

Belford First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122244
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	314247
Inspection dates	12–13 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Derek Sleightholme

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	81
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Saul Miller
Headteacher	Mr Julian Tyley
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2004
School address	West Street Belford Northumberland NE70 7QD
Telephone number	01668 213372
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a small school serving a rural village and scattered communities. Most pupils are White British and none are learning through English as an additional language. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is average. The number with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The percentage of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is well below average.

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 with a few outstanding features. 'The atmosphere in the school is wonderful, like one big happy family' is a typical comment that reflects parents' high regard for the school. The school is well led and managed. Standards at the end of Year 4 are above average. When set against their varying starting points the achievement of all pupils is good.

Since the previous inspection the school has improved in several ways. Standards have risen and the school deploys staff skills more efficiently. Attendance has improved and is now average. The curriculum is now good, a fact recognised when the school secured the Activemark and silver Artsmark awards. Winning the award for the best regional school newspaper illustrates pupils' excellent contribution to the community and their good acquisition of future life skills.

Pupils enjoy school; they respect staff and are courteous to visitors. Their behaviour is excellent. Pupils feel safe and secure because care and support are good. The school gives good support to pupils with learning difficulties. All pupils know the importance of keeping fit by energetically take part in daily exercises. Last year, many regularly joined the 'walking bus', the first to be operated in a Northumberland school. Pupils show they care for others by providing helpful support as playtime buddies. Assemblies make a considerable contribution to pupils' good spiritual, moral social and cultural development. Not all pupils benefit from these occasions and the good experiences they bring to personal development because they are working on developing basic literacy skills.

The good progress made by pupils throughout the school is a reflection of the consistently good teaching. Teachers conduct lessons at a good pace. They are often lively events because teachers capture pupils' interest. They regularly involve visitors who enhance learning experiences well. Teachers' use of assessment is improving. Although all pupils' work is marked regularly, specific guidance to pupils and setting targets clearly is currently only a feature of classes in Years 3 and 4.

The good leadership and strong sense of teamwork provides the school with a clear sense of direction. Leaders use excellent partnerships to enhance provision and strive for further improvement. Self-evaluation is accurate and leads to effective strategic development planning. Governance is good. The school provides good value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Foundation stage is good. This year the small number of Reception children joined the school with a wide range of abilities. Many have skills that are typical for their age and this year some were admitted who were confident in their use of language, mathematical and social skills. They are already collaborating regularly in activities with some Year 1 pupils who are taught in the same class. Comprehensive mid year assessments, confirm all Reception children are achieving well. By the end of Reception, children reach the level expected for their age. Children who were admitted from very low starting points make good progress towards these goals. The curriculum and teaching and learning are good resulting in good progress across all the areas of learning. Children benefit from a good variety of learning experiences, some led by adults and others self selected. For example, when learning about the weather, children handled real floating 'icebergs'. Others, during a small group activity, used early number skills to count a family of polar bears. Staff organise the large classroom well and make good

use of the outdoor facilities. Leadership and management are good. Good partnerships with pre-school staff enhance transition into the Reception year.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further improve target setting and marking for pupils in Years 1 and 2.
- Ensure all pupils access assemblies in order that their personal development benefits from the valuable experiences these occasions provide.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good. Standards vary from year-to-year because of the small numbers in each year group, the differences in the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the recent inward mobility. All pupils achieve equally well because the school works hard to provide equal opportunities to meet their individual academic needs. School records show that pupils in Year 4 made good progress in Key Stage 1 and reached average standards by Year 2. They continue to make good progress, and standards by Year 4 are above average in English, mathematics and science. Although dipping slightly in 2007 the teachers' assessments at the end of Year 2 show standards in reading, writing and mathematics have been steadily rising. Standards of pupils currently in Year 2 are above average. These pupils have achieved well as they entered the school from starting points that were typical for their age. The school's data shows a more encouraging picture of standards currently in Years 2 and 4 because challenging targets are set, teachers have high expectations and pupils have good attitudes to learning.

Pupils with learning difficulties achieve well because they benefit from additional support and programmes that are closely matched to their individual needs.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. During their school years pupils become polite, responsible, and reflective. They value each other's friendships and learn and play well together. Behaviour is hard to fault. Pupils serving as 'buddies' support others well and discharge this duty sensibly. Pupils say they feel safe, knowing they can access help if they need personal help and advice. They recognise there are potential dangers when accessing the Internet. Pupils' commitment to daily exercise typifies their good understanding of the importance of being fit and healthy.

Pupils enjoy school. They welcome the many opportunities the school provides for them to learn in partnership with pupils in other schools. When asked about favourite activities many cited learning to improve handwriting. Pupils' good acquisition of this key skill is typical of the way they are preparing to be future adults. Contributions to the community are excellent. Pupils serving as school councillors have an upbeat attitude to improving the school. They proudly spoke of their success in ensuring 'proper plates' are used for school lunch and how their suggestion for a canopy to shelter parents at the end of the school day came to fruition. Pupils' contribution to good causes through fund raising efforts supports their personal development well.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Consequently, pupils make good progress. Teachers have good subject knowledge, form good relationships with their pupils, manage behaviour well and promote positive learning experiences. For example, in a Key Stage 2 lesson about writing instructions, pupils learned not only how to incorporate 'bossy verbs' into their writing but also how to use them when speaking to each other. Teachers' high expectations are evident in the way they plan and organise activities to challenge pupils of all abilities. Pupils' work illustrates teachers' skills in matching tasks and resources to pupils' needs. For example, when using research techniques, more able pupils were expected to find the information quickly and independently rather than rely on prompts.

Teachers mark pupils' work regularly throughout the school. In classes for pupils in Years 3 and 4 more detailed marking provides pupils with clear guidance on what they need to do to improve. Targets to work towards are written clearly into exercise books. This good outcome of teacher assessment is not consistently applied and is not a feature of teaching in classes with pupils in Years 1 and 2.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good curriculum. Planning is thorough and meets requirements. Additional staffing ensures that Key Stage 2 pupils make good progress in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). Through a successful partnership, Year 4 pupils access one weekly ICT lesson using middle school facilities, aiding their transition to the next phase. Literacy and numeracy are promoted well through topics. For example, in a successful Key Stage 1 geography lesson, pupils enthusiastically used word processing to write a weather report while others were engrossed in observing extreme climatic conditions when viewing a media clip. The school enriches the curriculum well through the excellent links with the community and its use of visits, visitors and extra-curricular activities. Diverse experiences range from local village studies to experiencing the religious tradition of a city Hindu Temple. Some Year 3 and 4 pupils regularly miss assemblies because they attend a literacy support programme. These pupils lose the benefits the good assemblies make to pupils' personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support of pupils are good. 'We have been overwhelmed at how well he has fitted in and the support we have received personally,' is a typical comment made by a parent of a pupil recently transferring to this school. Safeguarding, child protection procedures and risk assessments are in place. Staff have accessed relevant training. The school manages the supervision of pupils effectively throughout the day as well as when many depart on minibuses and taxis.

Pupils of all abilities benefit from good individual support. Teaching assistants provide sensitive support to those with learning difficulties. Good links exist with specialist support services. For example, last year an advanced skills mathematics teacher provided additional challenge to

more able pupils. School leaders use an effective tracking system to plot each individual pupil's progress towards challenging targets set, which ensures good progress. Academic guidance to Key Stage 2 pupils is good; it is satisfactory for those pupils in the Years 1 and 2 classes.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management, including governance are good. The headteacher, through his purposeful leadership, establishes a strong sense of teamwork.

Important outcomes of effective leadership are improvements in attendance, standards in mathematics, use of assessment, management restructuring and deployment of staff. Partnerships with outside agencies and the community are outstanding and ensure that the focus remains on improving standards and pupils' personal development. This includes the 'Friends of Belford School' and parent volunteers. Leaders regularly set ambitious goals. For example, excellent collaboration with parents, villagers and horticultural staff from Alnwick Garden, led to the creation of a school garden that is used as an excellent curriculum resource. There is a high emphasis on promoting equality of opportunity on academic development but it is not as good in personal development. Governors support the school well. They have a good understanding of the schools' strengths and development issues and are keen to make the school's provision become even better. Self-evaluation is accurate and informs school improvements well. Given the record of past success and the quality of school leadership the school has a good capacity for further improvement.

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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?	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?	1
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	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

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

14 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Belford First School, Northumberland, NE70 7QD

Thank you for helping me when I inspected your school. You were polite, courteous and friendly. Your behaviour is excellent I enjoyed visiting your classrooms, looking at your work on display and in your books and talking to you about your school. Your school councillors told me how you have made good suggestions to improve it and that these have been followed up.

These are the things I found out about your school. You attend a good school. You all make good progress and in Year 4 this year the standards you have reached are above average. You told me what you like about school and your favourite lessons and your lessons certainly are interesting. You know how to stay safe and where to get help. I know that, by growing vegetables in your excellent school garden, you understand why it is important to eat healthy food; I wish my vegetables were as big as yours! You make excellent contributions to Belford village events and your work on the school newspaper won a regional award. Activities like this are helping you gain important skills for the future.

In Years 1 and 2 your teachers are going to help you to understand what you need to do to improve your work and you can work hard to make sure you to carry this out. The school is going to make sure that you all go to assembly and you can make sure that you listen carefully to all the things that are happening when you are there.

I wish you and all the staff the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Derek Sleightholme

Lead inspector