistants offer good support for such pupils and this extends to assisting all pupils in their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It meets statutory requirements and takes account of national initiatives and guidance. The school's focus on literacy, numeracy and ICT is strong. Although a start has been made in geography and history to provide opportunities to develop pupils' writing skills, the curriculum offers too few opportunities for pupils to write in different subjects. The school is using its harvest celebration to demonstrate the impact of creative subjects, especially art and music, on the pupils' learning. Pupils' personal and academic development is well supported by good enrichment activities which have added enjoyment to pupils' learning and helped them to extend their knowledge of the wider world. They enjoy their visits to the local castle and industrial museum to support their work on the local environment and the Victorians. Italian is taught to Year 4 pupils who also have an intensive course in French in the term before they leave the school. Philosophy has been introduced to help pupils to develop their thinking skills. Pupils appreciate and take advantage of the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities including the gardening club, mixed football and netball, music, Italian and dance.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. This is because all members of staff know the pupils well and are aware of their needs and how to address them. Support for vulnerable students, including looked-after children, and for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is both sensitive and effective. Effective partnerships with the many outside agencies who work with the school contribute to good care and support. The health and safety of all children are paramount and all necessary child protection and safeguarding requirements are in place. A good personal,

social and health education programme supports pupils' personal and emotional development well.

The school supports pupils well when they join the school. Close social and academic links with the local middle school ensure pupils are well prepared for their next school.

Reports for parents are clear and informative about pupils' progress and set some targets for improvement. Processes for tracking pupils' progress are clear and are used by all teachers to plan suitable work and to identify where pupils may need additional support or challenge.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher is building a strong team spirit that shares and develops expertise well. Supported by the leadership team, she has quickly established a clear view of the school and knows what needs to be done to move the school forward. The new school improvement plan identifies appropriate areas for development. Curriculum leaders contribute to self-evaluation through their monitoring of teaching and pupils' work. Self-evaluation is therefore good. The school analyses pupils' progress closely to ensure early intervention where pupils fall behind, especially pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The school has effectively addressed the key issues from the previous inspection, especially in the Foundation Stage and in marking. It is aware that the key to raising standards further is to improve writing.

Governors contribute effectively to the development of the school by supporting work in school, playing a role in the school's self-evaluation as well as providing a good level of challenge for school leaders. Parents overwhelmingly support the work of the school and appreciate what it does for their children. The school has a good capacity to improve.

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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?	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 ¹ 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?	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
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
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	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

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?	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	2
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

12 October 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Prudhoe Castle First School, Northumberland, NE42 6PH

Thank you so much for making me welcome when I visited your school to see how well you are learning.

Prudhoe Castle First School is a good school. The staff care for you very well and make your lessons interesting.

I was pleased to see that you work hard and do your best. You come to school regularly and on time and most of you behave well in lessons and in the playground. I found that you are very polite and helpful and I enjoyed talking to you about your school. You told me that you enjoyed coming to school and that you liked your teachers. You said you appreciated the activities the school provides for you like the visits to castles and museums and the work you have done on the school playground.

Your parents and carers like the school very much, especially the way you are cared for.

There is one way in which the school could help you to do better and that is to improve your writing. So I have suggested that the school gives you more opportunities to write in different subjects, and that it helps support those of you who find it difficult to concentrate when you are doing your work.

Thank you for all your help and I wish you every success in all you do in the future.

Yours sincerely

Gordon Potter

Lead inspector