

Stamfordham First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122202
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	327658
Inspection dates	23–24 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Judith Straw

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	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	74
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 Simon Richards
Headteacher	Miss Claire McKinney
Date of previous school inspection	9 February 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Stamfordham Newcastle upon Tyne Tyne and Wear NE18 0NA
Telephone number	01661 886358
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Age group	3–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one additional inspector.

Description of the school

This is a small village school which serves an area of social and economic advantage. A very low proportion of the pupils are entitled to free school meals. Very few pupils are from minority ethnic groups and no pupils use English as an additional language. A lower than average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities but an average number of pupils have a statement of special educational need. Pupil mobility is very high, largely because a number of pupils from the nearby army barracks attend the school. An Early Years Foundation Stage Unit was established in September 2008 when the 'Stampers' pre-school group was amalgamated into the school. The children are taught in three mixed-age classes.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Stamfordham is a good school. It has many outstanding features. Personal development is outstanding. Pupils behave extremely well and are very polite, well mannered and pleasant young people. They thoroughly enjoy school and it is not surprising that attendance is well above average. A wonderful ethos of friendship pervades the school. Pastoral care is excellent and pupils say they feel safe. They know how to look after themselves and keep healthy. One parent summed up the school's many strengths by writing, 'It is a fantastic school which puts the children's well-being at the forefront of its ethos'. The school recognises the importance of working closely with the community and this aspect of its work is excellent.

Pupils' achievement is good. Standards at the end of Year 2 have been consistently well above average in reading, writing and mathematics for the last four years but fell to average in 2008. Nevertheless, from their starting points these individual pupils achieved well. The school took prompt and effective action to halt a decline in standards in writing so that standards are now rising. In Year 2, current standards in English and mathematics are well above average and high in science; across the school, the pupils benefit from specialist science teaching. Standards when pupils leave the school at the end of Year 4 are consistently well above those typically expected for pupils' ages in all tested subjects, and an increasingly high proportion attain levels expected of 11 year olds.

Good teaching and an excellent curriculum are key reasons for achievement being good. Some outstanding teaching was seen with inspirational teachers enthusing the pupils and accelerating learning. Throughout the school, teachers make lessons interesting. These imaginative approaches lead to a real enthusiasm for learning. The school makes excellent use of its attractive and extensive grounds and has created several outside learning areas. Children in all classes relish the opportunity to learn outside, and in all weathers. The school has created a good balance in the curriculum with equal emphasis on academic and social development. The school has gained the Healthy Schools Award and ensures that the children are active, fit and enjoy a healthy diet. With their good basic skills and growing confidence and self-esteem, the pupils are extremely well prepared for the future.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher is an outstanding leader who has brought stability to the school after several changes in leadership. Self-evaluation is accurate and the response to weaknesses is effective, as can be seen in the improvement in writing throughout the school. Subject leaders carry out detailed audits, identify the correct areas to develop and draw up action plans setting clear and measurable targets for improvement. However, the headteacher is currently the only full time member of staff and many responsibilities rest on her shoulders. Governance is excellent and governors play a full role in school life and are involved in major management decisions. Despite financial strictures due to the school's small size, the allocation of resources and deployment of staff to best effect has been highly successful. Weaknesses identified at the last inspection have now become strengths of the school. Numbers on roll are rising, so that from next September, the school will be full for the first time in many years.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Teachers recognise the importance of making learning fun so that the start to the children's education is positive and enjoyable. Parents appreciate the excellent care their children receive and the warm and friendly relationships evident in the classrooms. As a result, personal development is excellent and children make friends quickly. Teaching is good: staff understand the needs of these young children. There is a key worker system and the small steps in progress made by each child are carefully measured and recorded. There is a good balance of free choice and activities led by staff, This increases children's independent skills, which are often underdeveloped when they start school. Overall, children start the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and abilities broadly in line with what is usually seen for this age. However this varies each year within the small groups admitted, and is sometimes below expectations. Achievement is good and children mostly attain higher than typically expected for their ages by the time they start in Year 1. The curriculum is stimulating and solidly based on learning through play and first-hand experiences. The outdoor space is used well by both pre-school and Reception children. Leadership and management are good. Leaders of the pre-school and Reception class are in the early stages of working together to develop the new Early Years Foundation Stage Unit to ensure an even smoother transition in children's learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Consolidate and unify provision and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Review staff roles and responsibilities to strengthen leadership across the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards at the end of Year 2 are consistently well above average and all pupils achieve well. There was an exception in 2008 when standards at the end of Key Stage 1 fell to average. Nevertheless, all pupils achieved well relative to their starting points and the school's records show that this group has now achieved higher than usually expected in Year 3. By the end of Year 4, pupils achieve well in English and mathematics and make outstanding progress in science. Standards are well above those typically expected for their age and a significant proportion attain highly. The school carefully tracks the progress of girls and boys, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those pupils who join the school only for a short time to make sure every child is making good progress in reaching his or her potential. Parents of more able pupils praise the school's efforts in ensuring their children receive extra challenge.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

As at the time of the last inspection, this is a real strength in the school. Pupils have an excellent understanding of keeping safe. They feel secure because of extremely friendly relationships and the very positive ethos that is evident throughout the school. A real sense of mutual respect exists between teachers and pupils and as a result, behaviour is excellent. Pupils show great respect for each other and are very attentive in lessons. Attendance is well above the national average, reflecting pupils' excellent enjoyment of school. This pleasure in school extends to keeping fit and their energetic but well organised play activities are just one example of the pupils' very thorough understanding of caring for themselves.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. The school is at the core of the community with the pupils having close links with the church and local community. The pupils have a very clear understanding of world faiths in addition to Christianity and wrote recently about their pleasure in visiting a synagogue. The school expands pupils' understanding of their role in society to a global dimension as they work towards gaining an Eco green flag and through their exchange visits with an inner city school in Newcastle and support for an orphan school in Uganda. In school, older pupils develop their citizenship skills further through their work as playground buddies and leaders. Pupils' high levels of self-confidence and their good basic skills prepare them extremely well for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good throughout the school, with some that is outstanding. Teachers strive to add that little extra that captures pupils' interest and gives an extra spark to the lesson. Wherever possible, teachers use resources outdoors and provide lots of practical experience so that pupils learn by first-hand experience not just by listening. Management and organisation are effective and lessons run smoothly. Teachers are usually skilful in ensuring pupils in the mixed-age group classes are provided with the right level of support and challenge so that individual pupils can gain from lessons. Just occasionally the pace slackens. Speaking and listening are enhanced with lively discussion. Planning is of good quality and teachers share with pupils what they are to learn and encourage pupils to evaluate their learning at the end of the lesson. Marking of pupils' work is thorough and helpful and is now a strength of teaching. Experienced and well briefed teaching assistants provide extra support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities so that they are able to make good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school has given great thought to providing a curriculum that takes account of the needs of all pupils in the mixed-age classes. Careful planning means that no topics are missed or repeated. Excitement is added with special theme days and subject weeks which keep the focus on enjoyable learning. There is a strong emphasis on raising standards in literacy and numeracy across all subjects. Science is delivered by a subject expert with a real emphasis on investigation so that standards are high and all pupils eagerly enjoy their work in science. Information and communication technology is used well across the curriculum. Specialist teaching is provided in French, physical education and music, thus enhancing pupils' enjoyment and improving standards. The curriculum is sensitively adapted for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities so that they can play a full part in the everyday life of the school. The school provides a very good range of visits, visitors and extremely well attended clubs including sports, French and chess. These activities widen pupils' horizons and their understanding of the world around them.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are excellent. Staff know pupils very well and are quick to respond to their needs. School rules are very well explained and pupils feel secure because they

understand what is expected of them. Bullying is rare and, when it occurs, it is resolved quickly. Safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements and staff and governors are vigilant in ensuring all health and safety procedures are rigorously applied. The school sets great store by providing emotional support for the armed forces children who might be separated from a parent on active service as well as those with social or learning difficulties. Systems to track pupils' academic progress accurately identify if a pupil is underachieving. This is effective in providing extra help for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, ensures pupils joining the school mid-year are quickly assessed and that more able pupils receive the challenge they need. Assessment in literacy and numeracy gives staff a precise picture of pupils' standards.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The strength in leadership and management is the headteacher's dynamic enthusiasm and commitment to ensuring that the school runs smoothly. For example, an exemplary tracking system identifies the progress of all children and is well used. However, there is currently no other senior teacher so most of the responsibilities rest on the headteacher. Staff work as a dynamic team and ensure equal opportunities. Subject leaders play an increasingly important role in monitoring and developing the areas for which they are responsible. The school is vigilant in ensuring that pupils of all backgrounds get the best of opportunities. Self-evaluation is strong. A major feature of the school is its understanding that it is a key facility for the community. This cohesion with the local and wider community is excellent and carefully audited so that it has developed over recent years to enrich both the school and the community. In addition to village, army and parish links, the pupils work with others from an inner city school in Newcastle. The two school councils are working together to compare issues and ways of achieving their goals. There are international links with an orphan school in Uganda. Pupils exchange letters and photographs and Stamfordham staff, children and parents do a lot of fundraising to support their friends in Africa. Governance is excellent as it was at the time of the last inspection. Governors bring a wide and valuable range of experiences to the school that are fully exploited to the benefit of the pupils. They are prepared to challenge and also to support the headteacher when decisions need to be made. With increasing numbers and rising standards, the school is in a good position to move forward.

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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 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?	1
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	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	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	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?	2
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?	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	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	2
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**

27 April 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Stamfordham First School, Northumberland, NE18 0NA

Thank you so much for the warm welcome you gave me when I inspected your school. You were very helpful and made my visit very enjoyable. Please thank your parents for their many helpful and positive comments. This letter is to share with you what I found.

You go to a good school which has outstanding features. Your personal development, including your behaviour, is excellent. I enjoyed seeing so many happy, friendly and smiling faces. I was pleased to see you all being so energetic at play and you have a thorough understanding of the importance of keeping fit and healthy. Your teachers and other staff take excellent care of you and you told me that you all feel safe. It is very clear that you enjoy school and your attendance is very good. Teachers are good at making your lessons interesting and this enables you all to make good progress. Your school is well managed so that it runs smoothly and, even when difficulties arise, the headteacher and staff do everything possible to prevent them disrupting your learning. By the time you leave school, you are extremely well prepared for the future.

There are two things I have asked the school to do.

- Carry on planning together now that the Nursery and Reception classes are amalgamated into one unit.
- Keep reviewing how leadership and management is organised so that everyone is involved in improving the school.

For you the most important things are to carry on doing your best and enjoying school.

I wish you every happiness for the future!

Yours faithfully

Judith Straw

Lead inspector