

Swarland First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122240
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	314246
Inspection date	26 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Sheridan

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	71
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Liz Phillips
Headteacher	Mrs Janet Dyson
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2005
School address	Leamington Lane Swarland Morpeth Northumberland NE65 9JP
Telephone number	01670 787346
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards; the quality of teaching and learning; pupils' personal development and well-being; and provision in the Foundation Stage. Evidence was gathered from the scrutiny of the school's data; brief observations of lessons; discussions with staff, governors and pupils; scrutiny of pupils' work, school documents and parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified.

Description of the school

Swarland First School is a small school which attracts most of its pupils from Swarland and Longframlington. It serves an area where social and economic indicators are above average, though pupils come from a range of backgrounds. All pupils in the school speak English as their first language and the number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is well below average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is much higher than average and an above average number of pupils in the school have a statement of special educational need. The school holds the Gold Artsmark, Activemark, the Healthy Schools award and Investors in People.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Swarland First School is a good school with outstanding features in the personal development and well-being of its pupils and in the provision of care, guidance and support. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and appreciative of the rounded education that it provides. One parent, typical of many said, 'My children have been taught exceptionally well and have developed well socially. They have had lots of opportunities at school to take part in a huge variety of things. The school is extremely welcoming and all the staff help the children develop into well balanced individuals.'

Pupils' attitudes towards each other and their learning are outstanding. Pupils play a significant part in the development of the school and they feel a real sense of belonging to the school community and contributing to it. The school takes pupils' views seriously and frequently acts on their suggestions and requests. Pupils are enthusiastic about their enjoyment of school and pupil surveys show that this view is widespread. Pupils feel very safe in school. They are confident that their peers will respect their views and ideas. A tangible feeling of mutual support and trust permeates the school and this is reflected in the outstanding relationships that exist between staff and pupils and the very high quality of care and support provided for pupils.

Pupils make a good contribution to the school community. The school supports a range of charities each year and pupils enjoy raising money and learning about the difference it makes. Older children take on jobs of responsibility and treat these very seriously. One parent commented on the emotional sensitivity her son demonstrated when reflecting on his duties. Parents are often invited into school to take part in activities and celebrations. These opportunities are used for pupils to show off their learning, which they do with enthusiasm. A high proportion of pupils take part in the good range of after-school clubs and lunchtime activities.

Opportunities for pupils to adopt a healthy lifestyle are outstanding. Pupils benefit from regular access to water and healthy options at lunch and break-times. They are active at break-times and make good use of the different activities and sporting equipment. Daily 'wake and shake' sessions ensure that all members of the school community take part in daily exercise. Pupils have a very good understanding of how to stay safe. They are very aware of hazards in and out of school. For example, they had a good understanding of Internet safety.

Pupils' academic achievement is good. Standards at the end of Year 4 vary from year to year because of the different starting points of different cohorts. However, typically they reach standards that are above age related expectations in English and in line with expectations in mathematics. This is good progress from starting points at the beginning of the Foundation Stage which are typically in line with age related expectations in early reading and writing skills and below expectations in mathematics.

In mathematics, pupils make rapid progress in the first three years of school. Progress slows in Years 3 and 4 because pupils have too few opportunities to apply their mathematical knowledge in a variety of situations. The school is beginning to address this and pupils are now using published materials that provide more opportunities for such work. However, some opportunities are missed to fully develop pupils' ability to apply mathematics to a variety of problems and situations. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress in line with their peers.

Pupils learn well because teaching is good. Pupils are captivated by a range of activities and scenarios that are designed to bring learning alive. Information and communication technology is used effectively to enhance learning and children use computers with increasing independence as they move through school.

Marking is good and often refers to the progress pupils make. In some lessons, pupils effectively evaluate their own and others' work to identify what they need to do next to improve their work. Teachers often set pupils well judged targets to improve their work. This is particularly effective in helping pupils across the school to develop their writing skills.

The school's curriculum is adapted well to meet pupils' needs. Well planned topics mean that learning in different subjects is linked by common themes and literacy skills are developed across different subjects. Pupils are enthusiastic about learning in this way. The curriculum is enhanced and enriched by a good range of extra-curricular clubs, visits and visitors which cater for a wide range of sporting and creative interests. These provide varied opportunities for pupils of all ages to try out new activities and extend their skills.

The school has continued to develop and improve since the last inspection. The headteacher provides excellent leadership. Her vision, shared by staff, is rooted in the drive to raise standards further and to provide a broad range of exciting learning opportunities. She has a very good understanding of the school and has led it successfully through a period of considerable staff change. In the last year, two out of the four class-based teaching staff have changed and the other remaining teacher has been promoted to senior teacher. During this time, the headteacher has effectively carried many of the roles and responsibilities within school, ably supported in day-to-day management by the senior teacher. This has ensured that class teaching remains good but some middle and subject leadership is at an early stage of development. The time is ripe to develop the leadership capacity of the other staff so that responsibilities can be shared and made more sustainable.

Governance is good. Governors know the school well and individual governors use their areas of expertise and interest to support and challenge the school. The school meets government requirements for the safeguarding of pupils and the care, guidance and support for pupils is good.

Accurate self-evaluation leads to well focused and accurate issues for improvement within the school improvement plan. The school is very clear about the priorities for development and the effectiveness of this self-evaluation is good. It is always striving to improve. It provides good value for money and has good capacity for improvement in the future.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children get off to a good start in Reception. Children arrive at the school with skills and experiences that are in line with age related expectations, except in areas relating to mathematical development, which are below. They make good progress and by the end of the year, they reach levels expected of five-year-olds and exceed them in language development. A wide range of appealing activities, carefully linked through topics, give them many opportunities to learn to work and play together. There is a good balance of child-initiated activity and teacher-led sessions. Planning is good and effectively moves pupils forward in their learning. The interests of children are paramount in planning so that they enjoy their learning a great deal. Leadership and management are good. Staff constantly assesses children's progress and uses the information effectively. Support for children individually and in groups is good.

Staff use the limited space well with a good degree of flexibility. Open access to the outdoors is limited to certain times of the day but activities are planned daily to ensure children have regular opportunity to learn outdoors.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide more opportunities for pupils to use their mathematical knowledge and skills to solve problems.

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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	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?	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?	1

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

27 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Swarland First School, Northumberland, NE65 9JP

You may remember that I visited your school recently to conduct an inspection. This letter is to let you know what I found out.

Many of you were keen to tell me that you thought your school was good. I agree with you. You make good progress in your work. You told me that you enjoy your lessons and I could see that was true when I came to watch some of you learn. Your lessons are interesting and teachers plan learning for you in ways that will keep you excited and interested. You also have a lot of extra activities, trips and visitors that I know you enjoy.

I was most impressed with the way that you behave, think about each other and conduct yourselves around school. I judged your personal development and the care, guidance and support you receive, to be outstanding. This is the highest grade that Ofsted awards. You are a credit to your teachers and parents and you should be proud. Well done!

I have asked your school to look at two things to make Swarland First School even better.

- Help you get better at problem-solving in mathematics.
- Share out leadership of the different subjects between the staff so that no-one has too many things to do.

I would like to finish by saying thank you to all of you who talked to me. I found you to be wonderful ambassadors for your school.

I wish you all the very best for the future.

Michael Sheridan

Lead inspector