

Slaley First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122227
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	340108
Inspection dates	1–2 December 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	64
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs M Rastall
Headteacher	Mrs . O'Neill
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Slaley Village Hexham Northumberland NE47 0AA
Telephone number	01434 673220
Fax number	01434 673220
Email address	admin@slaley.northumberland.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited six lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and the school council. They also analysed the school's documentation, progress data, welfare arrangements and the questionnaires that were returned by parents, pupils and staff.

- progress in mathematics in Key Stage 1, and in writing in Key Stage 2
- the effective use of assessment to influence the planning of all subjects
- the outstanding elements within pupils' outcomes and the quality of care
- the promotion of all facets of community cohesion
- the quality and effectiveness of the school's development planning.

Information about the school

This is a small rural school. Almost all pupils come from White British families; very few are eligible for free school meals. A small percentage of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Its Early Years Foundation Stage comprises a combined Nursery and Reception class. The school has held the Healthy Schools' award for several years and has recently had its Basic Skills Quality Mark renewed.

In the current absence of the headteacher, two members of staff have jointly taken on the role of acting headteacher.

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

Highly regarded by the local community, Slaley First is a good school. It has several outstanding features, especially the high quality of everyday care from all staff and its delightful atmosphere. It is a happy place. As a result, pupils' behaviour and their sense of community are excellent. The school has done well to maintain its good provision this year, despite the temporary absence of the headteacher. The governors had the good foresight to have prepared contingency plans for such an eventuality and so the outcomes for pupils have remained positive. The acting headteachers evince a bright sense of purpose and energy, typical of all staff, which ensures good cohesive leadership for the school.

Over time, standards are above average at the school. They are consistently high at Year 2 and improved in Year 4 in 2009 to be high in reading and mathematics; standards in writing were above average. Pupils' achievement is good. They make particularly good progress in literacy and numeracy from Nursery to Year 2. Teaching is most effective in Years 1 and 2, because there is a more creative and flexible approach to planning and a curriculum that meets the needs of individual pupils better. In addition, older pupils do not have enough guidance through marking to show how they can improve their work.

Pupils benefit from many exciting links that have a significant impact on their learning and well-being. Golf lessons from the professional at the Slaley Hall golf course are a fine example. The size of the school promotes an excellent and automatic sense of citizenship among all pupils. Links with the wider world are varied and extending them is very much on the school's agenda.

The school has accurate self-evaluation. The judgements of its provision tally very much with those of the inspectors and the School Improvement Partner. Although the school knows itself well and has identified areas for improvement accurately, its plans for development sometimes miss key areas and occasionally lack detail. Governors, while being supportive and knowledgeable, have not always checked that plans are appropriate and that all necessary procedures are in place. Nevertheless, the school has made good progress since the last inspection. For example, it has improved the Early Years Foundation Stage outdoor area, raised standards and enhanced the influence of support staff. Such improvements, and the combined energies and common aims of the staff, demonstrate a good capacity to sustain improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure greater consistency in pupils' learning in Key Stage 2, especially in writing,

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by:

- giving them clearer indications of how to improve their work through effective marking
- adopting a more creative curriculum such as already exists in Key Stage 1.
- Improve the quality of the school's development planning by:
 - creating action plans for improvement that are more detailed and based on a clear analysis and prioritisation of the school's current needs
 - ensuring that governors monitor the school with greater rigour to check that all required actions are carried out.

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

Pupils love their school and attendance has been rising. They are eager to learn, very amenable to new ideas and suggestions from staff, and work consistently well on their own or with others. They relish a good challenge, although a few pupils need reminders from staff about their pace of work. Sometimes, staff are too keen to help pupils and do not give them enough time to think for themselves. Because of their attitudes and the quality of teaching, pupils achieve well from their starting points.

Progress is impressive in Years 1 and 2, capped by high performances in national assessments. In 2009, all pupils attained the expected level for their age in reading, writing and mathematics, and many exceeded it. Pupils do slightly less well in mathematics but this was not found to be significant. Standards in Year 4 have improved steadily since 2007 and were high in 2009 in reading and mathematics; standards in writing were not quite so good, because fewer pupils attained the higher level. All pupils achieve equally well, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. There are inevitable fluctuations over the years between groups of pupil because class sizes are so small. However, there are no consistent disparities.

Pupils develop well as individuals. They learn to respect others and be considerate, following the exemplary lead of the adults. They instinctively combine forces in lessons, for example, when completing tasks, and provide tactful support when others are struggling. Pupils understand the need for a healthy lifestyle and lead active lives; they generally follow a good diet but find that good food choices are sometimes hard to make. There are some excellent examples of community spirit and involvement. Pupils will shortly be out carol-singing for some of the village's older residents. They have participated in a local project involving dance, singing and music based on a historical theme of the Newcastle Guild of Workers. They supply exhibits at the local country show. Links further afield, together with developing enterprise activities, prepare pupils well for life ahead.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
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	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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	2

How effective is the provision?

The good learning by pupils is due to the effective teaching throughout the school. In classrooms, there is always a healthy buzz of activity. Pupils respond well to the good challenge and encouragement from staff, and are aware that teachers and support staff want them to succeed. Pupils sustain good concentration because work is mostly pitched at a level to suit their individual needs, no mean feat in mixed-year classes. Learning is more effective in Key Stage 1 because of a richer curriculum and a more energised pace of learning. Key skills are taught successfully on their own and through other subjects. In a Year 2 English lesson with a pantomime theme, pupils effortlessly expanded linguistic and other skills. They were asked to compose a letter in response to a complaint by the Ugly Sisters about sore feet, produce made-to-measure tiaras and design a glass slipper. They did so, enthusiastically.

Pupils respond wholeheartedly when activities are particularly stimulating. They especially like the excellent range of activities beyond the classroom, such as projects with Hexham Abbey, an Artist in Residence and family music making. Links with local schools are equally fruitful. Teachers' planning focuses strongly on basic skills, and the skilled support staff benefit all pupils, notably those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Despite this close support in lessons, teachers do not routinely show pupils how they can improve when marking their work, especially older pupils.

The day-to-day care for pupils is outstanding. Staff place a great store by knowing the individual circumstances and needs of pupils. Each pupil is greeted warmly at the door in the morning by a teacher, and another teacher extends the welcome by providing supervision in the yard before school. There is constant and sensitive support for

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vulnerable pupils. On occasions, pupils join different year groups to meet their social and learning needs better. The overall level of care is good; the school is not as thorough as it could be in ensuring that all training needs and documentation are fully up to date.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
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?

All aspects of leadership and management are good. The school continues to function well, upholding the strengths identified at the last inspection. There is no evidence that the extra responsibilities of the two key teachers, currently acting as headteachers, are having any adverse impact on pupils' learning and other outcomes. Indeed, the situation highlights the essential strength of the school – namely, staff cohesion and a shared drive to succeed. Governors play an important part and are very supportive, although they could do more to monitor the relevance of the school's development.

The school has established a good range of activities to promote community cohesion. Staff are acutely aware that the school's rural location makes this provision a priority and are already broadening the scope of its action plan. Partnerships with parents and external agencies bring a vital extra dimension to learning. Parents are keen to support learning at home and pupils acquire good skills in dance, for example, through highly skilled tuition from the North Tynedale Partnership. Procedures to safeguard pupils are good, including the vetting of staff and assessment of risks. Some procedural elements, however, would benefit from a more efficient overview by senior staff and governors. The school succeeds in its philosophy of treating every pupil equally. They all receive the same level of care and support, and teachers' planning takes good account of their various capabilities.

The school has dealt effectively with the issue of assessment raised at the last inspection. Although the leadership knows the school's strengths, it does not identify all its relative weaknesses with sufficient clarity so that action plans are highly focused. For example, leaders have not fully considered the impact of marking on pupils' progress, especially in Key Stage 2. Nevertheless, the acting headteachers are doing a sterling job in keeping the school on an even keel and retaining its joie de vivre. The indications for the future are promising.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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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	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	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children benefit from a good start to school life in the Nursery and Reception class. Excellent home visits before children start school and close links with the pre-school provision on site mean that children rapidly settle into school routines. They start school with skills and abilities that are typical of three-year-olds, although their early language and mathematical skills are sometimes weaker. They make good progress so that, by the end of Reception, they reach levels above those expected for their age. The progress in literacy and numeracy is very good helped by detailed assessments of the progress of each child that significantly influence lesson planning. The quality of care and close personal attention is as evident here as in the rest of the school and this encourages children to make vital choices for themselves. Staff also inspire their imagination. The faces of a small group of children lit up as they made a 'sleigh' and headed off into the firmament to deliver Christmas presents. Work is usually challenging with a good range of activities, in and out of the classroom. However, the range and diversity of opportunities are not as extensive as they could be to maximise progress in all areas of learning. This Early Years Foundation Stage is well led and managed. Staff work seamlessly together and arrangements into Year 1 have been honed to smooth children's transition.

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

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 think highly of the school. In their questionnaires, they praised all aspects of the school, especially its warm and welcoming ethos, the quality of teachers and support staff, as well as the provision for the individual needs of pupils. The inspectors agree with these views. A very small number of parents did not agree with all that the school does, but there were no common concerns among the parent body.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Slaley 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 inspection team received 31 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 64 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	21	75	6	21	1	4	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	22	79	5	18	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	20	71	7	25	1	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	20	71	7	25	1	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	18	64	9	32	1	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	14	50	10	36	2	7	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	17	61	10	36	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)	15	54	10	36	1	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	14	50	10	36	1	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	13	46	10	36	2	7	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	13	46	9	32	2	7	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	16	57	6	21	2	7	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	18	64	8	29	1	4	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.



Dear Pupils

I am writing to thank you for the part you played in the recent inspection of your school. Mrs Cochrane and I enjoyed our time in Slaley, and got to know your school quickly, helped by your comments and those from your parents. I would like to tell you what we found out.

We think, like you, that you go to a good school. There are some extra special parts, including your excellent behaviour and understanding of what it means to be part of a community. These are possible because staff take wonderful care of you on a day-to-day basis and want the best for you. You follow the excellent examples set for you by all staff. You care for one another and clearly enjoy your learning. You certainly make good progress in your work and reach standards that are above the national average. We were particularly impressed by your performances in language and mathematics from Nursery to Year 2. Pupils in Year 4 also achieved high standards this year, and we hope this will continue.

We know that there are plenty of good things happening for all of you, including those in Years 3 and 4, especially out of the classroom. Understandably, you enjoy the exciting aspects of learning when subjects are linked together or there is a great theme, like Cinderella. We have, therefore, asked that such imaginative and interactive lessons happen more regularly throughout the school. We would also like teachers to help you make even better progress by telling you in their marking exactly how you can improve. We feel that you would want to know this. I always like to know what would make me a better inspector!

Mrs O'Neill and Mrs Hay are doing a really good job while Mrs Ross is away. It cannot be easy for them, having to manage their teaching as well. You are certainly playing your part in supporting the school, as are your parents, the governors and the rest of the staff. The school is continuing to make good progress, although we would like its suggested plans for improvement to be a bit sharper and reflect what you really need. It would be great if you could help by suggesting ideas of your own to make the school even better.

I wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

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