

Seaton Sluice Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122334
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	340127
Inspection dates	16–17 September 2009
Reporting inspector	Christine Graham HMI

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	308
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter Hillman
Headteacher	Mr David Street
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 16 part lessons and held meetings with the senior leadership team, staff, governors, the School Improvement Partner and a representative of the local authority. They observed the school's work and looked at school data and improvement planning, pupils' work and external data about the school. They also considered the 125 parent and 24 pupil questionnaires that were returned to the inspection team.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- How well do pupils progress from Year 5 to Year 8 given their attainment on entry to the school?
- How effective are the strategies used to improve pupils' attainment?
- The impact of the school's work on pupils' enjoyment, safety and well-being.

Information about the school

Seaton Sluice Middle School is smaller than similar schools but the number on roll is increasing steadily year on year. The school serves three local villages. Nearly all pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average but the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is above average. Seven newly qualified teachers have joined the school in the last 12 months and the headteacher and most of the senior leadership team took up their posts six days before the start of the inspection. The school is part of a hard federation with Whytrig Middle School and Astley Community High School. The schools share a governing body but have separate, autonomous headteachers. The federation achieved specialist status in mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) in July 2009.

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

Pupils enjoy school. Their attendance is satisfactory and they behave well. They develop a secure understanding of how to stay safe and healthy and they make a satisfactory contribution to the school and local community. Pupils and their parents appreciate the support pupils are given when they join or leave the school. Year 5 pupils who joined the school in the week before the inspection have settled into school well. They are already represented on the school council and they say that older pupils are friendly and take care of them. They particularly appreciate their Year 8 buddies and say that if they did experience any difficulties their buddy would help them to sort things out.

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. When they join the school they can do as much and sometimes more than others of their age. Although they make satisfactory progress by the end of their time in school they do not always progress well enough from year to year, especially in Key Stage 2. Pupils' attainment has declined in recent years and the school's results in the 2008 national tests were well below the national average. The school, with the support of the local authority, took effective action and the school's 2009 data shows that outcomes improved significantly. Pupils' progress accelerates in Key Stage 3 and, by the end of Year 8, school data indicates that pupils' attainment is in line with that expected for their age. However, they do better in mathematics than in English and some of the most able pupils do not achieve well enough. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well as a result of the good support they receive.

The school is very positive about the support it received from the local authority and subject leaders feel that this helped them to improve teaching, especially in English and mathematics. Teachers have adopted new ways of working. However, although all teachers use similar strategies they do not all have the same level of confidence and understanding when using these new approaches and they do not receive enough regular feedback about their work to help them to build on their successes or improve weaker areas. Teachers do not use information gained from day-to-day or longer-term assessments effectively enough when planning tasks for individuals or groups of pupils. Pupils of different abilities are given different tasks but the tasks are not always accurately matched to their ability or current needs. In some lessons tasks are not demanding enough, especially for the most able pupils. The tasks do not require pupils to solve problems or make choices or decisions. Many pupils lack the skills needed to work cooperatively as part of a group. The school does not have consistent approaches to key activities such as marking, which is confusing for pupils and does not help them to understand how well they are meeting their targets.

The school has made satisfactory progress since its last inspection. Senior leaders have

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tackled some of the most important weaknesses and, although much remains to be done, improvements have been made. While the school collects a great deal of information, it does not evaluate the impact of its actions sufficiently rigorously or regularly so it cannot accurately measure the progress it has made. The school has ensured that all statutory requirements are met and its arrangements to safeguard pupils are secure. An assistant headteacher manages all aspects of this work and he has ensured that all staff and governors understand the school's responsibilities in this area. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of the new senior leadership team. The newly appointed headteacher has correctly identified the school's most important priorities but he cannot be sure that planned actions are appropriate because he does not have enough first-hand knowledge of the school. The school plans to complete a great many activities in a short period of time and some timescales appear to be a little optimistic. The newly appointed assistant headteachers are willing and enthusiastic but they do not, as yet, have the knowledge, skills and experience to play a full part in the improvement process. Governance is good. Governors have ambitious plans for the future of the federation. Although detailed planning for the specialism is at an early stage, governors expect it to have a very positive impact on the three schools. Consequently, the school's capacity to improve is satisfactory and it provides satisfactory value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and pupils' learning and progress by:
 - ensuring that teachers make better use of assessment information when planning work for individuals or groups of pupils, especially the most able
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to participate in practical and investigative work and for pupils to learn independently or with others
 - ensuring that senior managers provide teachers with regular feedback about their work
 - developing a consistent whole-school approach to key functions such as lesson planning, marking and assessment.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - the new senior leadership team receive effective induction, support and development
 - senior staff monitor and evaluate the work of the school regularly and robustly
 - plans to improve the school are based on secure evidence and clearly identify planned actions and realistic timescales.
- About 40% of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged to be satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

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Pupils work hard and have positive attitudes towards learning but the tasks they are given do not always challenge them or provide them with the means to reach their, appropriately, ambitious targets. In some classes pupils have opportunities to evaluate their own work or the work of others and they are encouraged to discuss their ideas with a partner. This is helping them to gain a critical perspective on their own work and have high expectations of themselves. However, this approach is at an early stage and it is not developed equally effectively in all lessons or subjects. Many pupils lack the skills needed to work as part of a group and they are easily discouraged when work demands more than a simple recall of information. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because they receive well-targeted support in lessons and most of the work they are given helps them to build on existing skills.

Pupils are aware of potential dangers and carry out all tasks with a high level of regard for their own safety and that of others. They lead healthy lifestyles and the school helps them to understand why this is important.

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	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	3

How effective is the provision?

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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Teachers and teaching assistants work very effectively together. All teaching assistants know exactly what is expected of them during the lesson so this valuable support has a very positive impact. Teachers use questioning well and this engages pupils and promotes their understanding. In many lessons teachers use a good balance of talk by the teacher and activities for pupils but occasionally teachers talk for too long and pupils become bored. In these lessons behaviour deteriorates. Teachers new to the profession have made a good start and their more experienced colleagues have reacted positively to new ways of working. The introduction of sheets to track pupils' progress in English and mathematics, together with opportunities for teachers to meet together to discuss pupils' progress, is helping the school to improve pupils' attainment. However, there is still some way to go. The school sets challenging targets but marking is inconsistent so pupils do not always receive enough detailed guidance to help them to reach their predicted grades. Pupils are often asked to decide how successful they have been during a lesson. This is of great benefit to them but occasionally teachers miss opportunities to identify misconceptions or a lack of confidence because they underestimate the importance of this activity.

The curriculum meets all statutory requirements and it is enhanced by the provision of specialist teaching and resources. The school has not adapted the curriculum in order to promote improvements in weaker subjects so, for instance, there are currently too few planned opportunities to develop writing across the curriculum. There is an adequate range of enrichment activities and some lunchtime and after-school clubs. However, pupils who travel to school by bus cannot stay for activities unless their parents can collect them. The school has plans to improve this situation.

The support provided for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities or those who need a little extra support is good and, as a result, they play a full part in school life. Governors report that some pupils who have experienced difficulties in other schools settle happily into Seaton Sluice and achieve well. The school targets any persistent non-attenders and works effectively with other agencies. Pupils are reintegrated into school and helped to catch up with their work.

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	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

How effective are leadership and management?

The school has tackled some long-standing weaknesses and has brought some ambitious plans to fruition. All statutory requirements are in place and the school

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successfully promotes pupils' safety, well-being and enjoyment of school. The school has an adequate understanding of the local and wider community and works effectively with parents. All pupils are included in the life of the school. The school's capacity to improve has been considerably strengthened by its involvement in the federation. The headteachers meet regularly and have a shared focus on pupils' achievement. The federation is adopting joint policies and there are opportunities for staff from all three schools to work together, most importantly on plans for the specialism.

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	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

Most parents who responded to the questionnaire were happy with the provision made for their children. Some parents did not answer every question because their children had been in school for too short a time. Two parents were very positive about the support provided for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Five parents felt that the school does not communicate sufficiently well with parents and two parents noted that bullying is not dealt with swiftly enough. Three parents felt that behaviour is poor and that the school is not rigorous enough when dealing with behavioural issues. All comments were considered during the inspection but inspectors found no evidence to support the negative views.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Seaton Sluice Middle 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 125 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 308 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	150	98	3	2	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	90	60	51	34	5	3	5	3
The school informs me about my child's progress	47	32	95	65	3	2	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	36	26	84	61	14	10	3	2
The teaching is good at this school	39	29	86	63	9	7	2	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	31	22	103	74	4	3	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	26	20	82	63	19	15	3	2
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)	24	22	78	71	6	5	2	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	4	29	8	57	0	0	2	14
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	30	22	89	66	12	9	4	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	30	22	81	60	16	12	7	5
The school is led and managed effectively	24	19	86	69	10	8	5	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	25	20	94	75	7	6	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.



Thank you for being so helpful when I visited your school with Mr Potter and Mr Colley. We enjoyed talking to you and finding out about the school. We were pleased to hear that you enjoy school and that you feel safe and well cared for. Year 5 pupils told us that they have settled into school very easily and that everyone has been very kind to them. We could see that you understand how to stay safe and healthy.

We think your school gives you a satisfactory education. When you join the school most of you can do more than others of your age and when you leave, in Year 8, you attain as well as your peers nationally. However, in recent years you have not progressed well enough in Key Stage 2 and in 2008 the school's results in national tests at the end of Year 6 were below average. The staff took action to improve matters and the 2009 results are much improved. You make better progress in Key Stage 3 but your attainment is higher in mathematics than in English. You do not always make enough progress in lessons because your work is sometimes too easy. We have asked your teachers to plan lessons using up-to-date information about your work so that you can all make good progress in every lesson. Pupils who need a little more help with their learning achieve well because they receive good support in lessons.

We noticed that you really enjoyed practical activities where you could solve problems and work in pairs or small groups; however, this does not happen in every lesson. We have asked the school to ensure that teachers receive regular feedback about their work so that they know what is successful and what could be improved. The school has a lot of different ways of doing things such as marking and assessing your work. They are all helpful but having so many systems is confusing for you so we have suggested that the school should develop consistent methods of carrying out these tasks. This is an exciting time for the school because you have a new headteacher and a new senior leadership team. We think that it is very important that they find out about the school as quickly as possible so that their improvement planning is based on secure evidence about the school's strengths and weaknesses.

I hope you enjoy the rest of the year.

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