

Longhoughton Church of England First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122277
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	327682
Inspection dates	23–24 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Dave Byrne

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	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	121
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	Mrs Audrey Jamieson
Headteacher	Mrs Tracey Critchlow
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Lacey Street Longhoughton Alnwick Northumberland NE66 3AJ

Age group	4–9
Inspection dates	23–24 April 2009
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Telephone number
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one additional inspector.

Description of the school

This is a small rural school with close associations with a local Royal Air Force (RAF) base. The families of many pupils are employed there; this is one reason why the movement of pupils into and out of the school during some school years is relatively high. The percentage of pupils taking free school meals is below average, as is the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The large majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds and none requires support for English as an additional language. The headteacher took up post in September 2008 and the deputy was appointed in January 2009. There is access to extended-day provision on the school site. This is inspected separately in accordance with section 49 of the Childcare Act of 2006.

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 number of outstanding features. It has excellent links with the local community, including with local schools and the church, and benefits enormously from very close links with the RAF base. Parents and carers are unanimous in their support of the school. The comment of one parent typifies the many positive opinions expressed by many in their questionnaires: 'The school is a wonderful environment for children. The quality of communication with us is excellent.' The vast majority of those who expressed an opinion feel that the school listens to the views and concerns of parents and carers.

Pupils are well cared for at all times. Their safety and well-being are given the highest priority, and contribute to their good personal development. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are excellent; they are polite, courteous and respectful of others. They confidently take on responsibilities within school and willingly help others. They know the choices required to live safe and healthy lives and most transfer this into their day-to-day actions. Pupils' levels of spiritual, moral and social development are outstanding. Their cultural development is satisfactory. Pupils have a good understanding of local culture but their knowledge of the richness and diversity of modern society is relatively weak.

The quality of teaching and learning is good with some outstanding elements. The hard work and dedication of the staff, coupled with a good and exciting curriculum, are reflected in the pupils' love of learning. They respond very positively to opportunities to learn outdoors at the Forest school, to creatively explore the Tudors and to act as secret agents cracking mathematical codes. These imaginative approaches to teaching and learning are accelerating progress across the school and raising standards further, particularly amongst boys.

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and abilities that are typical of children of their age. They make good progress throughout the school and their overall achievement is good. Progress is outstanding in Years 1 and 2 and by the end of Year 2, standards are well above average. By the end of Year 4, standards exceed the expectations for their age in reading, writing, mathematics and science. Pupils do particularly well in reading. Even so, the more able pupils in Key Stage 2, are not always stretched enough and could do even better in writing and mathematics. Girls have tended to do better than boys but recent improvements in the curriculum are rapidly narrowing the gap. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress from their starting points. Good academic and personal development means that pupils are well prepared for their future learning and the world of work.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides excellent leadership, setting high expectations for pupils, building warm and productive relationships with parents and the community and valuing the skills of all staff. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and based on rigorous analyses of assessment data and the views of staff, pupils and parents. The school recognises the need to refine its approach to promoting community cohesion with regard to the wider world. The school has successfully built on the good quality of education noted at the last inspection. Recent improvements to the curriculum, significant upgrading of the Early Years Foundation Stage and investments in the school grounds demonstrate the school's determination to continue to improve. These factors, coupled with an extremely effective governing body, provide the school with an excellent capacity for improvement in the future.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The quality of leadership and management is excellent. It successfully overcomes some limitations in the accommodation to give children a flying start to school life. At all times, children learn within a safe and secure environment. Building on excellent links with the on-site Nursery, children quickly settle into school life. They thrive on the wide range of exciting and stimulating activities provided for them. A highly skilled teaching team cleverly directs and cajoles children to explore and try out all that is on offer. Children are encouraged to make decisions and solve problems for themselves. Using very thorough and accurate assessments of each child, activities are tailored to meet the needs of each individual. Children enjoy taking part in adult-led activities, for example to extend their basic phonics as a way into early reading and writing. The needs of boys and girls are recognised and accommodated while ensuring that all children have equal access to a full and balanced range of activities. The needs of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are fully met and the more able are identified and subtly given challenge.

Teaching shows excellent knowledge and understanding of the needs of young children and results in the wise use of all resources to promote excellent learning. In their time in Reception, children make excellent progress in all areas of learning. After starting with levels of development which are typical for their age, they develop rapidly and exceed levels expected of five-year-olds by the start of Year 1. Many do well in early reading, writing and mathematics and have good levels of personal, social and emotional development. Parents are very supportive of the quality of provision provided. They rate highly the very effective systems established which keep them exceptionally well informed and involved in their children's education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the achievement of more able pupils in Key Stage 2, particularly in writing and mathematics.
- Refine current strategies for promoting community cohesion to give pupils a better understanding of the wider world and the cultural richness and diversity in modern society.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' achievement is good. After starting Year 1 with above average standards, pupils make outstanding progress and standards rise to being well above average by the end of Year 2. This has been a consistent picture in each of the last five years. In Years 3 and 4, the large majority of pupils make good progress and reach levels that exceed the expectations for their age. They do particularly well in reading and attain well above average standards. The school is accurate in its assertion, confirmed by inspection findings, that more able pupils could do even better in Key Stage 2, particularly in writing and mathematics. Across the school, data indicate that girls tend to do better than boys, but recent initiatives, for example, to boost learning in mathematics and to make writing more relevant to boys, are rapidly narrowing the gap. Pupils with moderate learning difficulties make good progress and those with a statement of special educational need progress well to reach the targets set.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is outstanding and contributes to their excellent behaviour and attitudes. While pupils have an advanced understanding of their local culture and aspects of that of the United Kingdom, their knowledge and understanding of the richness and diversity of multicultural society are weaker.

Pupils grow into mature and confident young people in their time in school. The many opportunities provided for them to take on responsibility, for example, by acting as head boy and head girl, and helping others as buddies and school councillors, give pupils a good understanding of how to be active citizens. At all times, pupils are polite and show interest in others. They work hard in lessons and take pride in their work. Most pupils have a very well developed knowledge and understanding of the choices required to live safe and healthy lives. The pupils' acquisition of good academic skills, coupled with excellent social and moral development, prepare them well for the next stage of their education. They enjoy coming to school and love learning. Attendance is in line with that of most schools, and there have been no exclusions in recent years.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good with outstanding elements. Teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of the curriculum and give lessons which move at a well judged and often brisk pace. When working closely with dedicated teaching assistants, pupils of all abilities are well involved in lessons. While the needs of those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are consistently met, the more able are not always stretched enough, most noticeably in Key Stage 2. Teaching is most effective when an imaginative approach is taken. Using drama and role-play linked to art and dance as part of studies about the Tudors, both boys and girls were inspired to learn. Lessons based on such approaches enable pupils to see links between different subjects resulting in them working with enormous enthusiasm and pleasure, and producing high quality work. Teachers know each pupil well. Most pupils are given good guidance about how well they are doing. Marking, however, is not always exploited enough to improve standards.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good with outstanding features. It gives pupils access to all required subjects and successfully promotes their development of personal, social, health and citizenship understanding. Some excellent initiatives taken to promote creativity are having a positive impact on pupils' learning in all subjects but most noticeably in mathematics and writing. A good focus is given to developing the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). These are increasingly planned within imaginative approaches to learning that link subjects together and use inventive scenarios to inspire learning. Excellent partnerships within the community enrich the curriculum. Examples include: learning through the environment in a Forest school, exploring Tudor life through drama, dance and art, and working with local industry to explore and develop the school's bio-diversity within the grounds.

Extra-curricular activities are wide and varied and successfully broaden the experiences of a large proportion of pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care and guidance are good with significant strengths in the quality of support for the pupils' personal development. When pupils have emotional needs, help is at hand, and when pupils need someone to talk to, there is a trained adult available. The school places great value on involving parents and carers in their children's education and has some excellent strategies to do so which benefit learning. Pupils' health and safety have the highest priority for the school and all procedures to safeguard pupils meet current requirements. Academic assessment is rigorous and effective in monitoring and tracking the progress of pupils and identifying those who could do better. For those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, good support is available but for the more able pupils it is not as well planned. This reduces the rate of learning for some pupils, particularly in Key Stage 2.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is successfully building on its many strengths noted at the last inspection. The headteacher provides excellent leadership, generating a strong vision for the school's future and demonstrating a strong ambition for its improvement. There are effective ways for evaluating the school which reflect the views of staff, pupils and parents. These outcomes inform a reasonable school improvement plan. It has good links between its targets for developing the school and those recorded in the school's self-evaluation form. Staff successfully manage subjects well and benefit from a good model for staff training and development. The management of provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has recently changed and aspects of its administration are in the process of being evaluated and improved further.

The excellent governing body is dedicated to school improvement. Governors know the school very well and constantly monitor it in a variety of ways, including regular visits. The school is committed to promoting community cohesion. It is strong in terms of promoting cohesion within the school and the local area but less effective in extending the pupils' knowledge of the wider world and monitoring the impact of provision on their cultural development. Given the current excellent level of leadership provided by the headteacher which is resulting in better progress and rising standards, coupled with the outstanding support of the governing body and the strong and dedicated staff team, the school has an excellent capacity to improve further in future.

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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	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?	2
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 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?	2
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	3
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

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?	2

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	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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**

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Longhoughton Church of England First School, Northumberland, NE66 3AJ

During my recent visit to your school, I promised to let you know what I thought of it. You told me that you liked your school and said that it was a good place to learn in. I agree with you, your school is good and has some outstanding features. It gives you a really good start to your education and gives you a good chance in life.

These are things that are particularly good.

- The excellent start you get in the Reception class.
- The good standards in English, mathematics and science.
- The mature way you behave and treat others and look out for them.
- The quality of teaching which makes lessons exciting and interesting.
- The benefits you get from the excellent links the school has with the community especially the local RAF base and the Forest school.
- The care that is taken to keep you safe at all times.
- The way the school encourages your parents and carers to get involved with your education at home.
- The high quality of leadership provided by your headteacher and governors.

Your school is an exciting place to be and all your staff are very dedicated to making it even better. It keeps a close eye on how well you are doing and how well the school supports you. Where possible, the school does its best to help each and every one of you. I have suggested, however, two things that would make the school even better. These are:

- help pupils in Key Stage 2 who learn quickly to do even better in writing and mathematics
- find ways of extending your knowledge and understanding of the cultural richness and differences in our modern society and in the wider world.

Please thank your parents for sending me their thoughts about the school; almost all of them feel that the school is doing a good job.

Best wishes for your futures.

Yours faithfully

Dave Byrne

Lead inspector