

Alnwick South First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122172
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	380412
Inspection dates	29–30 September 2011
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	Community
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	234
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Walker
Headteacher	Jenny Smith
Date of previous school inspection	11 January 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed 12 lessons and six part-lessons led by 11 staff. They held meetings with the executive headteacher, groups of pupils, members of the governing body, and members of staff, as well as speaking with some parents and carers. They observed various activities throughout the school day and looked at a range of documents including policies for safeguarding and community cohesion, and the school development plan. Inspectors considered 114 parental questionnaires together with questionnaires completed by pupils and staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The impact on the school of its federation with other schools.
- How much progress pupils make, especially in mathematics, from joining to leaving the school.
- How much teaching and assessment have improved since the last inspection.

Information about the school

Alnwick South First School is an average-sized primary school. The proportions of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, of those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, of those from minority ethnic groups and of those who speak English as an additional language are below average. Since April 2009 the school has been a member of the Aln Community Schools Federation. It has the Artsmark, Activemark, Healthy School status and Investors in People award.

Privately-organised childcare adjacent to the school was inspected separately. The report is available on the Ofsted website.

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 2

Main findings

This is an outstanding school. All staff share a commitment to ensure that the pupils develop into mature and responsible citizens and achieve high academic standards. Parents and carers are delighted to send their children here. As one parent wrote, reflecting the views of very many, 'the school has an excellent ethos of high standards and personal development.'

Children enter the Nursery or Reception Year with skills that are typical for their age. They make outstanding progress during their time in school and attain high standards by the end of Year 4. Although their progress in mathematics has lagged behind that in reading and writing, the school has tackled this recently and standards are now high in all these subjects.

Pupils' personal development is excellent. They have a first-class understanding of how to stay healthy and most are very fit. They participate fully in organised physical activities and are very active at playtime. They make the most of the wealth of opportunities they get to make a contribution to the school, for example as playground helpers; or to the wider community, for example by raising funds for charities and participating in civic events.

The school achieves high standards because of its meticulously-planned, stimulating curriculum, which is carefully tailored to meet the needs of individual pupils and which provides those who need support with high levels of expert help to improve their basic skills. The school's success is also due to good teaching, which provides a high level of challenge in most lessons, although teachers do not take full advantage of the technology available to them. Pupils are extremely well cared for; in particular, those who are vulnerable are very well supported, and are able therefore to thrive in school.

The school has improved considerably since its last inspection. The Early Years Foundation Stage is now outstanding, although the children's access to an exciting outdoor curriculum is limited, partly because of constraints imposed by the accommodation. Plans based on the recommendations in the previous inspection report have been fully implemented, so that assessment and teaching are now much better. In introducing these improvements the staff have greatly benefited from the experience and expertise in other federation schools. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and suitable plans have been prepared for further development. The

governing body's vision for the federation is supported by rigorous monitoring of the school and well-considered plans for reforming the way governance is organised. All involved are fully-committed to the vision and have enjoyed considerable success so far. The school has good capacity for improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make better use of new technologies as teaching tools so that lessons are more stimulating and exciting.
- Improve the outdoor provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Pupils make excellent progress in their time at the school. In lessons they pay close attention to the teacher, ask for clarification when they do not understand, and most do their best with their written work. In their own words, they thoroughly 'enjoy learning new things.' In one lesson, for example, pupils concentrated hard when listening to the challenging text of a news item; took notes on what they had heard, after reflecting on what were the important points; and then took great care when translating their rough notes into fluent written prose. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make outstanding progress. Expert teaching assistants give them intensive support out of lessons, and the class teacher has high expectations of them when they are in class.

Pupils feel extremely safe in school. They appreciate the security of the building and adopt safe practices themselves in class and in the playground. Their behaviour is exemplary; in particular, they do their best to help and to take care of each other. They have a very good knowledge of how to live a healthy lifestyle and many of them are highly active at playtime. They know what constitutes a good diet. Those who do not take a school dinner recall having their packed lunch inspected by those pupils on the health and well-being group as part of a survey into healthy food. Pupils make the most of the wide range of opportunities for contributing to society. The playground helpers, for example, diligently put out and pack away appropriate equipment every day, and help their peers to enjoy playtime. Pupils have raised considerable funds for charities and other purposes, developing very useful enterprise skills. For example, they bought second-hand books from a local book-store and sold them at a book fair which they had organised for the community.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1

¹The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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 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 has many strengths. Relationships in class are excellent. Teachers use praise very effectively to encourage pupils to do their best and to build up their self-confidence. Lessons have clear objectives, which are explained very effectively to the pupils. Although pupils have to listen to the teacher for lengthy periods in some lessons they are given plenty of opportunities to be actively involved at these times, for example by discussing ideas with a partner. In the very best lessons, the teachers excite and inspire the class with their original and enthusiastic approach. Teachers seldom use new technologies, however, to make their lessons more exciting and the learning clearer. Occasionally a lesson lacks urgency and pace, and some pupils do not complete enough work, and this is sometimes overlooked by the teacher. Assessment is good. Its accuracy is assured by the federation's moderation procedures. The data it produces are rigorously studied so that individual pupils at risk of underachieving are rapidly identified and appropriate remedial action is planned. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and give them advice on how to improve. The quality of this guidance varies across the school. So too does the extent to which pupils respond to the advice they are given.

The curriculum is planned in considerable detail and ensures that pupils develop basic skills to a high level. It is carefully adapted to meet the needs of individuals. The most-able, for example, are 'challenged and stretched', as one parent put it, to achieve their best. It provides a host of memorable experiences, often through visits and activities out of school, such as the French fair in town or the trip to the Grace Darling museum. One of the many benefits of the federation is the opportunity pupils enjoy to contribute to the federation's excellent newspaper, 'The Alnwickist'.

The very high standards of care and guidance noted at the last inspection have been maintained. The staff know the pupils very well. They provide a very high level of supervision throughout the school day. Transition arrangements to the middle school are well-planned. Those pupils who join mid-year are extremely well supported so they quickly settle into their new school. The school's support for pupils and families suffering personal tragedy is exemplary.

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	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher communicates a clear and ambitious vision for the school and the staff are fully-committed to raising standards and improving provision. The actions taken to improve pupils' progress in mathematics, for example, have proved very successful. Although senior leaders recognise that other staff need to develop their management skills so they can exercise more independence in their areas of responsibility, this has not yet been fully tackled. The governing body is well-informed about the work of the federation schools and its members make regular visits to further their understanding of the work of other schools in the federation. It has improved the school's procedures for monitoring and evaluating its performance and increased the degree to which the staff are held accountable for the school's results. Recent changes to streamline the committee structure are based on a sound analysis of the federation's progress to date, but it is too early for these changes to have had an impact.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding its pupils are excellent. Its practice has many exemplary features; for example, the detailed induction guidance for new staff and the nomination of trained substitutes to act as the designated teacher in the absence of the headteacher. The school does its utmost to promote equality of opportunity; its detailed scrutiny of assessment data underpins its efforts to make sure no one underachieves. It has had considerable success in narrowing the gap between the achievement of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and that of their peers. The promotion of community cohesion is good. The school overcomes the limitations of the largely mono-cultural local area by providing a range of opportunities for pupils to experience other communities in the United Kingdom and abroad, for example by linking with other schools.

These are the grades for the 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	1
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enter the Nursery and Reception classes with skills that are broadly typical for their age. They make outstanding progress; by the end of their time in this stage nearly all achieve the early learning goals and many exceed these expectations. Staff

provide a safe and welcoming environment, in which the children settle quickly, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Simple rules help children learn to keep safe and healthy, to co-operate with each other, to share and to take turns. As a result they play and learn together happily and confidently.

Their outstanding progress is due to a well-planned curriculum and some first-class teaching, particularly in the Nursery. For example, children there were captivated by a session which taught them the importance of being quiet in order to listen carefully. A large pair of 'listening ears' focused their attention on the sounds around them as they went on a 'listening walk'. Soon they were discussing the sounds they could hear, which included 'birds singing' and 'dogs woofing'. The children do not have regular, easy access to a stimulating outdoor environment and this limits their opportunities for learning through investigation and exploration.

The Early Years Foundation Stage is exceptionally well led. The team works cohesively and with a shared vision. The unit has made considerable improvements since the last inspection.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Views of parents and carers

Inspectors received an above-average number of responses to the parental questionnaires. The overwhelming majority replied positively to the questions. Many wrote additional comments to praise the school's successes. Some parents and carers expressed concerns but there was no pattern or trend to these. All were investigated but inspectors found no evidence to support them. A very small number of parents and carers would welcome more information about their children's progress. The headteacher is aware of this issue and has plans to tackle it.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Alnwick South First School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 114 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 234 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	77	68	37	32	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	84	74	29	25	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	64	56	42	37	6	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	71	62	38	33	3	3	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	82	72	29	25	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	76	67	32	28	1	1	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	73	64	41	36	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)	69	61	35	31	2	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	72	63	33	29	2	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	62	54	42	37	4	4	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	63	55	39	34	2	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	73	64	35	31	3	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	83	73	29	25	1	1	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 all 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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 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. Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 pupils' 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.



3 October 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Alnwick South First School, Alnwick, NE66 1UL

Thank you for welcoming my colleagues and me so warmly into your school when we visited last month. We 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 we thought.

You go to an outstanding school. It is even better than it was the last time it was inspected. The staff take extremely good care of you and I understand why you say you feel safe there. You enjoy your lessons for which the teachers plan imaginative activities to help you make excellent progress with your work. You behave extremely well and take good care of each other. You know how to stay healthy; it was lovely to see so many of you in sun hats on those hot sunny days. You make an excellent contribution to the community; for instance, many of you are involved in organising fund-raising activities and you all participate in big events in the town.

There are a few things that would make the school even better. I have asked the staff to use the technology they have to make their lessons more exciting. I have also asked the school's managers to improve the learning in the outdoor areas for the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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,

Derek Neil
Lead Inspector

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