

Spittal Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122185
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	340101
Inspection dates	5–6 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Andrew Scott

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	5–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	121
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs D Pervis
Headteacher	Mrs Cathrine Taylor
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector. The inspector visited seven lessons, and held meetings with staff, pupils and members of the governing body. He observed the school's activities, especially classroom learning, and analysed the school's documentation. He also took full account of the 32 questionnaires that were returned by parents and carers, as well as those from pupils in Key Stage 2 and staff.

The inspector reviewed many aspects of the school's work. He looked in detail at the following:

- the achievement and standards of different groups of pupils, especially boys
- the quality of teachers' assessment and planning throughout the school, especially for literacy
- the extent of pupils' understanding of the different cultures and aspects of the world beyond the locality
- the flexibility and creativity within the curriculum that help to meet pupils' individual needs
- the effectiveness of self-evaluation at all levels of leadership and the quality of development planning.

Information about the school

This small first school serves an area of Berwick-upon-Tweed where there is some social disadvantage. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average. Almost all pupils are from White British families. Absence of key staff last year has caused some disruption to the school's usual provision. The headteacher had been in post for four weeks at the time of the inspection.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school that is well regarded in the local community. Pupils develop good personal skills and achieve well in their work. They benefit from good-quality care, because staff know them very well and work to address their individual needs, often linking with outside agencies. Unavoidable absences by senior staff affected the momentum of pupils' learning in the past year, but the school succeeded in minimising any adverse impact. Similarly, the school has ensured a smooth transition in the change of leadership. Parents and carers think well of the school. One view, shared by the inspector, was, 'All teachers are very friendly, approachable and professional.'

Pupils are happy at school and attendance has been rising. They respect their teachers and enjoy the various activities, including the clubs after school. Their behaviour is mostly good. Occasionally, vigorous play in the playground upsets some pupils, but pupils essentially feel safe in school and know that staff deal promptly with any problem. Pupils lead active, healthy lifestyles and know what food is good for them. They interact well with the local community, but their awareness of the wider world and its variety of cultures and traditions is underdeveloped.

By Year 4, pupils reach standards in reading, writing and mathematics that are expected of nine-year-olds. This represents good progress from their below average starting points into the Reception class. Standards have been consistently similar since the last inspection. Girls have tended to do better than boys, especially in English. The school has done well to narrow the gap but there is still a little way to go, particularly in writing. Progress in Key Stage 1 is at present satisfactory and reflects the quality of teaching there.

Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers' knowledge, enthusiasm and support for pupils' learning certainly develop a positive work ethic among pupils. The level of challenge is mostly good for all groups of pupils, although this is not always tuned finely enough, notably in Key Stage 1. Teachers know how well pupils are learning and have good data about their progress. However, the systems to record and analyse the data are not organised enough to ensure that all pupils consistently receive a high level of challenge in their work. The school is eager to develop its curriculum. Currently, it rightly follows national guidelines and is satisfactory, but it is not very imaginative or diverse. There is some good enrichment outside classes, but lessons are quite formal and routine at times. This does little to galvanise pupils, broaden their knowledge or show how learning relates to real life.

The school, at all levels of leadership, has good self-evaluation. Well aware of its strengths, it is not blind to how it could be better. Action plans clearly define the areas

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of focus, such as writing, assessment and the curriculum, reflecting the ambition of the school to improve further. The new headteacher already has an accurate picture of the school, and governors monitor the school regularly and effectively. Although the management structure is not clearly defined, all staff with responsibilities work effectively to drive the development of their aspects of the school. Resources in the Reception class have been improved, standards have risen in Key Stage 2 and staff morale has been maintained in potentially difficult times. The school has yet to establish a coherent approach to community cohesion but is keen to do so. The camaraderie among staff, the clear and incisive vision of the headteacher and governors, together with recent improvements, show that the school has good capacity to sustain improvement. The school provides good value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of pupils' learning, especially in Key Stage 1, by:
 - streamlining the gathering and recording of data on pupils' progress
 - using the data on pupils' progress more effectively to ensure a consistently high level of challenge for all pupils.
- Increase the variety and range of pupils' learning experiences by:
 - ensuring that lesson planning is more flexible, creative and motivational for pupils
 - developing pupils' awareness of the different cultures and communities beyond the immediate locality.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Pupils make good progress overall and reach average standards by Year 4. When they enter Year 1, standards are usually close to average overall but pupils have below average language and calculation skills. Pupils usually make good progress in these basic skills and, by Year 2, standards tend to be average in all subjects. In the past, girls have performed better than boys, but the gap is narrowing. In 2009, standards remained broadly average but dipped very slightly. The progress of this year group was disrupted by staff absence and the number of different teachers. Pupils' progress at present in Key Stage 1 is satisfactory.

Standards at Year 4 have risen in English, particularly in reading, and are broadly average. Boys attain as well as girls in mathematics but, like younger pupils, have not quite caught up in writing. The school has worked hard to improve this situation and is having gradual success. Learning and progress are good in both of the current year groups. Usually, more able pupils achieve as well as other pupils. This was less apparent in 2009, but the right kind of challenge in lessons at present is extending more able pupils' abilities and enables them to work at higher levels. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities also make good progress, helped by focused learning plans and close support from staff.

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Pupils develop good personal and social skills. They get on well together, behave well for the most part and are responsible when moving around. Reflection is a natural part of school life in lessons and assemblies, so pupils become thoughtful. They like being active and many engage in physical activities after school. They know what constitutes a healthy diet. They certainly like their school and found it hard to suggest improvements, except for a larger hall. They enjoy their close links with the local community; the annual sandcastle competition is a fine tradition on the nearby beach. They are much less knowledgeable about the complexity and diversity of people and cultures further afield. With good personal skills and average basic skills, pupils are prepared satisfactorily for the next phase of their education.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching and learning are mostly good. Teachers are knowledgeable, confident and eager to engage all pupils, whatever their individual needs or circumstances. In most lessons, work is sufficiently challenging and progressive so that pupils acquire skills readily yet methodically. Teachers ask probing questions to promote speaking and to

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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ensure good understanding. They value pupils' contributions. As a result, pupils are relaxed but focused and capable of sustaining prolonged concentration.

However, teachers' planning does not always take enough account of pupils' prior learning to match work neatly to their needs. This is particularly true in Key Stage 1, where teaching is satisfactory. Here, pupils' classroom work is sometimes unenterprising and unnecessarily laboured. Colouring in and the completion of worksheets did little to enliven pupils or quicken learning in some lessons, especially for more-able pupils. Throughout the school, there is some good enrichment outside lessons, through visits and visiting experts. However, teachers do not regularly make the most of opportunities to link subjects or present learning in real-life situations to make learning richer, more secure and with greater relevance.

The inspector agrees with parents and carers that the school takes good care of its pupils. Staff are very welcoming towards families and readily work with them to resolve any issues. Staff are vigilant about pupils' welfare and investigate all concerns without delay, often together with local agencies, such as social services, if appropriate. Pupils certainly feel comfortable approaching staff if they have a problem, safe in the knowledge that it will be handled effectively and quickly. The school ensures that the very few pupils who speak English as an additional language settle in well, but lacks clear, formal guidelines for staff to follow.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Effective leadership has enabled the school to make the change of headteacher smooth and successful. The shared commitment and sense of purpose among all staff and governors have ensured that the school has not only remained on an even keel in recent years but has developed well, despite some absences by key staff. The new headteacher has quickly gained an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses and has good ideas to develop the school further. The management structure is at present sufficiently clear although senior staff do not regularly benefit from enough time to perform their duties. However, they have done well to introduce some important changes, and are willing and enthusiastic to adopt fresh, new ideas. Good self-evaluation has enabled the school to improve important aspects of its work. These include a reduction in class sizes to focus on individual needs, sustaining a good proportion of teaching support, as well as increased resources for outdoor learning, and

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information and communication technology. Good monitoring of teaching is highlighting sensible areas for improvement. The school is committed to treating all pupils equally. However, its progress in ensuring equality for all pupils has been steady rather than swift, as in the case of improving boys' achievement. Governors are well trained, proactive and know the school from first-hand experience. The governing body fulfils its statutory duties well, including the commitment to safeguarding pupils.

The school forges fruitful partnerships with external agencies. For example, the links with Sure Start ensure that children begin school with greater confidence. There is also a close bond with the local community. Picnics with older people and visits from the local lifeboat crew are good examples. Even so, the school has not planned its links thoroughly enough with the world beyond Berwick, so its approach to community cohesion is satisfactory.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children benefit from a good start to their education in the Reception class. Very good links with pre-school providers, and parents and carers, mean that children settle very quickly into school and learn the various routines. They soon acquire a sensible approach to work and behave well. They are attentive in whole-class sessions and capable of sustaining concentration when working on their own. They enjoy the varied activities and, helped by lively, challenging teaching, make good progress in their learning. They enter school with skills and abilities at levels below those expected for four-year-olds, and enter Year 1 having reached most of the expectations for their age. Language, a weakness at the start, has still not entirely caught up.

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Children are able to access activities inside and outside freely, and are encouraged to learn through exploration. They thoroughly enjoyed investigating textures, such as foam and jelly, and were motivated to create an impromptu game using hoops of different sizes. Learning activities are increasingly being linked to the main focus of learning, such as phonics, but this is not routinely happening. Children are happy and confident because of a good level of care at all times. Appropriate safeguarding procedures are in place. Although the leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is not clearly defined, the provision is nevertheless being well run by a capable practitioner who has the enthusiasm and determination to develop it further.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers think well of the school. They praise its warm, welcoming atmosphere and they know that staff want the best for their children. They feel that their children make good progress, because teachers are capable and committed. They endorse the fact that the school is a focal part of the community. A few think that their children could make better progress and would like better communication from the school, including information about how to support their children's learning at home. Individual concerns about behaviour were not supported by most parents and carers or the inspection evidence.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Spittal Community School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspector received 32 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 121 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	18	56	13	41	0	0	1	3
The school keeps my child safe	17	53	13	41	1	3	1	3
The school informs me about my child's progress	15	47	11	34	4	13	2	6
My child is making enough progress at this school	15	47	11	34	4	13	2	6
The teaching is good at this school	17	53	11	34	3	9	1	3
The school helps me to support my child's learning	14	44	13	41	4	13	1	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	15	47	16	50	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	10	31	17	53	1	3	1	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	13	41	16	50	2	6	1	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	10	31	16	50	3	9	1	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	14	44	14	44	1	3	1	3
The school is led and managed effectively	13	41	14	44	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	17	53	13	41	1	3	1	3

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



7 October 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Spittal Community School, Berwick-upon-Tweed, TD15 1RD

Following my recent visit to your school, I am writing to thank you for your help and to tell you what I found out. I enjoyed meeting you and listening to your views. As you know, it was important for me to know that you felt safe and enjoyed learning.

Like you, I think you go to a good school. You make good progress in your work and leave school with standards that are expected of pupils of your age. Standards have improved recently, especially for older pupils. Boys do not do quite as well as girls in English, but the gap is narrowing. You are happy and respectful in lessons and work hard because teachers generally expect good things from you and usually set you good challenges. Sometimes, though, and especially in Years 1 and 2, the work could be harder and more interesting. Therefore, I have asked the school to make sure that new learning takes full account of what you already know and can do, and to provide lots of new exciting activities in lessons. I am sure you will respond to all new challenges very positively so that you can make even better progress.

The school is continuing to develop well. It was not easy last year, with some teachers away. The new headteacher has got to know the school well and has good ideas to make it better. Governors and staff work hard to support the school's progress. They make sure, for example, that you are safe and that you develop well as individuals. I know there are occasional problems, but I also know that your behaviour is good, your attendance has improved and you have active lifestyles. I would like the school, though, to make sure that you get to know more about life beyond Berwick, especially about different people, their customs and traditions. I am confident that you will find this fascinating and work hard to understand.

I wish you every success for the future.

Yours faithfully

Mr Andrew Scott

Lead inspector

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