

# Ashington Central First School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	131021
<b>Local Authority</b>	Northumberland
<b>Inspection number</b>	341083
<b>Inspection dates</b>	2–3 February 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Andrew Scott

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–9
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	481
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Chris Smith
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr David Godfrey
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Milburn Road Ashington Northumberland NE63 0AX
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 23 lessons, taught by the school's 16 class teachers; in all, about one third of the inspection time was spent looking at pupils' learning. The inspectors observed as many of the school's other activities as possible and held meetings with governors, staff and pupils, as well as members of the parent council, the executive director of the federation and the education welfare officer. They also analysed the school's documentation, progress data, welfare arrangements and the 104 questionnaires that were returned by parents, as well as those from pupils and staff.

- the achievement of pupils in Key Stage 2, and boys in Key Stages 1 and 2
- the effectiveness of the school's actions in promoting attendance
- the impact of the curriculum on pupils' learning and personal development
- the influence of the school's partnerships on outcomes for pupils
- the quality and effectiveness of self-evaluation at all levels of management and its impact on the school's development.

## Information about the school

This is a large, urban first school in the centre of Ashington. Almost all pupils come from White British families and a high proportion is eligible for a free school meal. An above average proportion has special educational needs and/or disabilities. The Early Years Foundation Stage comprises a Nursery and three Reception classes. The school is part of a federation with four other local schools. The headteacher has been in post for just over a year.

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

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

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**2**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**2**

### Main findings

This is a good school. It has maintained its provision well since the last inspection and is well respected in the community. A particular strength lies in the Early Years Foundation Stage where provision is outstanding. Here, a stimulating, interactive environment enables children to learn to their heart's content. The new headteacher has brought fresh ideas and a new impetus to the school's development. His hard work to strengthen links with parents and with other schools and agencies, for example, is already paying dividends.

Pupils achieve well overall. They start school with skills that are well below those expected for their age and leave with broadly average standards in the main subjects. After an excellent start in Nursery and Reception, pupils make good progress in Years 1 and 2 and satisfactory progress in Years 3 and 4. Standards at both key stages are beginning to rise. The differences in pupils' progress are linked directly to the quality and aptness of teaching and the curriculum. This provision is good, especially in Key Stage 1. However, much is satisfactory because often teachers do not provide enough challenge in lessons, learning is too formal and guidance is not rigorous enough to encourage pupils to take a pride in their work.

The school takes good care of its pupils. Staff are good role models and expect pupils to respond appropriately. As a result, pupils behave well and also feel safe. Occasional problems are quickly dealt with by staff. Pupils grow in confidence and self-esteem, and learn the benefits and importance of community within and beyond school. They enjoy school, especially the many exciting activities on offer. Even so, attendance is low despite the school's constant efforts to improve it.

Staff are keen to develop the school and senior staff are increasingly involved in monitoring and evaluating the provision. Self-evaluation is satisfactory, but not based enough on the outcomes for pupils, for it to be wholly accurate. The priorities for improvement are the right ones, but the action plans are not all sharply focused. The contribution of the governing body is satisfactory, but its monitoring of management systems is not as thorough as it should be. Nevertheless, the school has a positive, can-do atmosphere, spurred on by the good leadership of the headteacher and the improvements that have already taken place. These include improving standards, effective partnerships, and better resources and accommodation which show that the school has good capacity to sustain improvement.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning, especially in Key Stage 2, by:

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- - increasing the level of challenge to meet the different needs of pupils
- - being more flexible and creative in lesson planning in order to motivate pupils and to put learning in context, such as real-life situations
- - improving the consistency and quality of marking and pupils' presentation
- - ensuring that monitoring of lessons is more closely linked to the outcomes for pupils.
- Improve the effectiveness of management by ensuring that:
  - - all recording systems are more closely and efficiently monitored by the governing body
  - - more accurate self-evaluation leads to detailed development plans
  - - every possible avenue is explored to improve the persistent absence by a small minority of pupils.

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

Pupils enjoy learning and are attentive in lessons. They respond well, especially when topics interest them and show commendable self-restraint when lessons are not very exciting. Mutual respect helps them to work well together although, when in pairs of mixed ability, the less-able pupil usually achieves more than the more-able. Pupils' positive approach helps them to achieve well. Standards are broadly average across the school, but have risen in Key Stage 1 in the past two years, especially in reading and writing. They were above average in 2009 and current standards show a similar picture because pupils' progress in the current Year 2 is good.

Recent standards in Key Stage 2 have been a little below age-related expectations, but broadly average. Here pupils have tended to make satisfactory progress, but evidence shows that pupils in the current Year 4 are making better progress and on track to reach average attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve as well as other pupils. In the past, boys have tended to achieve less well than girls in English. The school's actions have succeeded in narrowing the gap.

Pupils are relaxed and happy at school. A few have concerns about behaviour but, in their questionnaires, pupils said that it is essentially good and inspectors agree. The active school council gives all pupils a sense of responsibility and makes them feel valued. Through the federation and other partnerships, pupils are involved in local community life and increasingly further afield. The school recognises the need to promote multi-cultural awareness more and has plans to do so. Pupils' cultural development through music, art and drama is good. Teachers encourage pupils to be contemplative, especially in assemblies. Pupils mostly lead active and healthy lifestyles and sport is popular. However, some pupils understandably find it hard at their age to be wholly self-disciplined in their choice of food. Attendance remains an issue especially because of persistent absentees, but it is starting to improve.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

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<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	4
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

### How effective is the provision?

Although the quality of provision varies, it is good overall. Teaching is good, especially, but not exclusively, in Key Stage 1. It is often satisfactory, occasionally outstanding and, very occasionally, inadequate. Common strengths include harmonious and purposeful classrooms. Teachers are clear in their explanations and expectations of pupils, and they use resources thoughtfully to reinforce learning. In good lessons, teachers use assessment skilfully to provide a high level of challenge. They devise imaginative and lively work with a good blend of activities that stir pupils' interest. Helpful advice is on hand from teachers and teaching assistants. Such strengths are less apparent in other lessons, and here pupils' learning is satisfactory. Pupils' work is not always well presented because teachers' marking does not insist consistently enough on accuracy and neatness.

Within the curriculum, there is a constant focus on literacy, numeracy and other life skills. Pupils benefit from enterprise activities, such as fish breeding, for example. Learning is enhanced by stimulating activities such as samba drumming and modern dance. Sometimes, lessons are similarly exciting, for example, when pupils produce broadcasts in the new recording studio. However, lessons do not benefit routinely from such motivational activities. Support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is good, because of the skill of support staff, although their continuity of learning is sometimes disrupted by the many separate group sessions.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 and parents are appreciative of the care shown by the staff. Staff take a keen interest in the emotional and physical well-being of all pupils; a sad pupil is unlikely to be sad for long. There are good systems in place in case of an accident, but not all health and safety systems are as watertight as they should be. The school has worked very hard, together with other agencies, to improve attendance. Pupils have been made well aware that attendance is important and mostly respond to the encouragement and sanctions.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

**How effective are leadership and management?**

The headteacher has done well in a comparatively short time to move the school forward and to ensure that the staff share his upbeat vision. His effective leadership means they are eager to take on new challenges and morale is good. Senior staff are involved in developing provision and are honing their skills in evaluating its success. Governors have a good overview of the school and act as critical friends, but do not have enough contact with staff to see how the school operates at first hand.

Although the school is improving steadily, its systems are not robust as they could be. Monitoring of teaching is regular and has led to some decisive improvement in learning. Judgements, though, are not based sufficiently on pupils' learning and can be too generous, so teachers are unclear just how good they are and how they can improve. Development plans have worthy priorities and are helpful tools but lack detail because the rationale behind them is not clear enough. The governing body has not regularly checked that all school procedures follow guidelines, including health and safety issues, although arrangements to safeguard pupils are satisfactory.

The school works hard to eradicate all forms of discrimination and is generally successful. However, it does not ensure that all pupils achieve equally well. Partnerships underpin much that the school does. The federation provides valuable shared expertise, training and resources. Parents appreciate the school's moves to strengthen home-school links. The new community room, the range of courses and improved communication, through newsletters, the website and text messages, have boosted parents' involvement in their children's education. The promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory. There are clear strengths in the provision for pupils' awareness of social and religious issues but their view of the wider world is less well developed. The school accepts that it needs to improve the quality of its action planning.

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*These are the grades for leadership and management*

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

## Early Years Foundation Stage

Provision in the Nursery and Reception is outstanding and a strength of the school. Children start school with skills well below those expected for their age, especially in early language development. They make rapid progress in all areas of learning so that, by the end of Reception, they reach levels expected of five-year-olds. Learning is galvanised by a vibrant and varied environment, especially in the Nursery where staff take full advantage of the abundant space. Exciting and stimulating activities are everywhere and children love them. Containers of dry rice and wet spaghetti give children interesting textures to ponder; igloos have to be explored with torches. Even simple activities, such as throwing and catching a ball require children to be highly accurate. Learning is tightly linked to overall themes such as fairy tales. Considerable ingenuity and high expectations from staff meant that children actually attempted to build a house, using real bricks and tools, to rebuff the Big Bad Wolf.

The interaction between children and adults is first-class with just the right mix of guidance and praise from staff, and independent learning. Particularly impressive is the way in which children become totally absorbed in their work and sustain avid concentration. Behaviour is impeccable and so is their social interaction. On one occasion, two children in Nursery sat down to earnestly discuss a problem together. Outside activities are equally exciting and productive; children simply get stuck in and feel able to 'push the boundaries' in their investigative play. Excellent assessment guides teachers to plan the best for children; they know how young children learn. Fundamental to this outstanding provision is excellent leadership by the Early Years



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Foundation Stage leader, which has generated excellent teamwork among staff and outstanding care for children. She has created a wonderful and charming place of learning that captivates and motivates children in equal measure.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>1</b>
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	1

## Views of parents and carers

Parents are happy with the school and consider that it gives their children a good education. Those that commented in their questionnaires praised the ethos of the school and the quality of care. The parent council was full of praise for the action the school had taken to improve links with parents, especially to establish the council itself. Inspectors agree with all these views. A few parents had individual concerns, most commonly that communication with school could be better. Inspectors understand parents' concerns but found that the school has worked hard to improve communication in various ways.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ashington Central 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 104 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 481 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	69	66	34	33	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	59	57	44	42	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	40	38	53	51	10	10	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	50	48	52	50	1	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	50	48	50	48	1	1	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	47	45	48	46	5	5	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	41	39	58	56	2	2	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)	40	38	54	52	0	0	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	47	45	54	52	1	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	26	25	68	65	7	7	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	32	31	61	59	7	7	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	41	39	55	53	3	3	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	55	53	45	43	4	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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



4 February 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ashington Central First School, Ashington, NE63 0AX

I am writing to thank you for the part you played in the recent inspection of your school. My colleagues and I enjoyed our time with you and were grateful for all that you, the staff and your parents told us.

We found that yours is a good school. We especially liked the Nursery and Reception classes. Life is so exciting and interesting here that children love working and are challenged to do the best they can. As a result, their progress is excellent. The rest of you make good progress, especially in Years 1 and 2. Standards are much as they should be for your age, but they are beginning to rise by both Years 2 and 4. We are pleased that the boys are now catching up with the girls. You behave well, you generally look after each other well and so feel safe. You lead active lives, enjoy sport and know how to eat healthily, even though you sometimes don't! I know how hard it can be. We know that you are helping the school to improve your attendance but more needs to be done so that all of you attend well.

You do well in your learning because teaching is good. Lessons are interesting and teachers expect good things from you. Not all lessons, though, are good and we would like the school to make sure that you are all given challenging enough work and that your learning involves real-life situations. We feel sure that you will enjoy this and try that bit harder. Sometimes, you do not take enough care with your work, so we have asked that teachers mark your books more helpfully.

Your school is improving well. You are well aware of the new resources and library, for example. I particularly liked your recording studio. The headteacher ensures that all staff work as a good team to do the best for you. Sometimes, their plans are not quite clear enough, and so we would like the school to be absolutely sure about what it is you need to improve when they make new plans. Our request also includes the governors who are going to keep a closer eye on the school.

I wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Scott

Lead Inspector

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