

Belsay First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122184
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	327650
Inspection dates	10–11 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Sheila Mawer

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.

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	0
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
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ross Milbourne
Headteacher	Mrs Christine Corbett
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Belsay Newcastle upon Tyne Tyne and Wear NE20 0ET
Telephone number	01661 881641
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Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This small school serves the local village and outlying farms and hamlets, some of these being quite isolated. The area is more socially advantaged than average and very few pupils are entitled to free school meals. The percentage of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below average. Almost all children are from White British backgrounds. There are 19 children of Reception age in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). An independently run pre-school operates from the same site. The school holds a significant number of awards in recognition of its work. They include Healthy Schools, Quality Mark, Activemark, Young Enterprise, Artsmark 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: 1

The school provides an outstanding education for its pupils and gives excellent value for money. Outstanding leadership and management at all levels are due to the exemplary leadership of the headteacher, who is at the heart of the school's success.

As well as successfully managing a large teaching commitment, she maintains a sharp focus on continuous improvement in pupils' learning and well-being and sets very high expectations. As a result, pupils thrive both personally and academically in a rich, inclusive and exceptionally caring community. Parents value the school highly and one remark sums up their views: 'Belsay has an excellent nurturing environment and is led by a remarkable, caring and devoted headteacher. The school has our complete support'.

Achievement is excellent from pupils' starting points in Reception, which are typical for their age. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve equally well through highly effective learning support. The school has maintained very high standards for several years. When pupils leave at the end of Year 4 they reach standards that are exceptionally higher than expectations. Despite a trend for some of the most able pupils to leave the school in Years 2 or 3 for private education, the majority of pupils leave school having reached levels of learning that are not expected until the end of Year 6. Although pupils reach very high standards in the content of their writing, their handwriting skills are weaker.

Personal development is outstanding. Parents are very appreciative of the way that the school encourages pupils to think for themselves, preparing them well for the challenges of later life. Pupils are well rounded and healthy individuals. They are proud of their excellent behaviour and the way they help each other, so that everyone feels safe. Older pupils act very responsibly when they devise their own rota of duties for the school each week.

Excellent and sometimes inspirational teaching helps pupils to learn exceptionally well. They are highly motivated by activities that are brought to life and provide challenge for them all. The school's very caring ethos is reflected in the positive way that staff make sure that pupils are happy in their learning. A real strength of teaching and its positive impact on standards is the encouragement pupils are given to plan their own learning and review their progress. In addition, the curriculum is exciting and creative, providing outstanding opportunities for enrichment and enjoyment.

The school's contribution to community cohesion is outstanding. Everyone is valued equally in this vibrant and harmonious community. There are excellent partnerships with parents, other schools and agencies and the local and wider community. This enriches pupils' involvement and understanding of the diverse nature of society. The development of a wildlife area with the local community is just one project that has significantly enriched pupils' learning. Global awareness has been heightened through links with schools in other countries and the support for many different charities.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Provision in EYFS is outstanding and enables children to achieve very highly. When they enter Reception their skills are typical for their age. They make excellent progress and reach standards that are well above average by the end of Reception. Close links with the pre-school helps them settle seamlessly into Reception. Parents are delighted with the induction arrangements and

the first-rate information they receive on their children's progress, through a weekly learning journal. In outstanding teaching, an inspiring curriculum and a strong emphasis on care and welfare, the children's needs are met exceptionally well. They respond very positively to exciting activities that are either led by adults or chosen themselves. There is regular access to excellent provision outdoors. As well as a well resourced outdoor area, the children also use an adventure playground and wildlife area. The opportunities for role play and investigations are fully exploited in the latter. Making dens for a 'bear hunt' or tracking animal footprints in the snow provides absorbing learning. With excellent guidance children learn to work independently, take a pride in their achievements, share outstanding relationships and behave impeccably. The EYFS is led very effectively by the headteacher, who is also the teacher. Staff plan rigorously together, review progress and set challenging targets. Very good progress has been made in improving links between Reception and Year 1. The regular sharing of enrichment days together is just one example. As a result, the Reception children move happily into Year 1 as confident and able learners.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve handwriting skills across the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Achievement is outstanding for all groups of learners. Pupils make excellent progress in relation to their starting points in Reception which are typical for their age. Standards by the end of Year 2 are exceptionally high. The results of the school's assessments at the end of Year 2 have been significantly above average for several years and the most recent unvalidated results in 2008 follow this trend.

By the end of Year 4, the standards reached by pupils continue to be exceptionally higher than expectations. Results of optional tests in 2008 were significantly higher than the national expectations for their age in reading and writing and higher than the national expectations in mathematics. In 2008, results in mathematics did not reach the very high standards in writing and reading. The school has taken appropriate and successful steps to raise standards in mathematics to the same levels as English. This has been achieved through staff training, more adult support in lessons and a stronger focus on problem solving. Handwriting skills are weaker and not enough pupils are using a fluent and joined script by Year 4.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The views of pupils in Year 4 sum up most appropriately their outstanding personal development. 'Our time at Belsay has been very special because of great teachers and classmates, who are always there for us'. Personal development is at the heart of the school's work and impacts strongly on the excellent progress pupils make. They love school, behave impeccably and attendance is above average. They devise their own rules for behaviour and apply them diligently.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils form excellent relationships and are extremely polite and confident with adults. They embrace a healthy and safe lifestyle exceptionally well, through talks from visitors, healthy lunchtime options and many sporting activities. The school council is fully involved in decision making. As health and safety representatives they supervised the refurbishment of their cloakrooms. Pupils are

justifiably proud of the Young Enterprise Award for good citizenship. Their excellent understanding of European cultures and global issues is strongly promoted through the school. For example, pupils performed their nativity play in French and they enjoy pen pal links with a school in Tanzania. These initiatives lead to excellent personal skills, and with outstanding achievement pupils are being exceptionally well prepared for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

In outstanding teaching, lessons are planned very effectively to meet pupils' different learning needs and to help them reach challenging targets. This ensures that all pupils continue to make excellent progress. Teachers use an excellent range of practical activities, investigations and good resources to gain pupils' interest. Any areas of weakness in teaching are addressed by very good systems for checking and improving provision. Specialist teachers are employed for music, physical education and French. This ensures high standards in these subjects and adds much to pupils' enjoyment. Learning is brisk and purposeful at all times. Probing questions are used to help pupils to think hard, as for example when they were asked to explain different methods they use to solve money problems. The learning is often made more meaningful by linking subjects together. This frequently happens during outdoor learning days when the grounds are used extensively as a valuable teaching resource. Very supportive relationships make a significant contribution to pupils' achievement and their attitudes, helping them to aim high. They particularly enjoy being involved in their learning, by knowing the focus of the lesson and discussing their progress at the end. High quality marking is used particularly well to help pupils to know how to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The outstanding curriculum with its focus on creative activities, real life learning, citizenship and healthy living promotes excellent personal development. All groups of learners make outstanding progress because of the way that the curriculum is adapted to meet their individual needs. There is a strong emphasis on extending key literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills in other subjects, as well as a rigorous approach to the development of letters and sounds in Key Stage 1. This promotes high levels of achievement. Learning is significantly enriched through visits, visitors and themed days and weeks. The local area with its rich historical, geographical and natural amenities is fully utilised within the curriculum to make learning exciting. Pupils speak passionately about saving the red squirrels in their area. The very wide range of clubs after school, planned in conjunction with parents and a local Sports Partnership, provides very good opportunities to extend pupils' learning and talents.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, support and guidance for pupils are outstanding, enabling them all to achieve exceptionally well. Through high quality relationships with adults, pupils feel secure and valued. They thrive in this warm environment and self-esteem is high. The school works very well with local agencies to ensure that the needs of all pupils are met. Parents are very appreciative of the high levels

of care their children receive. The school in return is grateful for the help parents give in school and their support with homework. Family learning workshops are well attended and are an important link with parents. The safety of pupils is given a high profile and all safeguarding procedures meet government requirements.

Academic and personal guidance is excellent. Very good assessment systems give staff a clear picture of how well pupils are progressing so that challenging targets can be set. These targets are regularly reviewed with pupils to enable them to take an increased responsibility for their learning in knowing their strengths and areas for development. This improved guidance has had a significant impact on standards and achievement since the last inspection. It has raised the expectations of staff and pupils in recognising and working towards clear points for improvement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher, through inspirational leadership, has the total trust and confidence of the whole school community. With a strong supportive team, who share her high expectations, they are constantly looking for ways to continue to improve. Governors demonstrate excellence in their support and challenge for the school. With significant strengths in staffing and management, very high standards are maintained and the welfare of pupils is paramount. Challenging targets are set and often exceeded. The school has an excellent understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement through rigorous checking of the teaching and learning. Self-evaluation is accurate in all respects. New developments, like problem solving in mathematics, are quickly embedded through the school because of the outstanding skills and willingness of staff to take on board new initiatives. Governors know the school extremely well and play a significant part in shaping its development and holding it to account. Judged as a good school with outstanding features at the previous inspection, it has made very good improvements since then and has an excellent capacity to continue to do so.

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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?	1
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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

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?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1

¹Grade 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

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	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	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
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?	1
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	1
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**

11 December 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Belsay First School, Northumberland, NE20 0ET

Thank you for making me so welcome when I inspected your school. Everyone was so helpful, friendly and polite. I enjoyed my time with you all very much and would like to tell you what I found out. You go to an outstanding school, which I know you are all very proud to attend. Those of you in Reception make a really good start, as there are so many opportunities for you to learn through play. The excellent progress you make in Reception continues right through the school. By the time you leave at the end of Year 4 you are reaching very high standards. This is because the teaching and the way the school is led and managed are outstanding and also because you all work so hard and want to do well.

In lessons and around the school I saw how much you care for one another. I noticed particularly how those of you in Year 3 and 4 were keen to help your classmates when work on fractions got a bit difficult. I never saw anything other than excellent behaviour and happy smiling faces. You are all a great credit to the school. You told me how much you enjoy school because the teachers are very kind and they make the learning fun. I saw that in all of the lessons I observed. The teacher's give you very challenging and interesting work and they also take exceptional care of you all. You all have a very good understanding of how to stay healthy and safe. I enjoyed talking to the school council and was very impressed with the improvements you have made in the school. The stain glass window in the cloakroom is lovely. You certainly chose the best designs.

The headteacher and governors have worked exceptionally hard to make certain that your education is of the highest quality possible. With your help they have developed a wonderful wildlife area and adventure playground, which you all love using. There is so much for you to enjoy in the outstanding curriculum, including lots of visits, visitors and clubs after school and not forgetting your nativity play in French! I found just one thing that I have asked the school to improve. When I was looking at your exercise books and displays, I enjoyed the content of the writing, but decided that your handwriting could be much better. Some of you are still printing in Year 4 and quite a lot of you are not using a good fluent style of handwriting yet. I hope you will all try very hard to improve your handwriting throughout the school.

Yours sincerely

Sheila Mawer

Lead inspector