

Branton Community First School

Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 122188 |
| Local Authority | Northumberland |
| Inspection number | 340102 |
| Inspection date | 15 September 2009 |
| Reporting inspector | Andrew Scott |

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

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|--|---|
| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 4–9 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 10 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mrs Laura Capper |
| Headteacher | Mrs Alison Lloyd-Harris |
| 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 four lessons and held meetings with the 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 questionnaires that were returned by parents and staff, as well as those from pupils in Key Stage 2.

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

- standards and achievement of individual pupils throughout the school
- the effectiveness of teachers' assessment and short-term planning to ensure that the individual needs of pupils are met
- the procedures and practice in ensuring the safety and well-being of all pupils
- the impact of the provision for children of Reception age on their learning
- the rigour of the leadership, including the governing body, in monitoring and evaluating the school's effectiveness.

Information about the school

This is a very small rural school, currently operating in a building at a nearby middle school, whilst its own building is undergoing refurbishment and extension. All the pupils at present are taught in one classroom; there is usually a preponderance of boys. Socio-economic conditions in the area are broadly average. There are no pupils from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is usually average, but there are none in school at present. The school holds several awards, including the Healthy Schools Award, Silver Artsmark, the Activemark for sport and the Northumberland Wildlife Trust Award. Recently the school has experienced instability in staffing.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The school provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. The headteacher has done well to minimise the inevitable problems of the temporary accommodation. As a result the school is a happy place where pupils are relaxed and enjoy learning, especially the varied and stimulating activities throughout the year. The level of care for pupils, their personal development and the overall curriculum are good and, in a few aspects, even better. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding as is their contribution to the school and wider community. They benefit from fruitful ties with the local community and have some very good opportunities to learn of the world beyond their immediate area. Parents think highly of the school and praise its warm, supportive ethos, as well as the progress pupils make.

Attainment is broadly average and not quite so good as at the last inspection. As in many schools with such small year groups, standards often fluctuate widely and it is unrealistic to draw definitive comparisons with national data. On balance, individual pupils make satisfactory progress throughout the school and leave at Year 4 with their attainment in reading, writing and mathematics typical for their age and abilities. Therefore, pupils' achievement is satisfactory, not better because of unsettled staffing, and because assessment and planning are not as rigorous and focused as they could be. Teaching is satisfactory. The teaching of older pupils is more effective, as the engagement of pupils encourages positive learning habits and a swifter pace of learning. However, subjects are often taught in isolation with insufficient applying of knowledge in real-life situations. Consequently, the work does not always motivate pupils sufficiently and some inattention dilutes learning. Pupils are rightly appreciative of the many interesting experiences they receive. Their excellent social, sporting and cultural development is enhanced by frequent visits and activities that broaden their horizons and develop their skills. For example, some pupils play in a ceilidh band with pupils from other schools and perform at a local music festival. Consequently, their overall curriculum is good, even though the daily diet, notably in literacy and numeracy, often involves routine work and occasionally uninspiring exercises. The provision for Reception children is satisfactory. Children's progress is limited because of the lack of a formal system to assess their learning to ensure work is matched closely to their individual needs. In addition children do not always have opportunity to access independent learning activities.

The school looks after its pupils well. Pastoral care is especially good. All staff know the pupils very well and this ensures that any individual concerns are swiftly addressed. Parents acknowledge the benefits of an open-door approach to leadership and support the school well, as does the governing body. The headteacher ensures that her positive

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vision for pupils is shared by staff and she has succeeded in developing some aspects of the school, such as the premises and environmental activity. However, the school's development is not moving apace because there is insufficiently rigorous self-analysis by the leadership to determine what could be better and how they can achieve it. Action plans are satisfactory but not detailed or precise, and senior staff and governors do not monitor the progress of the school's work rigorously enough. This was an issue at the last inspection, together with provision for children of Reception age. The school has striven to rectify matters but with only partial success. Therefore, the school's capacity to sustain improvement is satisfactory.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that:
 - lesson planning consistently provides good challenge for all pupils
 - the everyday learning of basic skills is more practical and stimulating.
- Improve provision in the Reception class by:
 - adopting a more formal system of assessment of learning so that staff can match work more closely to children's individual needs
 - ensuring that children have full access to independent activities.
- Improve the pace and effectiveness of the school's development by creating action plans with rationales that are firmly based on rigorous self-evaluation and linked more directly to pupils' outcomes.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

In lessons pupils enjoy their learning most when the work is engaging and offers a good amount of challenge. Pupils' academic achievement is satisfactory. Standards within the main subjects of English and mathematics vary according to year groups and abilities. The school has been aware of some weaknesses in boys' writing and has worked to minimise them. This has been important because boys usually outnumber girls. Nevertheless, recent and current test results show little improvement overall and remain broadly average by the end of Years 2 and 4. In view of pupils' starting points, this demonstrates their individual progress is satisfactory. There are no significant differences in achievement between boys and girls; pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities also make satisfactory progress.

Pupils have an excellent sense of being part of a community, not only within the school but also beyond. They all form the school council, for example, which meets regularly to discuss and resolve any concerns or suggestions. Their links with the local community are excellent. They perform and show artwork at a nearby agricultural show. Pupils have worked closely with Northumberland National Park to produce a wildlife and

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environmental area that they are developing as a field centre for pupils from urban schools. Their affinity for the great outdoors helps them to lead very healthy lives. They ride, cycle and join sports clubs after school; they also eat and enjoy a sensible diet, not only relishing baked potatoes, for example, but all fruit and vegetables, even broccoli.

Their proximity to nature raises their awareness of the beauty around them in the countryside and stimulates their spiritual development. This is furthered by the close personal links within school where social bonds are very strong. Mutual respect means that pupils of all ages get on very well together. Bullying, as the pupils said, is unknown; behaviour is usually exemplary and only lapses when teaching fails to motivate them. Good attendance underlines their happiness with school. They feel safe and valued.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

The many good opportunities to gain knowledge are offset to some extent by planning that is not linked well enough to pupils' prior learning and capabilities. Teaching is often good, especially for older pupils. The rapport between these pupils and staff is relaxed yet focused. Presentation is lively and often captures the pupils' interest. Constant

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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encouragement and support from all staff spur the pupils on. Overall, lesson planning caters for the different year groups but, as the pupils themselves said, does not consistently provide a high enough challenge. Assessment procedures are in place but are not decisive or informative enough to ensure that teachers' planning is detailed and suitably honed. In addition, work in lessons often comprises routine tasks in workbooks. As a result pupils are not always enthused, and so work within their capabilities and at a moderate pace. This is particularly true of younger pupils.

Pupils enjoy the broader curriculum. The range of activities certainly strengthens their personal and social skills, especially their confidence in understanding the wider world and interacting with adults. Local experts, for example, teach the pupils traditions of weaving, music and farming. Partnerships with local schools and other agencies are especially beneficial, aiding the development of a more creative curriculum. However, teachers do not systematically develop literacy and numeracy through such opportunities in lessons. Growing links with the middle school smooth the transition between the two schools.

Staff are sensitive to pupils' emotional well-being and are vigilant about their safety. The temporary accommodation, for example, was suitably assessed for risks in advance. All procedures for safeguarding pupils meet requirements. For instance, all staff are suitably vetted and accident procedures are firmly established. The day-to-day care is especially good. The headteacher creates a very nurturing and thoughtful ethos, flavoured with a rich sense of humour. Pupils respond readily, comfortable in the knowledge that they all matter and that any personal problem is readily resolved.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

| | |
|--|----------|
| The quality of teaching | 3 |
| 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 | 2 |
| The effectiveness of care, guidance and support | 2 |

How effective are leadership and management?

The school has had to endure some recent problems. The unsettled nature of staffing in such a small school has brought unavoidable pressures, although the headteacher has done well to minimise their impact on pupils. The short-term displacement has limited some activities, such as the outdoor play for Reception children. The headteacher's leadership has done well to maintain standards. However, systems for assessment and planning are not robustly in place and so pupils' learning and the quality of teaching are not improving.

The school is aware of its strengths and what could be improved. Senior staff and governors have praiseworthy ambitions for the school, yet do not evaluate its work

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regularly and incisively enough to induce faster progress. The school's improvement plan has some good ideas but it does not feature enough of its shortcomings and suggest clear routes for improvement. Governors bring very useful expertise, for example, in safeguarding and finance, but could do more to hold the school to account for its actions.

The leadership has done well, though, to ensure that all pupils benefit equally from its provision. Individual skills are recognised and fostered. Outside experts are frequently used to help pupils reach towards their potential. The school's interaction with the local community is impressive and underpins the quality of the school's approach to community cohesion. The school is becoming a valuable local centre and links with urban schools are mutually beneficial for pupils.

These are the grades for leadership and management

| | |
|--|----------|
| The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement | 3 |
| Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning | 3 |
| The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met | 3 |
| 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 | 2 |
| The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures | 2 |
| The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion | 2 |
| The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money | 3 |

Early Years Foundation Stage

The school's provision is satisfactory. Because of the small numbers, children in their first year at school tend to work alongside pupils in Year 1 and sometimes Year 2. This is helpful to their personal and social development, and they quickly acquire confidence and a positive approach to work. The warm and welcoming atmosphere ensures that they happy and responsive to all adults; behaviour is good. Children's attainment when they enter varies considerably but it is broadly typical of four-year-olds, and sometimes higher. They make satisfactory progress and tend to reach levels expected for their age by the end of the year.

Teaching does not generate swift learning, especially in language and number, because

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there has not been an effective system of assessment of children's progress to ensure that work is right for individuals. In addition, children do not have enough scope to make their own choices. Working with staff and other pupils sometimes limits their options. At present, there is insufficient opportunity for outdoor learning, but that will be rectified when the school returns to its usual premises. The provision is satisfactorily managed and there are good systems to ensure children's safety and well-being.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

| | |
|--|----------|
| Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage | 3 |
| Taking into account: | |
| Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage | 3 |
| The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage | 3 |
| The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage | 3 |

Views of parents and carers

Almost all the parents returned the questionnaires; their responses were entirely positive. Parents are clearly happy with the school and what it does for their children. One wrote that it is, 'a lovely, happy, nurturing school'. They highlighted particular strengths in the effective learning environment and the overall progress their children make. They praised the ethos that enables the children to become, 'enquiring, enthusiastic and resourceful', as another parent wrote. The school keeps parents well informed of its activities. Indeed, the close community links mean that parents are regularly involved with school life. The inspector found that the quality of teaching and pupils' learning could be better and this is explained in the report.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Branton First 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 six completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 10 pupils registered at the school.

| Statements | Strongly Agree | | Agree | | Disagree | | Strongly disagree | |
|---|----------------|----|-------|----|----------|---|-------------------|---|
| | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % |
| My child enjoys school | 3 | 50 | 3 | 50 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school keeps my child safe | 5 | 83 | 1 | 17 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school informs me about my child's progress | 3 | 50 | 3 | 50 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| My child is making enough progress at this school | 4 | 80 | 1 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The teaching is good at this school | 3 | 50 | 3 | 50 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school helps me to support my child's learning | 3 | 50 | 3 | 50 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle | 5 | 83 | 1 | 17 | 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) | 5 | 83 | 1 | 17 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school meets my child's particular needs | 3 | 60 | 2 | 40 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour | 3 | 50 | 3 | 50 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns | 4 | 67 | 2 | 33 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school is led and managed effectively | 5 | 83 | 1 | 17 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school | 4 | 67 | 2 | 33 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

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.



Inspection of Branton First Community School, Northumberland, NE66 4JF

I am writing to thank you for the part you played in the recent inspection of your school. I enjoyed my time there, even though it is temporarily in Wooler. I think you have done very well to just get on with your school life, despite the obvious inconvenience to you and your teachers. I was very grateful for your thoughts about the school. Your opinions matter and helped me to get to know your school better.

At present, your school provides you with a satisfactory education. Your standards of work are much as they should be for your age and you make satisfactory progress through the school. Your personal development is good because of the many opportunities to become responsible, thoughtful and sensible young people. Your school council work shows how much the adults appreciate your ideas. You behave well and are considerate towards others. You lead impressively active and healthy lives, and have an excellent bond with the area in which you live and its traditions. Such activities raise your spirits as well as your understanding of life beyond school.

I know you enjoy the different activities that you do over the year. I believe, though, that the work you do each day is not as exciting or interesting as it could be. Teachers certainly want you to do well but do not always make sure that your work fully challenges you. They do not always double check what you already know; this is particularly true of the younger ones among you. Therefore, I have asked the school to provide work that interests and stretches you as often as possible, so that the work is just right for all of you, including those of you in the Reception class.

Your headteacher and staff work hard for you and make sure you are safe and happy. They fully involve your parents and the community in your development and have good ideas to help the school become even better. Even so, I would like the senior staff and governors to make sure all their plans are the right ones for you and keep a close eye on whether these are successful or not.

I wish you every success for the future in your new, improved school building.

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