

Acklington Church of England Controlled First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122270
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	359205
Inspection dates	27–28 September 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	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	26
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr William Rowntree
Headteacher	Ms Effie Fenton
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector. Seven lessons were observed during which three teachers and one teaching assistant were seen. Meetings were held with staff, governors and groups of pupils. The inspector observed the school's work and looked school documents including assessment and tracking data showing pupils' progress, pupils' work from the previous school year, and for the current term, teachers' planning, the school improvement plan, and documentation relating to the safeguarding of pupils. The inspector also took account of the views of parents and carers as expressed in 13 questionnaires that were returned. The views of staff and pupils, as expressed in the questionnaires they returned, were also taken into account.

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

- The impact of new initiatives to accelerate pupils' progress and to raise attainment.
- How well developments in provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage are improving children's learning and independence.
- What impact the distribution of leadership and management responsibilities are having on school improvement.

Information about the school

This school is much smaller than others of the same type and all pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average. There is a higher than average percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. There has been an increase in the number of pupils on roll since the previous inspection, with a number of pupils travelling from beyond the village to attend the school. The school holds a number of awards including Healthy School Status, Activemark and the Financial Management in Schools award. Pupils are taught in two mixed-age classes and they are grouped according to their stage of learning for basic skills teaching.

There has been some staffing instability since the previous inspection, which resulted in a number of short-term supply teachers taking classes from time to time. None of the current teaching staff was at the school at the time of the previous inspection. A new headteacher took up post in January 2010.

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

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

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Currently, the school's overall effectiveness is satisfactory. It is rapidly improving under the headteacher's excellent drive to raise standards and improve provision.

Improvement since the previous inspection has been good and especially impressive since the arrival of the headteacher. The school is developing a number of strengths because staff morale is high and both staff and governors are fully committed to the headteacher's vision for improvement. The school's self-evaluation is accurate, with prompt and robust action taken to tackle identified weaknesses. Parents and carers are keen to praise the headteacher and staff for the way the school is moving forward and comment, 'The leadership has already proven to be a huge asset to the school; staff are enthusiastic and teach in a way perfectly suited to young children.' The school demonstrates a good capacity for further improvement.

Pupils' attainment is variable and because there are such small numbers in each year group it is difficult to make comparisons with national averages. Overall, pupils' attainment is average and their achievement and progress are satisfactory from starting points that vary from below to above average. However, there has been a marked rise in progress, especially in basic skills since the start of the year when new procedures for monitoring pupils' learning were introduced. Most notably, provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is closing the gap between their attainment and that of their peers.

Teaching is satisfactory, with some good and better teaching, which encourages pupils to be independent and learn for themselves through well planned activities. In some lessons, teachers talk for too long and this makes pupils passive learners who are overly dependent on the teacher for support. The curriculum matches pupils' needs and is developing well. For example, the school has plans to develop a 'forest school', so that it can extend outdoor learning to pupils of all ages. Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is improving well with increasing opportunities for children to direct their own learning. There is scope for this to develop further and for there to be more opportunities for children to write in all areas of their learning. Pupils are well cared for and supported to feel safe and thrive in school. Parents value the 'family atmosphere' and rightly see the school's care for vulnerable children as excellent.

Pupils develop good personal qualities. They behave well and show great care and consideration for each other, which contribute well to creating the happy school community. They understand the benefits of a balanced diet and plenty of exercise and are keen to explain how the credit system in the dining hall works for those who eat, in their words, 'proper food'. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and they are well prepared for the next stage of education by the end of Year 4.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and consolidate quicker rates of progress, by:
 - – improving the effectiveness of assessment strategies within lessons
 - – sharing the best teaching strategies for the benefit of all pupils
 - – developing and extending independent learning opportunities.
- Further develop provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage so that:
 - – children have more opportunities to initiate and direct their own learning thereby increasing their progress
 - – children have more opportunities for writing in all areas of their learning.
- Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Pupils enjoy learning and are very keen to succeed with tasks that allow them to work with a partner or in a group. They say this way of working helps them to think for themselves and work at their best rate. Pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make expected progress from their starting points and their achievement is satisfactory overall. There is evidence in pupils' work from last year and in the school's monitoring data that rates of progress are accelerating as new systems are embedded in classroom practice. A large proportion of pupils is now making good progress for much of the time. This proportion is increasing as gaps in learning are identified and eradicated by careful tracking of pupils' work.

Good behaviour in and out of class creates a very secure and comfortable atmosphere for learning and play. Pupils agree they feel safe in school and are unanimous in their view that all teachers look after them if they have a problem. They take plenty of vigorous exercise and have a healthy diet of balanced lunches and fruit snacks at playtime. Their good contribution to their own and other communities begins with their caring attitudes and consideration for others. Older pupils instinctively look after younger ones and happily include them in play, so no one is left out. Regular performances in the village hall and fund raising for a range of charities, 'For people who need our help', give pupils a good understanding of their responsibilities for improving society. By the time they leave the school, pupils are well prepared for the next stage of learning with sound basic skills and good personal qualities.

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	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
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	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is satisfactory and improving quickly as systems for tracking pupils' learning become embedded. During the inspection, some good and some outstanding teaching was observed, indicating the school's capacity to improve teaching further from within its own resources. Teachers have good expectations of what pupils can do based on their regular assessment of learning, so they usually set appropriate levels of challenge in lessons. Sometimes, assessment of learning through questioning is not sharp enough in all lessons, so that teachers can miss where pupils misunderstand or are ready to move on. Time is generally well used in lessons but, occasionally, direct teaching turns pupils into passive learners when they have to listen for too long. Younger pupils in Key Stage 1 are benefiting well from increased opportunities to direct their own learning, which is developing their independence. Learning and progress are best when pupils have activities which allow them to sustain independent effort.

The curriculum is increasingly matched to pupils' needs. For example, the teaching of letters and sounds, recently introduced across the school, has been organised so that pupils are grouped according to the stage they have reached. This is accelerating progress in key basic skills by giving pupils the tools to improve their reading and writing, though it still has some way to go to have a full impact on raising their attainment. Improvements to provision for information and communication technology are beginning to impact on pupils' use of these skills. For example, pupils now regularly use mathematics programmes at school and at home to reinforce their learning. Good links with partner schools extend pupils' learning through shared activities, while a good range of after-school clubs develop their personal skills and interests well. A recent visit

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to a neighbouring farm, prompted by a power cut, illustrates how well the school is able to seize opportunities to enrich the learning of pupils.

Staff have good knowledge of all pupils in the school, because teaching groups are arranged so that pupils have contact with all teachers. Pupils and their parents and carers overwhelmingly agree that the school takes good care of them, so they feel safe and secure in school. Improved assessment procedures have led to an increase in the identification of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, so numbers have risen this year. The school has developed good links with external services to provide expert support for these pupils and tracking data shows that they are rapidly catching up with their peers and closing the gap in attainment. Prompt action, relentless pursuit of appropriate support and very good communication with families are the hallmarks of the excellent support given to vulnerable pupils.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has made an excellent evaluation of how the school should improve. The right priorities have been set and tackled with rigour since she took up her post. Leadership and management roles have been distributed well amongst a small staff, while training has introduced new skills, so that expertise is rapidly developing. The result is that the school's self-evaluation is accurate and effective in leading improvement. Areas contributing to the good improvement since the previous inspection include improved assessment procedures and the management of tracking data, which are impacting positively on progress, improved site security, improved learning resources and effective strategies for teaching basic skills. Staff morale is high, and staff agree that closer collaboration, better communication and clear expectations have given them a fresh impetus to improve the school.

Governors give sound support to the school. They regularly monitor its work and have been active in supporting improvements to site security. They ensure that safeguarding requirements reflect good practice, fully meet requirements, and that the school's policies for equal opportunities and tackling discrimination are well promoted. The school's contribution to community cohesion is good, because it knows its own community well and has identified where pupils' understanding of the wider world and their contribution to it need to be developed. Recently formed links with a multicultural school in Edinburgh have given pupils good insight into different cultures and traditions.

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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	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
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	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is improving rapidly because of enthusiastic leadership and determined management of change. Provision for children to learn independently and direct their own learning has improved significantly this year with a huge increase in resources to ensure children have good facilities for learning in and outdoors. Despite this, the Early Years Foundation Stage leader acknowledges that provision still has some way to go to realise the school's high ambitions for children's learning. Children settle quickly into the Reception class and already are showing good independence and confidence. This is because they are very well cared for and nurtured by staff who know them well. Direct teaching is good and sometimes outstanding, but adult intervention to accelerate children's learning, is not yet of consistently good quality. Children have regular access to learning about letters and sounds and are making good progress in this aspect of their learning. However, the development of early writing skills is not as well promoted so they do not make as much progress here. Children join the school with skills and knowledge that vary from below to above what is typical for their age. They make expected progress overall so that nearly all reach the goals expected for their age by the end of Reception and in some years they exceed them. Good leadership has been successful in developing effective teamwork and inspiring colleagues to develop areas of expertise such as the planned 'forest school' provision.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers are highly supportive of the school and appreciate all that it does to make their children safe and happy there. As one parent, speaking for many, said, 'It is much easier to get my child to school in the mornings now that she is happy at school.' Other parents and carers comment on the improvements to provision for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. As they comment 'There have been massive improvements in provision; the school has really supported our children and helped us as parents.' The inspector agrees that children are happy and contented at school and that the improvements to provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are having a positive impact on their learning.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Acklington Church of England 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 13 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 26 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	11	85	2	15	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	8	62	5	38	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	8	62	5	38	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	10	77	2	15	1	8	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	10	77	3	23	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	10	77	3	23	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	8	62	5	38	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)	7	54	4	31	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	9	69	3	23	1	8	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	8	62	4	31	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	4	31	8	62	1	8	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	8	62	5	38	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	12	92	1	8	0	0	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

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.



29 September 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Acklington Church of England Controlled First School, Morpeth, NE65 9BW

Thank you for making me so welcome when I inspected your school recently. Your kindness and good behaviour made my visit a pleasure. I am pleased to tell you that your school gives you a satisfactory education and is quickly improving towards becoming a good school. This is because your teachers take care to get to know how well you are learning so they know what you need to learn next. They also make sure you have a curriculum that interests you and provide exciting after-school clubs and visits. Because of this you are now making faster progress and your learning in literacy and numeracy is improving all the time. While I could see that you enjoy learning, I did notice that you learn best when you are expected to think for yourself and work on interesting activities with a partner. I have asked your school to give you more opportunities to do this and to share the best teaching methods so that you all benefit from really good teaching all of the time.

You told me that your teachers take good care of you and I agree. They keep a watchful eye in case you need help or support. They also set a very good example of how to care for each other, which you follow. You are kind and helpful to each other and make a difference to the lives of others through your fundraising and your school concerts. I was pleased to see how you enjoy fruit snacks and sensible lunches and you certainly keep fit with all that running about in the playground!

Another area where I could see the school is making many improvements is in the Reception class. These are making a big difference to the learning of children in Class 1, so I have asked your school to keep on improving this area and to plan more writing activities for the younger children so that their writing becomes even better.

Your school is well led by the headteacher, staff, and governors who all want the best for you. You can help by working as hard as you do now and by learning to think and find out for yourself as much as possible.

My best wishes for the year ahead.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Moira Fitzpatrick

Lead inspector

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