



Whalton Church of England Aided First School

Inspection Report

Better
education
and care

Unique Reference Number 122302
Local Authority Northumberland
Inspection number 292365
Inspection date 28 September 2006
Reporting inspector Carole Cressey

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Whalton
School category	Voluntary aided		Morpeth, Northumberland
Age range of pupils	4-9		NE61 3XH
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01670 775216
Number on roll (school)	49	Fax number	01670 775216
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Penelope Norton
		Headteacher	Mrs Melanie Hinson
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2001		

Age group 4-9	Inspection date 28 September 2006	Inspection number 292365
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This very small Church of England school is set in the rural village of Whalton. Most children come from White British backgrounds with a very small number from other faiths and backgrounds that have English as an additional language. Most of the pupils are from Whalton but a few travel in from neighbouring villages. The proportion of pupils who are entitled to free school meals is below average as is the percentage with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school is part of a confederation of three schools and the headteacher of Whalton School is also head of one of the other two.

The school provides a breakfast club.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Whalton is an outstanding school. To echo the remarks of one parent 'it is a school of the highest calibre'. Although its own evaluation makes a cautious judgement about the school's overall effectiveness, it has a very accurate insight into the high quality and impact of its provision. The caring Christian ethos of the school is central to its determination to provide the best education it can, despite the limitations of a very small early Victorian building.

Children enter the Reception class with standards which are broadly average. They achieve well throughout the school and leave in Year 4 with academic standards and their personal and social development consistently and significantly above those expected for their ages. The school's success is due to the vision and determination of the headteacher to preserve all that is excellent in this small village school, while at the same time eliminating the drawbacks such schools have in providing a curriculum which equips pupils well for the challenges of the future. Her success in becoming the headteacher of both Whalton and a school in a neighbouring village has freed up valuable finances, staffing, resources, skills and expertise and allowed these small schools to have a viable future.

The school is exceptionally caring and has high aspirations for all its pupils. The quality of the teaching and the curriculum are outstanding. The excellent governing body has appointed teachers who ably meet the schools very high professional standards. As a result, learning in this school, including in the Foundation Stage, is both exciting and challenging. Work in lessons is exceptionally well matched to the different abilities and ages in each class. Assessment and recording systems provide a detailed picture of attainment and progress. Parents are very supportive of their children's education and most appreciate the information they receive about their learning and progress. However, a small minority would like to receive more information about their children's learning.

All activities, whether they are in lessons at break time or after school, develop pupils' love of learning and an understanding of how they can stay healthy, keep themselves and others safe and become responsible members of their school and local community. The school has responded well to the issues from the previous inspection, gives excellent value for money and is exceptionally well placed to continue to be very successful.

What the school should do to improve further

There are no areas to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The pupils attain standards which are significantly higher than average. Very effective and consistently high quality teaching ensures that all pupils achieve well. Pupils in

Whalton School are on average one whole year ahead of pupils nationally. The latest national test results indicate that standards are even higher than in previous years.

Children join the Reception class with levels of attainment which are broadly average. They make good progress and by the time they move into Year 1 the majority are reaching and some exceeding the learning goals expected for their ages. This good start is continued in Years 1 and 2 and, at the age of seven, standards are significantly above those seen nationally in reading, writing, mathematics and science. Almost all pupils reach the expected level for their ages and over half exceed them and reach the higher levels. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve very well and often reach the levels expected nationally for their ages. Girls and boys do equally well. The very few pupils with English as an additional language make rapid progress and quickly catch up with their classmates. In Years 3 and 4, pupils continue to make very good progress and the school's own rigorous assessments and tests indicate that high standards are maintained. When pupils leave the school at the age of nine, the majority are working at a level well beyond that expected for their ages.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. Pupils of all ages enjoy coming to school and attendance is above average. All pupils are keen to do well and say that learning is fun and 'it's not too hard and it's not too easy'. Being polite, friendly, and well behaved is the order of the day in this very happy community. Pupils enjoy each others' company and get on well together in lessons, at lunchtime and in the playground. There is a very good understanding of bullying but like their parents, pupils are firm in their belief that there is no bullying in their school. Healthy snacks and lunches which the pupils say are 'tasty, healthy and yummy' and the well planned opportunities to take part in sport and exercise ensure that pupils are developing a good understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles. Pupils are very proud of the school council, which they say 'helps to make the school a better place'. They have a very good knowledge of their own Christian faith and culture and are developing a respect and tolerance for other religions and ways of life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Very effective and consistently high quality teaching ensures that all pupils, no matter what their backgrounds or abilities, achieve well. A significant strength of the teaching is the way staff rigorously assess pupils' work and progress. They use this knowledge to meticulously plan lessons which meet the needs of different ages and abilities in mixed age classes. Flexible grouping allows pupils who have complex learning needs to be taught in a lower age group and those who are gifted and talented can be found

working a full year ahead of their chronological age. This ensures that all pupils are challenged to achieve their potential. The use of practical high quality resources, different teaching styles, tasks and activities, maintains pupils' interest and helps them to be very successful learners. Teachers set clear challenging targets which pupils say help them to know how well they are doing and what needs to be done to reach the next level in their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is imaginatively planned to ensure that the small size of the school does not hinder pupils' learning. The decision to incorporate the Reception class into the community's pre-school has created a challenging, well resourced Foundation Stage. Parents are delighted their children can now benefit from a purpose-built and rich learning environment. The confederation of schools enables pupils to experience all that is on offer in a much larger urban school. Learning is enriched as pupils work alongside pupils from other schools on exciting history and art projects. After school clubs and sports events, well planned visits and visitors are all available to pupils because resources and costs can be shared. The school is even able to offer French to all its pupils adding a breadth to their learning, which they and their parents value. The very strong emphasis on developing pupils' literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills along with an excellent programme of social and health education, provides the pupils with the necessary tools to develop personal safety, care and healthy living and prepares them well for life in the twenty first century.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils achieve well in their personal and academic development because of the excellent care the school provides for them. All adults working in the school, including the cook, caretaker and voluntary workers, contribute to the school's outstanding level of care, guidance and support for pupils. Highly effective procedures are used to safeguard pupils' welfare, health and safety. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive a very high level of care and support from experienced teaching assistants and as a result become confident and successful learners. Pupils say they feel very safe and well cared for in the school and know that teachers value their opinions and ideas. They appreciate the fact that all staff care enough to provide them with cups of warming hot chocolate, low fat of course, on cold and snowy winter mornings. The school has a breakfast club which cares for children before the start of morning school. Such actions are typical of a school that goes the extra mile in order to care for all its pupils. Teachers track each pupil's academic progress and set challenging targets to enable pupils to improve. Pupils put great store on their targets and are very clear about what they need to do to move on to the next level.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The forward thinking headteacher and supportive governing body lead and manage the school with an outstanding vision and flair, resulting in excellence in all aspects of its work. This is central to the school's success in ensuring that standards remain high and all pupils achieve as well as they can. Leadership is highly successful in combating the limitations of a very small school and to quote one parent 'has been ahead of the game' in seeking to secure the school's ability to deliver a successful learning environment for the pupils. Her leadership and management galvanise all concerned within the school to take advantage of a wide range of valuable initiatives to improve the provision.

The headteacher's enthusiasm knows no bounds because she has been appointed to lead a second school. Her vision in bringing together the two schools places Whalton in the strong position of being able to deliver an excellent curriculum for pupils and provide stability and continuity for the future.

- Governors are extremely supportive and are rigorous in their desire to maintain high standards and provide the best education for pupils. The school works well with parents and sees them as equal partners in the education of their children. Most parents value the reading diaries, homework tasks, formal and informal meetings and regular newsletters which keep them informed about their children's learning. However, the school is aware that some parents would like more information and is looking at other ways to keep all parents more fully involved in their children's education.
- The parents' confidence in the leadership and management of the school can be summed up by the comments in one of the questionnaires 'the school is absolutely first class and I doubt that I could ask for anything better'.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Whalton Church of England Aided First School

Whalton

Morpeth

Northumberland

NE61 3XH

28 September 2006

Dear Pupils

Thank you so much for being so friendly and welcoming when I visited your school a short while ago.

You are all very successful and enthusiastic learners who work really hard and behave well. Do you know that your work is a whole lot better than it is in most other schools? You should feel very proud of yourselves! Keep up the good work!

It was so pleasing to hear that there is no bullying in your school. In fact you seemed very surprised that I even asked you about bullying!

You are all very proud of the school council and it was good to know that you think it helps to make your school a better place. Certainly the healthy week you organised helped all of you learn more about being healthy.

I enjoyed having my lunch with you and I definitely agree with you that they are 'tasty, healthy and yummy'. I am so pleased that you know a lot about healthy food, keeping safe and taking regular exercise.

I think you are very lucky to go to such an excellent school where your headteacher and teachers work so hard to make lessons fun and help you learn such a lot. I hope you will continue to enjoy school as much as you do now and that it will help you to become happy and successful adults.

Yours sincerely

Carole Cressey

(Additional Inspector)