

Linton First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122199
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	327657
Inspection date	20 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Andrew Scott

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)	15
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 George Jackson
Headteacher	Mrs Katherine Urwin
Date of previous school inspection	13 July 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Linton Morpeth Northumberland NE61 5SG
Telephone number	01670 860361
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Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This very small school serves a small, isolated village where socio-economic conditions are below average. Almost all pupils are from White British families and the pupil population is fairly stable. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is usually average, but is currently above average. The Early Years Foundation Stage provision comprises a Reception class, in which children work mostly alongside pupils in Years 1 and 2.

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 which sits at the very heart of its community. Its key role in local life is one of its outstanding features. Parents are unanimous in their praise for its impact on their children. 'Our children receive an education second to none,' one wrote. 'Unable to fault the positive influence the school has on my children,' added another. The school certainly takes admirable care of its pupils, not just in ensuring that safeguarding procedures are secure, but especially in providing vital day-to-day care and concern for individual needs. Pupils are very reassured by this mantle of care and grow into sensible and thoughtful individuals. One pupil, for example, stopped a younger one in a passage to tie her shoelace that was undone. Behaviour, attitudes to learning and individual responsibility are excellent. As a consequence, pupils' personal development is outstanding.

Pupils achievement is good throughout the school. With such small year groups, it is very difficult to evaluate trends in standards over time. Broadly speaking, though, pupils enter school with attainment below typically expected levels and leave with standards that are at least average, and sometimes higher. Standards are now similar in all subjects. Until recently, writing was a weakness but a concerted effort by staff and pupils has boosted standards. There is still some work to do in this area, and in mathematical problem solving and independent learning. Teachers do not routinely plan work so that pupils progress at a speed that is always right for their capabilities. Despite this, teaching is good. The relaxed, purposeful atmosphere in classrooms and the personalised guidance for pupils from their teachers combine to ensure that all pupils make good progress.

The school has done well to improve the curriculum. It is now good. There is a good focus on the key skills in literacy and numeracy, and effective support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities through sensitive advice and encouragement. To improve standards, the school has considerably enriched the pupils' experiences to give real meaning to learning. Whole-school visits to interesting places are tightly linked to topic work in lessons. This element of the curriculum is excellent. This fresh impetus has been especially successful in improving writing, because pupils now have a richer vocabulary and more interesting things to write about.

The success of the school is due primarily to the very good leadership of the headteacher. She is instrumental not only in sustaining good standards of work and personal development, but also in moving the school forward. Self-evaluation is accurate, and there is no complacency. The school's development is very cohesive; staff, pupils, governors and parents are all fully involved in the process of change. In addition to the curriculum, the school has addressed the issues from the last inspection very well and it has strengthened community cohesion, especially in the locality. However, there has been a lack of urgency in providing a new outdoor learning area for the youngest pupils. Even so, the school is prospering and, as such, provides good value for money and is well placed to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children benefit from a good start to school in the Reception class. As relationships with the village community are close, children quickly settle into the class and soon acquire a very good interest in learning. They benefit from plenty of support from older pupils and the teachers, and the level of challenge in their work is usually good. They achieve well during the year.

Children tend to begin school with skills and abilities below those expected for four year olds, with a particular weakness in early language skills. They usually enter Year 1 with standards that are broadly average although language remains the weakest aspect. They experience a wide range of opportunities in their classroom, and have ample scope to learn through exploration. However, the school does not yet provide a designated and fully resourced area to support learning outside so that children can acquire a full range of experiences. A particular strength is the level of care and support that children receive when they are stuck with a problem, or simply need an encouraging word. As a result, they all get on together very well, their behaviour is excellent and they become very aware of the need to lead an active and positive lifestyle. They instinctively know that staff are very mindful of their welfare. The Reception class is well led and organised; links with parents are especially effective.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teachers' planning takes full account of the different needs of pupils to enable them to progress at a pace appropriate to their abilities.
- Ensure that outdoor provision fully supports all six areas of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

All pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, have good achievement. Standards fluctuate considerably year on year because of the very small year groups. However, there are no trends that give rise to concern and no obvious disparities between groups of pupils. Having entered Year 1 with broadly average attainment, pupils reach standards that are usually average by the end of Year 2. In 2008, standards were above average, and pupils are continuing to make good progress this year.

Standards by Year 4 are at least average. In 2007 they were very high; in 2008 they were broadly average. There is every indication that they will rise again in 2009. It is commendable that writing has improved following a whole school focus on language, including letters and sounds and increased life experiences to broaden vocabulary. Standards are not as high as they might be because pupils do not consistently work at their own pace to develop independent skills, for example in solving problems in mathematics and science investigations.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils make outstanding progress in their personal development. Behaviour is exemplary, and exclusions are unknown. Pupils are very polite, sociable and sensitive to each other's needs. They are very patient in lessons, for example, when waiting for others to catch up. They acquire a very good sense of right and wrong, and they learn respect and reverence for the world about them, notably through all their stimulating experiences in learning. They have a good knowledge of the wider locality and the school is currently improving their awareness of the diverse cultures of Britain and beyond. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

Pupils all love their school. They are very focused in lessons and attendance is above average. They learn to be self-reliant and responsible. Older pupils are thoughtful play leaders at break-times. They make wise choices about a safe and healthy lifestyle; they relish martial arts and dance activities, for example. All pupils play a pivotal role in the school's development and

they know their opinions matter. A litter campaign enabled them to clean up the village. Links with a university and an enterprise network give pupils valuable life skills and help to prepare them well for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are consistently good. There is an excellent ethos in lessons; teachers generate a supportive, encouraging environment with lots of praise so pupils are eager to learn and concentrate hard. Pupils know what they need to learn, because objectives are precise and clear. The level of challenge is for the most part good and activities motivate pupils. In a mathematics lessons, pupils in Years 3 and 4 reinforced their knowledge of angles and directions by using computer-directed 'roamers' as taxis visiting buildings in Newcastle. Guidance is very focused on individuals, so pupils are reassured and very clear about how to improve. Marking is especially good in English, but not quite so effective in other subjects.

Teachers' planning is well structured but is not as detailed or as fine-tuned as it could be. Although teachers are aware of pupils' individual needs, they do not provide enough scope for pupils to work at their own speed. Even though classes contain a mixture of ages and abilities, the pace of learning sometimes goes at the pace of the slowest learner.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Pupils benefit from a good curriculum that has some excellent enrichment. The school maintains a constant focus on key skills, especially in literacy and numeracy. The recent emphasis on writing, in particular, has borne fruit. The drive to diversify pupils' experiences beyond the classroom is increasingly influencing learning in lessons. For example, pupils produced some fine, factual writing following a visit to Hadrian's Wall. Pupils have performed dance routines in public and are about to be involved in video conferencing with other schools. Provision for pupils' social and health education is also good, because of the wide range of activities and visitors, such as a wildlife sanctuary worker, a Hindu dancer and an artist-in-residence. Good provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also effective especially through personalised support, helped by the high staff to pupil ratio.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

A major strength of the school is the way staff look after the interests of their pupils and families. The quality of care is outstanding, not just because individual needs are identified and dealt with effectively, but also because of the manner in which this work is carried out. The warm, family atmosphere in school means that support is sensitive and fair, but also firm. Consequently, pupils' personal development benefits extremely well. The formal procedures for safeguarding pupils are rigorous. Good links with external agencies, such as speech therapy, help specific needs. The drive to improve attendance has been successful, helped by close liaison with parents who trust the school. Excellent tracking systems enable staff to monitor pupils' progress very regularly. Individual targets to support learning are good, because they are clear and challenging. They have been particularly effective in improving writing.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Good leadership and management have enabled the school to build on its strengths since the last inspection. The dedicated, clear-sighted and shrewd leadership of the headteacher gives the school energy and a sense of direction. The headteacher ensures that everyone in the school is valued and is integral to the school's development. Governance is good. Governors are very supportive, and know the school well but are not yet sufficiently analytical in their monitoring. Regular and realistic self-evaluation leads directly to improvement, as in the broader curriculum. The school has succeeded in addressing issues from the last inspection; in particular, computers and other technology now pervade all learning. However, the school has not sufficiently prioritised the development of the 'outdoor classroom', especially for the youngest pupils.

There is a good focus on community cohesion. The school reviews its provision as part of its whole school planning and fully recognises the benefits of its links with the community. It works extremely hard to engage with the village including resolving local issues. For example, it has provided parking for the local football team to avoid problems when matches are played. Consequently, the school is a real focus for the village and is well supported by the community. It is already working on ways to make pupils more aware of the wider world.

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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?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
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?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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	2

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	2
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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

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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

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

23 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Linton First School, Northumberland, NE61 5SG

I am writing to thank you for the part you played in the recent inspection of your school. Mrs Richardson and I very much enjoyed our day with you, and meeting you and the staff. Your opinions matter to the school; they matter just as much to us and were very useful in helping us to get to know your school. Would you please thank your parents for their comments in their questionnaires.

We think that your school is a good school. You achieve well in your work. Standards are at least where they should be by the end of Year 4 and sometimes higher. We were especially pleased that your writing has improved. We know the teachers have helped you but you have worked very hard too. Teaching is good, because lessons are interesting and mostly challenging. It is good that you make the most of visits and other activities to improve your knowledge, for example, of language and the outside world. Teachers also help you by giving you very good advice in lessons and in their marking of your work. However, we feel that it is important, in such a small school, that you learn at your own pace and so we have asked the school to make sure you have plenty of opportunities to work independently, whenever possible. We think you would enjoy this and hope you would produce even better work.

We were very impressed with the care the school takes of you which, in turn, helps you to develop extremely well as individuals. Behaviour is excellent, as is your consideration for others. You are acquiring a very healthy lifestyle and really enjoy all that the school offers. We were delighted that you all help to improve not just the school, but the village as well. The litter campaign seemed to be very successful.

All this is made possible by your headteacher, staff and governors who have your best interests at heart. They keep a sharp eye on how the school can become better; for example, they have improved the variety of the activities that you do in and out of lessons. However, the very youngest of you do not have enough chance to learn outdoors, so we would like the school to establish its 'outdoor classroom' as soon as possible. Overall, though, your school is going from strength to strength and I wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Scott

Lead inspector