

Whitfield Church of England Voluntary Aided First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122303
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	359217
Inspection dates	6–7 December 2010
Reporting inspector	Derek Neil

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	22
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs J Lumley
Headteacher	Mrs E Baker
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector. He observed eight lessons and part-lessons led by four staff. Meetings were held with a group of pupils, members of the governing body and members of staff. The inspector had telephone conversations with the School Improvement Partner and a parent. He observed various activities throughout the school day, and looked at a range of documents including policies related to safeguarding, assessment data and the school development plan. He also considered 28 parental questionnaires as well as questionnaires completed by pupils and staff.

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

- The progress pupils make with their writing.
- The progress made by pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- How much the school has improved since its last inspection.

Information about the school

This very small church school in the West Tynedale ward of Northumberland serves a widespread rural community. Almost all pupils are from a White British background. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is very low. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities fluctuates but is broadly average. Pupils in the Reception Year, who are taught alongside pupils in Key Stage 1, make up the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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 a quite distinctive character. With so few pupils and with a staff committed to their individual welfare, it provides the sort of education that the parents and carers want and the pupils enjoy. All of the parents and carers returned the questionnaire. Typical of their unanimously supportive comments was this one: 'We are extremely happy with all aspects of the school. Our child is very happy, stimulated and fulfilled.'

A significant strength of the school is the pupils' personal development and well-being. This is reflected in their excellent behaviour, the contribution they make to the school and to the wider community, and their commitment to healthy lifestyles. They thrive in the friendly family atmosphere and develop into confident, caring and creative young people, who are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Their personal development is due in no small way to the school's imaginative and creative curriculum and the very high level of individual care and support they receive from the staff. Pupils are given every opportunity to mix with other children in this and other schools, and increasingly to interact with a range of different adults. Their social, moral and spiritual development is very strong. Their knowledge and understanding of cultures and communities in other parts of the country are less well developed.

The attainment of the pupils fluctuates with each changing year group but, overall, pupils leave the school having achieved well to reach above-average standards. They are particularly strong in reading and mathematics, but their writing still lags behind.

The headteacher has a heavy teaching commitment so leadership and management are shared as widely as possible. The high morale of the committed staff, who, in the words of one member, feel 'privileged to work here', and the dedication of the governing body ensure that responsibilities are suitably distributed. Furthermore, strong and productive partnerships with other local schools have enabled leaders to spread the workload more widely, for example, through the use of a shared curriculum and teacher for religious education. The school evaluates its performance accurately. It has maintained its quality and in some respects improved since the last inspection, though work remains to be done on some of the issues identified at that time, such as improving pupils' handwriting. It has good capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the standard of pupils' writing by:
 - providing all year groups with a broader range and greater quantity of

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opportunities for writing

- setting out in more detail in the school development plan what is to be done to raise standards in writing
- making further improvements to pupils' handwriting.
- Develop pupils' awareness and understanding of the diversity of cultures and communities in Britain by:
 - making more visits to places which highlight cultural diversity
 - finding imaginative and creative ways to exploit the recently established links with culturally contrasting schools.

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

Pupils start school with skills that are broadly typical for their age. They enjoy school and progress well. By the end of Year 4, their attainment is above average and achievement is good. Pupils' writing is less well developed than their reading or mathematics. Some produce too little writing, and their handwriting, though improving, needs further attention.

In lessons, pupils make good progress because of their positive attitudes to work. They listen attentively to the teacher, readily volunteer answers in discussions, and apply themselves to written work with enthusiasm. They show good levels of patience and concentration when listening to the teacher or when carrying out tasks individually or in groups. They particularly enjoy activities which give them an opportunity to be creative or to perform in front of an audience. In an English lesson, pupils worked constructively in small teams to produce a piece of improvised role play that explained the scene preceding the narrative extract they had been reading. They enjoyed assessing each team's performance and refining and improving their interpretation in the light of the advice they received. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because of the individual attention they receive and the encouragement and support they get from staff and peers.

Behaviour is outstanding. In lessons, this greatly contributes to the learning; elsewhere, it contributes to the happy family atmosphere that characterises the school. Pupils' commitment to being healthy is also outstanding. All of them take a healthy school lunch, prepared on the premises to an exacting standard. Some pupils are ambassadors for good health and talk to their parents and carers about the importance of giving up smoking. Because the school is so small, all pupils get ample opportunities to take on responsibilities. These range from hosting lunches for adults in the local community to sharing the rota for feeding the fish. All contribute to the work of the school council, which is active in fundraising and agreeing policies for improving the school. Pupils and parents and carers are very proud of the school's status as an eco-school, understand the importance of using renewable sources of energy, and fully support the school's efforts to eliminate its carbon footprint.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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	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	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The atmosphere in lessons is relaxed but purposeful. Teachers enjoy good relationships with their classes. They use praise well to boost pupils' confidence and encourage them to do their best. Because the teacher knows the pupils extremely well in these very small teaching groups, they make sure the work is well-matched to their ability and needs. They usually provide a good balance of whole-class teaching and individual work. Occasionally, the pace drops a little because an activity goes on for too long. Teachers regularly assess pupils' work formally and informally and use this information to decide what pupils need to do next. For example, one teacher, realising from pupils' mistakes that they had not mastered a particular mathematical concept, determined to revise it later in the week.

The curriculum has several strong features. It gives pupils many opportunities to develop their creative talents. One example is a recent project undertaken through 'Creative Partnerships', which involved several different art forms and resulted in the professionally produced publication, 'Little people do big thinking'. The school holds several curriculum awards, for example, for the way it promotes healthy living and

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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ecological awareness. Extra-curricular activities are varied and well attended, though these tend to be curtailed in the winter because of the school's transport arrangements. Some links between subjects are carefully planned so pupils develop their basic skills in a meaningful context; for example, different forms of writing are practised through the study of a history topic. The programme of activities, however, does not give pupils sufficient regular practice at developing the full range of writing skills.

All staff know all of the pupils extremely well and take very good care of them. Preparation for the next stage of education is very well planned. Pupils in Year 4, for example, have a summer residential visit where they meet with other pupils transferring to the same middle school. Attendance is about average, but is improving. The headteacher has worked strenuously with all parents and carers, exhorting them not to take holidays in term time, and with individual families to improve the attendance of the occasional persistent absentee.

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	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The school has maintained the quality identified in the last inspection because of the commitment of all staff and the governing body to share leadership and management responsibilities. The governing body, for example, plays an important role in evaluating the school's performance. Morale is high and everyone's pride in the school's achievements is evident. A significant feature is the way the school harnesses a wide range of partners, including a loose federation of local church schools, to enhance its management and its curriculum. Self-evaluation is accurate, and plans for improvement are generally appropriate, although they lack detail in key areas. For example, the school development plan has for some time recognised the need to raise standards in writing but does not give precise details about who is to do what and when in order to ensure that the required improvement occurs.

This is an inclusive school where all pupils are valued as individuals. The staff work effectively to ensure their needs are met and they all make good progress. The school has robust procedures to ensure that its pupils are safeguarded. Roles and responsibilities for protecting the children are clear, and all staff consider pupils' safety as paramount. Pupils do very good work in the local community and are beginning to learn about different communities in Britain through newly forged links with two contrasting schools, although this work is at an early stage of development.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

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

The children make good progress in Reception and usually finish the year with skills that are slightly above what is expected. They settle well into the school, aided by the close collaboration of the school and family. Although few in number and possibly lacking the range of children of the same age to work and play with that is found in larger schools, they clearly benefit from having older pupils in the same class who look after them and serve as role models. They also have opportunities to play with younger children in the toddler group. They enjoy their time in this stage and develop into self-sufficient and socially confident youngsters. They can concentrate on work that is directed by the teacher or the assistant, and can occupy themselves constructively in a group or individually with the different activities that are set out for them. The balance of teacher-led and child-initiated activity is appropriate, as is the natural flow of activity between the classroom and the well-resourced outdoor area. Planning is carefully designed to cover the areas of learning but staff adapt content to suit the moment. For example, a session on words beginning with the letter 'I' was enhanced by pupils' collection of icicles from the wall of the outside area. A session on solid shapes, where pupils were learning words such as, 'cylinder' and 'sphere', was enlivened by the shapes that were presented in the form of Christmas parcels. The provision is successful because of the close teamwork of the class teacher and the teaching assistant, and the very cooperative attitudes and behaviour of the older pupils in the class.

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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

All parents and carers responded to the questionnaire. They were unanimous in their praise of the school. Several provided comments, all highly complimentary about what the school is doing for their children's personal and academic development.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Whitfield Church of England Voluntary Aided 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 28 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 22 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	26	93	2	7	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	26	93	2	7	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	25	89	3	11	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	27	96	1	4	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	26	93	2	7	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	25	89	3	11	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	24	86	4	14	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	23	82	4	14	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	26	93	2	7	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	19	68	6	21	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	23	82	4	14	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	25	89	3	11	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	26	93	1	4	0	0	1	4

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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 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.



8 December 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Whitfield Church of England Voluntary Aided First School, Hexham, NE47 8JH

Thank you for welcoming me so warmly into your school. I enjoyed watching you in lessons and at play, talking about your school with you and your teachers, and looking at your work. Now I want to share with you what I thought.

You are lucky to go to such a good school. The boy who said to me 'Pretty much everything is perfect around here' was not wide of the mark! The staff take very good care of you. You say you feel safe in the school, and rightly so! You learn how to eat healthily and take lots of exercise. You are very proud of the school's work to eliminate its carbon footprint. You make a very positive contribution to society in many ways, from saving the planet to feeding the school fish! You get lots of opportunities to do creative things, such as drama in English lessons or singing at the start of every day. You behave extremely well in school and are very confident and polite when speaking to adults; you should be proud of this.

There are a couple of things that would make the school even better. I have asked the staff to help you to improve the quality of your writing so that it is as good as your reading and mathematics. I have also asked the headteacher to make sure that the new links you have with schools in London and Newcastle give you an insight into the huge variety of cultures and communities to be found in Britain.

Thank you again for helping me so much. It was a pleasure to meet you. I wish all of you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Lead inspector

Derek Neil

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