

Rothbury First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122221
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	314238
Inspection dates	23–24 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Linda Buller

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	84
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Owen
Headteacher	Mrs Dianne Butler
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2004
School address	Rothbury Morpeth Northumberland NE65 7PG
Telephone number	01669 620283
Fax number	0000

Age group	3–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average school that serves a rural area which is more socially and economically advantaged than others nationally. School numbers fluctuate significantly year by year. Very few pupils are eligible for free school meals. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below average although an above average proportion of pupils has a statement of special educational need.

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. Pupils thrive in a friendly and caring atmosphere where the development of basic skills is given a high priority. As a result, pupils achieve well and attain standards that are above average both academically and in their personal development. Standards achieved at the end of Year 2 have consistently been above average in reading, writing and mathematics and in national assessments in 2007 standards in writing were exceptionally high. These good standards and the school's good care and support for its pupils are praised by many parents. Pupils enjoy school, feel safe and secure and adopt healthy lifestyles. They know where to turn if they are experiencing problems. Pupils make a good contribution to their local and wider communities and say that they enjoy participating in recycling projects and in raising money for charity. By the time pupils leave the school, they are well prepared for the future because they are confident learners with good social and academic skills.

Good teaching and an interesting curriculum contribute well to pupils' good progress and their well-being. Much teaching is lively and engages the interest of the learners. In some parts of lessons, however, teaching is not adjusted well enough to take into account the different abilities of pupils. Checks on how well all pupils are progressing are made frequently and this information is generally used well to plan the next steps in their learning and to provide additional support when needed. The curriculum provides good opportunities for using local resources and involving members of the community in pupils' learning. Pupils enjoy the opportunities to be creative, for example, by working with music teachers and a visiting artist. In addition, it does not focus sharply enough on developing children's understanding of the links between sounds and letters, a common weakness in children's knowledge identified by the school when they enter Nursery.

Staff provide good support for pupils. The additional support provided for those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is particularly effective and one of the key reasons why these pupils make the same good progress as their peers. Pupils have targets to aim for in their work and older pupils have a developing understanding of the levels at which they are working. Not all targets are written in language which pupils find easy to understand. Consequently, some pupils are still not clear about how they can improve. This system therefore is not yet driving improvements as strongly as it could.

The school is well led and managed and self-evaluation is accurate. All staff and governors follow the good lead given by the headteacher. The school's success in raising standards in writing, providing good teaching and an interesting and enjoyable curriculum, alongside good care, guidance and support, is clear evidence that it is well placed to continue to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

When children start school in the Nursery their attainment is broadly typical of children of their age. They make good progress and by the time they leave the Foundation Stage they have all reached the goals set for children of this age and many exceed them. The rate of progress is better in the Reception class than in the Nursery. In the Reception class, good use is made of the information gathered about what children already know to plan effectively a range of activities which meet all of their future needs. A strong emphasis is placed on developing children's early literacy and numeracy skills and this contributes well to the standards they

reach by the end of Key Stage 1. In the Nursery, this is less effective as teaching and the planned curriculum do not always focus sharply enough on identified priorities. Opportunities to extend pupils' learning through use of the outdoor area are also missed. Children's personal and social skills are developed well throughout the Foundation Stage. They quickly develop independence and are confident in the positive relationships they have with one another and with staff. They are cared for well and children with specific needs are supported very well through strong links with external agencies.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teaching is pitched at the right level for all pupils in all parts of lessons.
- Ensure that the Nursery focuses sharply on teaching the links between letters and sounds.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well and standards are above average. All children reach the levels expected for their age by the time they start Year 1 and many reach higher levels. Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 1 and reach above average standards by the end of Year 2. Standards in the 2007 national assessments were above average in reading and mathematics and significantly high in writing. This reflects the high priority placed by the school on the firm consolidation of basic literacy and numeracy skills. In Years 3 and 4, pupils build well on the knowledge and skills gained in Key Stage 1. School records show that by the time they leave the school, standards are above those expected for their age. 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, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. They are able to reflect on and share their feelings, demonstrating the ability to appreciate and value those who are different from themselves. Pupils know that they, too, have a responsibility for their own learning and are eager to show their initiative in lessons. Behaviour and attendance are good and this contributes well to the good standards attained as little learning time is lost. Pupils have a very clear understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle and know how to stay safe. They make a good contribution to their community through an active role in village events and a developing awareness of global issues. Although pupils have opportunities in assemblies and in lessons to share ideas, their understanding of how they can influence the effectiveness of their school community is less well developed due to a lack of formal opportunities to express their views. Pupils develop good social skills; these, together with secure basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, prepare them well for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. As a result, pupils learn well and make good progress. Teachers have good subject knowledge and explanations for pupils are clear. Teachers find lively and imaginative ways to engage the interest of learners. In all lessons, the learning aims are made

very clear. Most lessons move along at a brisk pace whilst allowing ample time for pupils to understand what is required and to complete the tasks. All staff have very high expectations for behaviour and classrooms are calm and purposeful places in which to learn. Teachers use their assessments of pupils' work thoroughly to track their progress and set targets for improvement. In most lessons, these targets are reflected well in what pupils are required to learn next. Occasionally, in some parts of lessons teaching does not sufficiently take into account pupils' differing abilities. In these lessons, a few pupils find work too difficult and others too easy; consequently, the rate of progress slows. Marking, although often good, does not consistently focus pupils' attention on maintaining the good standards seen in previous pieces of work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum provides a good range of interesting activities. It is enriched by visitors and visits which are used well in pupils' learning, extending their experiences and adding to their enjoyment. The structure of curriculum planning has been well thought out to meet the needs of pupils in those classes which cater for more than one age group. Good use of staffing resources facilitates daily opportunities for pupils in these classes to divide into year groups, contributing further to the progress they make. The emphasis on the consolidation of good basic literacy and numeracy skills in Key Stage 1 is built upon well in Years 3 and 4. Provision for pupils' personal development is also good, resulting in much of the good behaviour and attitudes evident throughout the school. Pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 enjoy swimming lessons and the provision for sporting activities encourages positive attitudes to keeping fit and healthy.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school takes good care of its pupils. It is vigilant in maintaining procedures with regard to the health and safety of pupils. Systems for safeguarding pupils are fully in place and regularly monitored. Pastoral care is good. All staff are committed to helping pupils enjoy school and achieve well. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are effectively identified and good additional support contributes to their good achievement. Links with other schools and agencies are used well to support vulnerable pupils and those with specific statements of their learning or physical needs. Pupils are developing an understanding of what they need to do to improve the standards of their work in literacy and numeracy, for example, through discussions with their teachers. Formal targets for improvement inserted into pupils' books, however, are numerous and not always fully understood. As a consequence, the support and guidance they provide for pupils' progress is limited.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Good leadership and management are based on effective monitoring and evaluation by the headteacher who, in this small school, carries a heavy load for ensuring the continuing effectiveness of the school. She is well supported by governors who are helpful and challenging, with a clear focus on carrying out their duties well. As a result, the school has an accurate view of what it does well and where further improvements are required. Staff have a shared sense of purpose and are fully involved in deciding on the changes needed to bring about

improvements. For example, amendments to the curriculum, agreed strategies for teaching and a common understanding of how to assess pupils' work have contributed to an increase in standards in writing. Challenging targets are set for each pupil and the school analyses their progress closely to ensure early intervention where pupils fall behind. This does at times, however, result in the school lowering their expectation of what these pupils can achieve in their next year in school. Overall, the school has developed well since the last inspection. Above average standards have been maintained and the main issues for improvement have been successfully addressed. The school is well placed for further improvement.

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 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

28 January 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Rothbury First School, Northumberland, NE65 7PG

Thank you for the part you played in the inspection of your school. I am very grateful for your comments which helped me to get to know your school quickly.

I agree that you have a good school. The school takes good care of you so that you feel safe and valued and become good at looking after yourselves and others. It was good to see the healthy choices many of you make at lunchtime and how much you understand about the importance of taking regular exercise. Your good behaviour in lessons and the interest you have in your work help you to do well. The good progress you make in your literacy and numeracy and the skills you learn about getting along with each other prepare you well for later life.

The good care you receive when you start in the Nursery helps you to settle quickly into school routines. The activities you do help you to enjoy learning and to get along with each other. More of these activities are going to happen in the outdoor area and you will be helped more often to learn about sounds and letters.

You all achieve well in your time in school and reach standards better than those expected for children of your age. A lot of your lessons are very interesting and in many of them, whatever your ability, you are helped to improve. In a few lessons, some of you have difficulty in understanding what you are being taught and others find tasks too easy. I have asked your school to make sure that in all parts of lessons you all do as well as you can. You can help with this by continuing your good attitudes to your work.

I wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Linda Buller

Lead inspector