

Lowick Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131221
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	353976
Inspection dates	15–16 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Moira Fitzpatrick

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	5–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	33
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Moffat
Headteacher	Mrs Christine Thirlwell
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector. The inspector observed six lessons and saw six staff teaching. Meetings were held with the staff, governors, one parent and groups of pupils. The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documentation relating to the recruitment of staff, safeguarding and risk assessment. School documents relating to pupils' progress and attainment were scrutinised and a sample of pupils' work was examined. The inspector also examined 15 questionnaires returned by parents and carers and six returned by staff.

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

- the progress made by different groups of pupils
- the impact of recent developments in the curriculum and teaching and on pupils' achievement
- what has been the impact of leadership and management since the previous inspection.

Information about the school

The school is much smaller than average and forms part of a soft federation with a tiny school on Holy Island (Lindisfarne). The majority of pupils are from a White British heritage. There are no pupils who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. There is a higher than average proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. There are no pupils with a statement of special educational needs. The school has been subject to some high mobility in recent years with a number of pupils moving in and out of the school at times other than usual. There is a privately run pre-school provision on site, which did not form part of this inspection.

The school holds numerous awards, including Healthy Schools, Artsmark gold, BECTA ICT Mark and the Activemark. Because of its size, the school operates in mixed-age groups sometimes extending from four years to nine years, with all teachers teaching all groups in the course of the 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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Pupils are very happy in this outstanding school, where their good attendance reflects their enjoyment and love of learning. They and their parents and carers agree that they are safe and secure at school. As one parent put it, 'The staff really care for each child and their well-being is paramount.' Good teaching, based on excellent assessment of pupils' learning, together with an excellent curriculum that excites and motivates learners, underpins pupils' good progress and achievement. The school's many excellent features enable pupils to reach above average standards by the end of Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. By the end of Year 4, pupils have continued to make good progress to meet the levels expected for their age and in most years a good proportion of them exceed these.

Excellent care, guidance and support are the cornerstone of pupils' achievement. Because they feel valued, pupils have the confidence to attempt challenging tasks and welcome new experiences. They develop excellent personal qualities; their behaviour is exemplary, so too is their contribution to the school and wider communities. They relish undertaking risk assessments and have a good idea of how to stay safe. They actively pursue healthy lifestyles through careful choice of food and plenty of vigorous exercise. Their good attainment and excellent personal qualities prepare them extremely well for the future. Pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress from their different starting points, but they do not benefit from provision which always closely matches their needs. Sometimes they spend time working with older pupils at the start and end of the morning and this slows the progress of some aspects of their development, such as directing their own learning through exploring and pursuing their own interests.

Leadership and management are excellent. Staff work closely as a unit to monitor the school's work. Effective self-evaluation enables them to have a sharp insight into what needs to improve to take it forward. Together with governors they have done extremely well to sustain the excellent features of the school since the last inspection, notably in pupils' personal development, the curriculum and in care, guidance and support. The headteacher's vision and determination to provide the best for pupils has also resulted in much needed improvements to classrooms and the school grounds. Links with the community and further afield have been developed significantly and have an outstanding impact on pupils' learning experiences. All this demonstrates the school's excellent capacity to sustain improvement. Links with parents and carers are satisfactory; a minority have concerns about the work of the school and its communication with them about their children's progress.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage, by:
 - basing planning more closely on the results of assessment of children's learning so that they are always fully challenged when working independently and with a teacher
 - ensuring a proper balance between child-directed and teacher-led learning
 - involving parents and carers more in their children's learning by sharing children's work with them regularly throughout each term.
- Improve relationships with parents and carers, and address the concerns of those parents who have concerns about the school's work.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

Pupils of all ages are fired with enthusiasm for learning. They enjoy the challenges set by teachers and are able to think for themselves very well. In lessons, they excel at working together and show high levels of confidence in their ability to solve problems. From a wide range of starting points, all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress in their learning. Pupils' work seen during inspection and school tracking data indicate that attainment in Year 2 is above average, while pupils in Year 4 are mostly at or above the level expected for their age and all pupils have made good progress from their different starting points.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They are kind and considerate towards each other and listen with respect and understanding in the morning 'meet and greet' sessions. They have an excellent understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle and relish the opportunity to prepare the morning fruit snack in the school kitchen under the supervision of the school 'chef'. They enjoy plenty of vigorous exercise in the spacious grounds and through many sports clubs. Pupils are unanimous in their belief that they are safe and secure in school. They have been taught very well to assess risks to their safety, which makes them happy and confident in school. Attendance is good, reflecting their love of school. Pupils make a huge contribution to their own and other communities. They make frequent suggestions for improvement to the school, both for learning and for play. They are keen fund raisers, they bring entertainment and fairs to the local community and share their culture and traditions with schools in Britain, Norway, Japan and Australia. Pupils have a well-developed sense of right and wrong, are tolerant of and celebrate differences. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.

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

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is good overall. Occasionally, in mathematics lessons, it is outstanding, because pupils work independently of teachers to solve problems on their own or with learning partners. This accelerates their rate of learning, which sometimes is excellent. Detailed and comprehensive assessment systems are used by teachers to pinpoint what pupils need to learn next so that there is a correct level of challenge in lessons. Teachers have also taught pupils to evaluate their own and others' learning, so they are able to help each other with points to improve. Discussion between pupils about their work is a strong feature of many lessons. Now and again, their progress slows to satisfactory in lessons where teachers spend too long explaining or demonstrating and do not involve them actively in their learning. The practice of bringing the whole school together for the beginning and end of a lesson is not always appropriate for all groups of learners and this too can slow rates of progress to satisfactory, because time is taken away from active learning. Pupils who have special educational needs and / or disabilities are well supported by the skilled and dedicated teaching assistants who work seamlessly with class teachers.

The excellent curriculum is a great vehicle for motivating pupils' learning. It is highly creative and places strong emphasis on learning by encouraging pupils to assume the role of a person in an imaginary situation. This gives pupils the opportunity to investigate ways of solving problems and to work in teams to come up with solutions. It also gives many opportunities for learning in one subject to lead directly to learning in another, so that pupils understand how connected their learning is. This curriculum gives pupils frequent opportunities to apply their basic skills of literacy, numeracy and

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information and communication technology in 'real life' situations. The personal, social and health education curriculum pervades learning, so that pupils are constantly reinforcing their self-belief, regard for others, and their ability to stay safe and happy in school.

Excellent attention is given to all aspects of care, guidance and support for pupils. Staff know pupils and their families very well and are quick to spot any changes in mood or performance and then take action. They treat every child as an individual and respond promptly to their needs. Vulnerable pupils are well served by the school's excellent links with external services to provide expert help. Parents rightly believe that their pupils are safe and secure in school. Well-targeted support for individual pupils' attendance has led to better attendance patterns for them this year.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
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?

Excellent leadership and management are the result of the headteacher's clear and determined vision for a school that is continually improving. Her collegiate approach allows all staff to be directly involved in evaluating the school's work and in identifying areas for further improvement. A number of changes to staffing since the previous inspection have been very well managed, as staff willingly share and develop good practice. Very good support for teachers who are new to the school has enabled them to absorb the school's special ethos and fully support its commitment to equality of opportunity for all pupils. This is reflected well in the way all staff take responsibility for the care and learning of every child.

Governors have a good knowledge of the school and have given very good support to developments in the curriculum and to extending the building in recent years. Their insistence on high quality care for pupils is realised in outstanding safeguarding practices. Recruitment and record keeping are meticulous and up to date, likewise staff and governor training in safeguarding issues. Governors give very good support to the school's community cohesion programme. They have formed joint committees with the federated school and work closely in the best interests of both schools and communities. The school provides a wealth of opportunities for pupils to prepare to be good citizens of tomorrow. Excellent links with their own and other communities, include inviting local residents in to school for lunch several times a week; holding summer and autumn fairs, which involve the community and making numerous national and international links, so

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that pupils learn about the diversity of cultures and traditions.

Links with local schools and organisations are excellent and bring in a wealth of enrichment for pupils' learning. The school has positive relationships with most groups of parents, and regularly canvasses their views. There is regular communication about the work of the school and regular opportunities for parents to meet with teachers to learn about their children's progress. Nevertheless, a minority of parents have concerns about communication with the school and access to their children's work.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	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	3
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
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Provision is good, because adults know children well and look after them very well. This makes children feel safe and secure and eager to learn. Links with parents and carers are good although sharing information about their children's progress is not routine and parents and carers have less input to developing the profile of their children's development than is usually seen. Well planned activities for language and mathematical development ensure that children reach and sometimes exceed the goals set for their learning in these, and all other areas of learning, by the end of the Reception Year. Children have good opportunities in the afternoon to direct their own learning and select from a range of resources. These are not always set out so that children have easy access and this can restrict their imaginative development.

Teaching is good overall. The continuity of support from the teaching assistant is a major strength as teachers move from one age group in the school to another, each half term. The teaching assistant gives good quality intervention to develop learning and

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support children to listen and behave appropriately. Daily assessment is not always used to inform the next stages of learning for individual children, which means their learning is sometimes satisfactory, rather than good or excellent. Reception children's involvement at the beginning and end of each lesson in whole- school input and review is not always appropriate, as they have to sit passively for too long and lose time for active learning.

Leadership and management ensure that children's welfare is paramount and that they have plenty of opportunities to develop the skills necessary for the next stage of learning.

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

There is quite a variation in the views of parents and carers. While some are overwhelmingly supportive of the school, and praise staff for the way they care for their children, there is a significant minority that has concerns about their children's progress and the way the school helps them to support their children's learning. They also expressed concerns about how little opportunity they have to see their children's work when they attend parents' evenings. The inspector agreed with parents and carers who hold the care their children receive at school in high regard. This aspect of the school's work is outstanding. She also agrees with parents and carers who wish for more information, and sight of their children's work, when discussing progress. It is usual in most schools to have this provided, as a basis for discussion on how parents and carers might help their children at home.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Lowick Church of England Voluntary Controlled 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 15 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 33 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	12	80	3	20	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	12	80	3	20	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	6	40	5	33	4	27	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	7	47	3	20	4	27	1	7
The teaching is good at this school	8	53	2	13	5	33	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	6	40	2	13	7	47	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	10	67	5	33	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)	8	53	3	20	2	13	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	9	60	1	7	5	33	1	7
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	8	53	1	7	5	33	1	7
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	7	47	2	13	6	40	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	7	47	4	27	4	27	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	7	47	2	13	4	27	2	13

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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

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 is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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.



17 June 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Lowick Church of England Voluntary Controlled First School, Lowick, TD15 2UA

Thank you for the help you gave when I inspected your school recently. I was impressed with everything I saw, especially your behaviour and the sense of excitement you have about your learning. I agree with you that your school is very special. In fact it is outstanding, it is so good. Here's why:

- You achieve well and reach above average standards in your learning, because you are well taught and work hard to succeed. You have a very exciting curriculum, which takes you to all sorts of situations through your imagination, and you have many opportunities to learn from other experts and through visits to many different places.
- Your behaviour is excellent, you know how to stay safe and healthy and even help assess risks when you are in school or out on trips. You do a lot for others, in your school and village and in other communities across the world. This caring gives you a very good start as citizens of the future.
- You told me that you feel safe and secure in school, and I agree that your teachers look after you and support you extremely well. They make sure that they understand your feelings through the morning meet and greet times that you said you like so much. I agree it is a lovely start to the day!
- All of these good things happen because your headteacher is determined to get the best for you and from you. All the staff and governors work hard to make sure that your school is constantly improving. You can help by working hard and being friendly and helpful just as you are now.

I have asked your school to do two things to make it even better and they are to look at how the Reception children are learning and improve this so that they are even better prepared for Year 1; and to make better contact with some of your parents and carers so they can help you with your learning at home.

Yours sincerely,

Moira Fitzpatrick

Lead Inspector

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