

Ellington First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122198
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	340103
Inspection dates	20–21 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	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	186
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Simon Allan
Headteacher	Mr Kevin Vardy
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 13 lessons, and held meetings with staff, pupils and members of the governing body. They observed the school's activities, in particular the teaching and learning in classrooms. They analysed the school's documentation and the questionnaires that were returned by parents and carers, as well as those from pupils in Key Stage 2 and from staff.

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

- the achievement and standards by different groups of pupils, especially in Key Stage 2
- the impact of teachers' expectations and guidance on pupils' progress
- pupils' understanding of the different cultures and aspects of the world beyond the locality
- the effectiveness of self-evaluation in terms of linking provision to outcomes.

Information about the school

This average sized first school mainly serves the villages of Ellington and Cresswell where social backgrounds are broadly average. Increasingly, the school draws some pupils from other areas where socio-economic conditions are less favourable. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is currently much higher than average. Almost all pupils are from White British families.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This is an outstanding school where pupils thrive in their academic and personal development. Judged to be outstanding in its previous two inspections, the school continues to prosper. The excellent leadership of the headteacher provides very clear direction for the school and ensures that staff, governors and parents share a common vision for the good of the pupils. Inclusion is central to the school's ethos, as is the quality of care. Both are outstanding and result in an atmosphere throughout the school of calm, mutual respect, and a sense of social responsibility. Support for individual pupils is first-rate. Parents and carers are thrilled with the school and increasing numbers are sending their children here from beyond the catchment area. 'My child is so enthusiastic about coming to school,' was a typical parental comment.

Pupils make rapid strides in their learning in the core skills of reading, writing and mathematics because of excellent teaching and a rich, diverse curriculum. Work in lessons is challenging, interesting and brisk. Subjects are blended to maximise pupils' experiences and to give real meaning to learning. Progress is especially swift in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. At times, though, teachers do not make full use of assessment data to fine-tune the learning for all pupils.

Pupils develop a substantial self-reliance that enables them to take responsibility for their own work. Impressive social skills mean that they naturally help one another, mirroring the excellent guidance from all members of staff. The support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is especially effective. The school does extremely well to reach beyond its own resources to develop partnerships that considerably benefit pupils' learning and well-being, for example, in speech therapy and environmental projects. Links with the immediate community are very strong.

The school has done extremely well to maintain its strengths over time and improve any shortcomings. Staff morale is high and pupils are happy, motivated and successful. The new rooms for focused group work and a new community building are typical of the school's forward thinking. The care taken in appointing the deputy headteacher and the constant honing of staff skills are also good examples. Governors are pro-active and adept at keeping the school moving forward. Some of the school's systems to record information and outline future actions are rather cumbersome, but over time actions have proved effective. Therefore, the school has outstanding capacity to sustain further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Streamline existing systems of assessment in order to:

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- make the transfer and use of information more manageable
- ensure there is a consistently high level of challenge for all pupils in lessons.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and have excellent attitudes to learning. Classrooms are exciting, lively places in which pupils are encouraged to be inquisitive and appreciate learning for its own sake. They develop a high degree of independence which means that even the youngest ones are very capable of working productively on their own. Because of these attributes and the high quality of teaching, pupils' achievement is outstanding. It is especially good in Key Stage 1 where pupils' attainment improves from average to above average in reading, writing and mathematics.

This momentum is maintained in Key Stage 2; standards are usually above average by the end of Year 4, and have been higher. A higher proportion of pupils than is expected nationally reach the expected levels for their age before they leave school, including a substantial proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. These pupils are extremely well supported in lessons and so make rapid progress. There are occasional differences between the standards and achievements of boys and girls, but there is no persistent disparity.

Pupils develop outstanding personal and social skills. They are very thoughtful and instinctively care for one another, especially the most vulnerable pupils. Despite occasional misdemeanours, behaviour overall is as good as it gets. Pupils' sense of morality is very well developed. They are very dued-in about keeping themselves safe and relish an active, healthy lifestyle, as symbolised by the Activemark Gold Award. They are certainly very well placed to continue their education, although their knowledge of the wider world is underdeveloped. The school has already recognised this and good plans are in place for improvement.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1

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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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms	
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

All aspects of the provision are outstanding. Teachers are very skilled in managing and motivating all groups of pupils. In the best lessons, pupils learn through practice and investigation, with just the right amount of advice or guidance from staff. A high level of challenge and very clear learning objectives keep pupils on their toes. Pupils are eager to work and learn swiftly because teachers use all manner of exciting resources and activities. Devising new toys for presentation in a 'Dragons' Den' certainly galvanised Year 3 and Year 4 pupils in a literacy lesson. However, on occasions, teachers do not use their knowledge of pupils' previous learning well enough to ensure that all new learning is smartly tailored to pupils' needs.

The curriculum is outstanding because of its considerable diversity and breadth. Teachers ensure that lessons are sharply focused on basic skills but subjects are rarely taught in isolation. Teachers prefer to bring learning alive and put it in an everyday context. For example, pupils' vocabulary readily expanded when exploring the textures of unfamiliar fruit and vegetables in a Year 2 literacy lesson. Pupils benefit from a wide range of experiences outside school. They have staged a musical performance in Alnwick and been involved in family cookery workshops. The provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is excellent. Pupils' needs are quickly identified and the high quality work in and out of class, especially by the highly trained teaching assistants, is impressive. Pupils with special gifts or talents are increasingly receiving similarly high quality provision.

Such support is typical of the high quality care that all pupils receive. Staff are intensely aware of pupils' individual needs and respond accordingly. At the start of the school day, a smiling, welcoming committee of staff greet pupils, parents and carers who know that staff are always willing to listen to and act on any concerns. External specialists are astutely involved, especially in the training of staff so that they in turn can support pupils in, for example, speech therapy and in the understanding of complex medical needs.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The clear vision and infectious energy of the headteacher provide the spearhead for improvement in the school. His leadership ensures that the school is ambitious and continues to thrive, and its success is guaranteed by the excellent teamwork of all staff and governors. They share the same values that all children matter and so the schools' work is imbued with sensitive care, high expectations and a willingness to improve further. The strong infrastructure within the school means that any changes are skilfully managed and relatively seamless; for example, new staff are smoothly inducted.

The school's development is very good, despite quite long and unnecessarily complex action plans with too many priorities. Similarly, the systems for assessing pupils' work are not as effective as they could be, as the school has acknowledged. Self-evaluation is accurate and based on constant and rigorous review. Through its analysis, the school has already realised that the strengths of community cohesion mainly lie within the school and immediate locality and so has established plans to widen its scope.

The school meets its statutory requirements, including all necessary safeguarding procedures. It works closely with parents and carers to keep them informed of their children's progress and to help them support learning at home. The school prides itself on its inclusiveness. Barriers do not exist between anyone in the school, especially the pupils.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1

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	
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children's progress is outstanding in the Nursery and Reception classes. Children tend to start school with attainment that is typical for their age, but with comparatively weak language skills. In some years, their overall initial attainment is lower than expected. By the end of Reception, they reach and some exceed levels expected of five-year-olds, including in language. Excellent teaching generates a love of learning and makes school an exciting place to be; classrooms and outdoor learning areas are bursting with vibrancy. A rich diet of practical, hands-on activities is skilfully blended to capture children's imaginations and develop confidence and independence, as well as rapidly improving basic literacy and numeracy results. For example, in one topic about 'The lighthouse keeper's lunch', children were inspired to advance their understanding of sounds and letters while designing a sandwich for the lighthouse keeper. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are extremely well integrated and benefit from excellent support by skilled teaching assistants. All children benefit from the excellent guidance from adults around them that skilfully prompts and shapes but does not over-direct their learning.

Behaviour is excellent and children develop very close relationships with each other and adults. Children are impressively aware of how to stay healthy; cooking reinforces this. In Nursery, children worked together to prepare and cook their own vegetable soup, and then enjoyed evaluating its quality! Effective partnerships with parents and carers also make a very positive difference to children's experiences at school. Leadership and management are good. Safeguarding procedures are rigorous and self-evaluation is generally accurate. However, the recording of children's progress is not sufficiently clear in determining just how well each child is meeting the appropriate expectations in each area of learning.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

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Parents and carers roundly endorse the findings of the inspection. They not only agree that all aspects of the school are effective, they strongly agree. They particularly praise the welcoming and supportive ethos of the school, brought about by the dedication and professionalism of the headteacher and staff. They fully appreciate the level of care and the quality of teaching and learning. They are delighted that their children are happy and developing into mature and capable young people. A few individual concerns were not shared by the vast majority of parents and carers nor by the inspectors. One comment typified many: 'Our child has progressed way beyond our expectations due to the skill and support of the staff'.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ellington 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 66 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 186 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	57	81	11	16	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	64	91	3	4	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	47	67	17	24	3	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	55	79	12	17	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	62	89	7	10	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	55	79	7	10	4	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	55	79	10	14	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)	47	67	15	21	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	58	83	10	14	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	48	69	13	19	1	1	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	46	66	16	23	1	1	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	60	86	4	6	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	64	91	6	9	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.



22 October 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ellington First School, Morpeth, NE61 5HL

I am writing to thank you for your help in the recent inspection of your school. The other inspector and I very much enjoyed our time in the school and appreciated all that you had to say. I would like to share with you what we found out.

In short, we think your school is excellent. There are so many strengths that I hardly know where to begin, but here are the main ones.

- Your personal development is outstanding because you are very polite, very caring, very considerate, extremely well behaved and have a zest for learning.
- You achieve extremely well in your work because of excellent teaching; lessons are exciting and grab your attention.
- All staff in the school take excellent care of you all, with special attention to those who need it most.
- All staff are keen to improve their own skills so that they can give you the best support in your work and personal development.
- Your headteacher, the staff and governors work tirelessly and successfully to keep your school as good as it can be, with your best interests at heart.

Your school has no real weaknesses. However, we did notice that teachers do not always double-check what you have already learned in order to set all of you just the right level of work. We have, therefore, asked the school to improve this and we feel confident that you will enjoy a slightly higher challenge at times and want to respond to it.

I wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mr Andrew Scott

Lead inspector

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