

# Acomb First School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	122170
<b>Local Authority</b>	Northumberland
<b>Inspection number</b>	327645
<b>Inspection date</b>	16 January 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Jim Bennetts

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

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<b>Type of school</b>	First
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–9
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	44
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Jane Wrigley
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Lee Madderson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 November 2005
<b>Date of previous funded early education inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Date of previous childcare inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Bishops Hill Main Street Acomb Hexham Northumberland NE46 4PL
<b>Telephone number</b>	01434 603870

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<b>Age group</b>	4–9
<b>Inspection date</b>	16 January 2009
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**Fax number**

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Acomb First School is smaller than most schools of its type, but it is growing rapidly. It serves the village of Acomb and surrounding communities. The school works in close association with the privately run Little Oaks Nursery. The school provides for children at the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Nursery and Reception children learn in the same room, often participate in the same activities, and provision is planned jointly. There are no minority ethnic pupils and none speak English as an additional language. Overall, the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average, however there are more pupils than usual with statements of special educational needs. The village has a mix of private and rented accommodation; few pupils claim entitlement to free school meals.

Little Oaks Nursery was the subject of a separate Ofsted Inspection at the same time as this inspection of the First School; there is a separate report for that inspection.

## 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 many outstanding features. A parent comments, 'It is a pleasure sending my child to this school; we are lucky to have such a good school right on our doorstep.'

Staff unfailingly go the extra mile to ensure that pupils of all backgrounds, and with whatever needs, achieve well. Pupils' personal development is outstanding and the care, guidance and support they receive are exceptional. Relationships are excellent. Behaviour is impeccable. Pupils have a clear grasp of right and wrong. They are exceptionally keen to keep fit and they have an unusually strong grasp of how to look after themselves. They make a lively contribution to the work of the school and to the wider community. They are well prepared for moving on to their next school. Attendance is good; it was very high last year. Pupils are proud of their school. They are exceptionally well motivated and enjoyment is palpable. Pupils benefit from the school's good links with support agencies.

Children make outstanding progress in the EYFS. The innovative collaboration between Little Oaks Nursery and the Reception class secures excellent provision. In Key Stages 1 and 2, progress is good and standards are above and, at times, well above average. Teaching and learning are good in these key stages. Teaching is generally well planned with suitable arrangements for the older and younger pupils in mixed age classes. There is a good curriculum. Classroom activities engage pupils' interest well. There is enthusiastic attention to physical education (PE) and adventurous activities. From an early age, pupils learn how to deal sensibly with things that could have an element of danger. However, pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 could sometimes work a little faster, could be challenged more firmly to improve their work, or could be moved on to more demanding tasks.

Leadership and management are good. Many successful innovations have been put in place in recent years and the school is better than at the time of the last inspection. Links with the community at all levels are strong. A parent writes, 'In the five years my child has attended Acomb, the school has gone from strength to strength.' Not surprisingly, the school is increasing in popularity and pupil numbers have doubled since the last inspection. There has been extension to the buildings and prudent further development is planned. Governors are vigilant and supportive. The school has strong capacity for further improvement.

## Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

### Grade: 1

This stage of education is led with enthusiasm and dedication. The collaboration between the Reception class and the privately run Little Oaks Nursery is exemplary. It provides outstanding opportunities for children's learning and development. Joint planning and integration of staffing enable children to make impressive progress. There is a strong focus on speaking, listening and social skills. A common system for recording individuals' progress by a wealth of photographic evidence and commentary facilitates dialogue with parents and the planning of learning activities. All aspects of assessment are of the highest quality. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Time is always used to maximum effect and there is a very well judged balance of activities led by the teacher and those that children can choose and develop themselves. Excellent use is made of the outside area. Children learn to use hammers, drills and scissors safely and enjoy clambering in the outdoor 'adventure area'. By the end of their Reception year, children have generally attained a level higher than expected for their age in all areas of learning. Their personal



development is exceptional. All welfare requirements are met. A parent says that there is an incredible amount of support and care, and that the progress of her child has been fantastic. There are clear plans for further development of this provision.

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

- Ensure that the pace and challenge in lessons are always maximised in order to improve achievement from good to outstanding.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Due to excellent provision that has been established over the last few years, children make outstanding progress in the EYFS. They now enter Key Stage 1 with attainment and skills that are above those typical for their age. Pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 had standards that were above average in national assessments in the summer of 2008. This showed good achievement in relation to those pupils' starting points. School data shows that pupils who completed Year 4 in 2008 had made good progress during Years 3 and 4 and reached standards exceeding the expectations for their age.

In Reception lessons, the excellent planning of learning opportunities that is informed by high quality assessment facilitates outstanding achievement. There is good achievement in lessons in Key Stages 1 and 2, though occasionally pupils could work a little faster or tackle more challenging work. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are looked after exceptionally well and make outstanding progress in relation to their capabilities.

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

### **Grade: 1**

Pupils enjoy school enormously. Behaviour is excellent in lessons and about the school. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and particularly strong in social and moral awareness. Pupils value opportunities to take part in musical and other presentations through the local schools partnership. They are keen to talk about healthy living. They have an excellent understanding of why it is important and how to achieve that aim. They greatly appreciate PE, swimming and other physical activities. Challenging opportunities, for example, with tools in Reception and with outdoor adventures in Year 4, give pupils excellent awareness of how to weigh up risks and adopt safe practices. Pupils have a commitment to charity work and a staunch loyalty to 'their village'. There was good participation in an assembly on the environment and recycling, and pupils are pleased to have a say in the environmental development of the school site. Pupils have a strong link with Watoto in Kenya and school children in Chicago: they have good awareness of global issues. Pupils are well prepared for the subsequent stages of their education through, for example, the competence established in information and communication technology (ICT) and other key skills. Attendance is good and was particularly high last year.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teaching and learning are good overall. Teaching is most effective in the Reception class. Lessons in the two small, and mixed age, Key Stage 1 and 2 classes are characterised by good



relationships. There are well conceived tasks that often integrate different subjects, such as history and ICT. There are generally different tasks for groups of pupils of different age or ability. Lesson planning takes some account of records of the progress that individuals have made so far and their targets. Consequently, pupils make good headway in their learning most of the time. A parent comments, 'Staff enthuse our children and provide them with a memorable education.'

However, in Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils could sometimes get through tasks faster: things go down on paper too slowly. Some could be challenged to take more care, for example, with presentation and spelling. Occasionally, some pupils work within existing capabilities when it would be possible to move them on to a higher level of challenge. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school, and parent questionnaires mentioned that some children are challenged well, but there was also comment on the need to stretch some children more.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The school's curriculum is good. It is generally well planned. It takes proper account of national guidelines, with creative opportunities for links between subjects, such as science and literacy. The grouping of pupils within mixed-age classes generally promotes good progress. Good provision is made for PE and swimming. There are good links through the local schools partnership to get to know other pupils in the wider locality and to join together for musical and other events. The school is entrepreneurial in pursuing extensions to the curriculum through trips, for example, to a Mosque that is some distance away. Overseas links with United States of America and East Africa flourish. There are ample opportunities for pupils to advance all aspects of their personal development.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. There is a high level of support for pupils with individual needs. Parents are unanimous in their appreciation. A parent whose child has some learning difficulties writes with appreciation of extra help given and subsequent 'tremendous improvement'. Another writes of growth in confidence and how her child has excelled as a result of the school's care and support. A third says, 'Staff could not be more dedicated and caring.'

All procedures to safeguard pupils meet national requirements and risk assessments are well maintained. Encouragement of pupils to be mindful of safe practices is exceptional and is carefully fostered though opportunities to tackle situations that have a potential element of risk. Teaching assistants are well deployed and give well judged support. All staff are excellent role models with regard to relationships and care and consideration for others. There are very effective links with support agencies and procedures for transition to the next stage of education are good. The school works hard to maintain high attendance. There are effective procedures for keeping track of pupils' progress and for setting targets.



## Leadership and management

### Grade: 2

The school is well led and managed. It has seized the opportunity to make the most of the EYFS by creative collaboration between the Little Oaks Nursery and the Reception class. Recent building development and enhancement of the outdoor area have helped in improving provision; further sensible development is planned. Challenging targets are set and there has been good improvement since the last inspection. Pupils' welfare and personal development are promoted with vigour, so pupils thrive and achieve impressive maturity for their years. However, with the school's paramount focus on cherishing pupils, staff occasionally hesitate to push them harder.

Parents say the school is very approachable and that '...communication between school and home is second to none'. The school does a good job in strengthening community cohesion within the school, in the locality and beyond. There are effective initiatives, which are carefully evaluated, to raise pupils' sensitive awareness of the diversity of faiths, cultures and economic circumstances across Britain and throughout the world. The school ensures that pupils of all backgrounds and needs make strong progress.

Self-evaluation is excellent and the school has a clear view of how things stand. It is innovative in deploying resources to obtain best value. Governors keep a watchful eye on the effectiveness of provision and make visits to monitor quality. The school is well placed to make further improvements.



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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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

### Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

### 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/or disabilities make progress	1

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<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.



## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
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

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	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

## 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	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
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



**Annex B****Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

19 January 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Acomb First School, Northumberland, NE46 4PL

Mr Dixon and I greatly enjoyed our visit to your school. We are grateful for all the help you gave us. We think your school is good and that some of the things it does are outstanding.

The young children are benefiting greatly from the arrangements that are now set up for Nursery to work alongside Reception. Children moving into Year 1 have already made excellent progress. In infants and juniors, progress is good. We found teaching and learning to be good overall and really impressive for the young ones. The school provides you with some very exciting opportunities from which you learn a great deal. We were impressed by the careful and effective way in which five year olds used drills and hammered in nails, and by the photographs of adventurous activities such as climbing and canoeing for Year 4.

You enjoy school greatly. You are becoming mature young people and in many ways we might have taken you for older than you really are. Your behaviour and personal development are outstanding. This owes much to the excellent care, support and guidance that you have from all the staff.

The school is well run by the headteacher and other staff and by the governors. Some very effective improvements have been made over the last few years. Though this is a good school with some things that are outstanding, we have asked staff to make sure that some of you work a little faster or tackle harder things when possible. You can help by pushing ahead with your work and, for instance, with things you write, always trying to make it better than last time.

You have a school that you can be proud of. We wish you every success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Jim Bennetts

Lead inspector