

Croftway First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122255
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	314250
Inspection dates	4–5 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Derek Sleightholme

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

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	347
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Dave Grey
Headteacher	Mr Charles J Ellis
Date of previous school inspection	February 2004
School address	William Street Blyth Northumberland NE24 2HP
Telephone number	01670 353258
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Age group	3–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large urban school serving an area that includes social and economic disadvantage. The vast majority of pupils are from a White British background. There are few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and several are at an early stage of learning English. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is above average. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The percentage of pupils with a statement of special educational need is well above average. The school has secured Investor in People status. It has successfully maintained its designation as a Healthy School. Skills on entry are below those which are typical for this age.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school that is held in high regard by the vast majority of parents. One parent communicated a typical view by stating: 'I cannot fault the way Croftway is run and the children are taught'. The headteacher is supported well by an experienced deputy and committed staff. School leaders promote a clear focus on ensuring pupils make good progress both academically and personally. Important outcomes of their work are improvements in teaching, the accuracy of school self-review and the upturn in the rate of attendance so that this is now satisfactory.

Pupils behave well. They are proud of their school and eager to show visitors around. They enjoy school because they know they can make friends easily, they feel safe and can access help readily. Pupils know why it is important to be fit and healthy; many taking advantage of the good opportunities to play sport. They are keen to take on responsibilities such as serving on the school council or as 'playground pals'. Pupils acquired important future life skills when they set up and operated a stall at Blyth Market selling flowers, vegetables and artistic gifts they had produced at school.

From a level that is lower than usually seen when children start school, most pupils achieve well, particularly in English. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the very few from minority ethnic groups achieve similarly to other pupils. Teaching is good throughout the school. As a result, standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2 are average; by the end of Year 4 pupils are attaining standards that are broadly typical for their age. Standards of handwriting and presentation could be better.

Teachers plan successfully and this helps pupils to acquire core skills by promoting literacy and numeracy through other subjects such as history. They communicate knowledge confidently, manage pupils well and enhance learning through effective use of the school's interactive facilities such as the digital camera. The revised approaches to marking are not consistently applied when pupils are set targets. This leads to pupils not always being clear about how to improve their work. The curriculum is good and enriched through creative and sporting partnerships. Personal, social, cultural and environmental themes are promoted well. Care, guidance and support for children are good. Programmes designed to help vulnerable pupils, including those with specific needs, make an effective contribution to these pupils' good progress.

Leadership and management are good. Focused monitoring by school leaders and governors provides them with an accurate picture of the strengths of the school. It helps them to identify relevant priorities and deploy resources effectively. The revised targets set for pupils currently in Year 4 demonstrate good challenge compared to pupils' prior attainment. The school has good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the foundation stage

Grade: 2

The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage is good. Skills on entry to the Nursery are below those typical for this age and especially low in communication, language, literacy, and in mathematical understanding. Progress is good through the Nursery and Reception years. Most reach expected standards at the end of the Foundation Stage in many areas of learning, including personal and social and physical development. Standards remain below expected levels in language development. Teaching, learning and the curriculum are good. There are safe routines that allow all children to get on with their learning and their response is good. The Foundation Stage unit is well led and managed. The staff successfully involve parents. Consequently, parents are well informed about their children's progress and can support them at home.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all pupils understand the targets they are given to guide their learning and know what to do to achieve them.
- Raise standards of handwriting.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good. Pupils make good progress throughout Key Stage 1, particularly in English, and by the end of Year 2 their attainment is broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics. Most pupils maintain this good progress and by Year 4 the standards they reach are broadly at the level expected for their age.

Since 2004, teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 1 showed standards were close to average. In the 2006 assessments for seven-year-olds, pupils attained average standards in reading and mathematics. They attained above average standards in writing. The percentage of pupils attaining higher levels was similar to that reported nationally. Boys and girls attained similar standards in reading; in mathematics, boys outperformed girls. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress. The small number of pupils with statements of special educational need achieve very well compared to their starting points. The unvalidated results for 2007 were broadly similar to the average results for 2006 and the school exceeded its targets for reading and writing. Inspection findings confirm that pupils of all levels of prior attainment and the few learning through English as an additional language achieve well and make good progress. However, the scrutiny of pupils' work, particularly their exercise books, shows that standards of handwriting and presentation could be better.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils are a credit to the school, demonstrating good personal skills and attitudes to their work. They enjoy coming to school because of the strong relationships and positive climate for learning. Despite some isolated incidents of bullying, pupils feel safe, knowing that adult support is readily available. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Attendance has improved and is now average.

Pupils' enthusiasm for growing flowers and vegetables and their keen involvement in sport reflect a positive approach to a healthy lifestyle and to developing future life skills. Pupils willingly take up the many opportunities available to them especially those in the performing and creative arts. Children enthusiastically accept responsibilities in school, as playground pals, monitors and as members of the school council. This gives them a strong voice in the development of the school as well as developing their sense of community responsibility. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Consequently, pupils demonstrate high levels of maturity, responsibility and sensitivity towards others, through fundraising for charities and in contributions to local life. Their knowledge of other places and cultures is particularly striking as shown in the many attractive displays of their work around school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are planned well with tasks that match the full range of ability. Teachers skilfully adopt thematic approaches when they judge that the linking of subjects will benefit pupils' understanding. Pupils are attentive; they listen carefully as their teachers confidently explain, instruct and demonstrate. Pupils are well behaved because they are often engrossed by their teachers' lively exposition. Year 3 pupils made good progress in their understanding of the Victorians when they dressed up as pupils in a 'Victorian Classroom'. Their teacher photographed them, using sepia-toned, digital images. The good quality discussion and writing based on these effective resources that followed could be traced to the teacher's secure knowledge of Victorian history and ability to enhance the learning using interactive facilities.

Teachers use a common approach to marking. This helps pupils to know what they need to do to improve. This consistency does not apply when pupils are being guided on the targets they need to work towards. Some pupils understand what a target means; others are puzzled by the term. This stems from inconsistent approaches to setting targets between classes and subjects. A good start has been made through the 'Big Writing' initiative, but these approaches are not yet found in other core subjects. Teachers are not giving sufficient attention to improving pupils' handwriting skills.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It is enriched and strengthened as a result of good links and partnerships with external agents and the local community. Statutory requirements are met with a good allocation of time to the learning of literacy and numeracy skills. Displays are used well throughout the school to support the development of basic skills. Some focus on activities that spotlight and promote pupils' personal development. Displays also confirm that the curriculum opportunities are similar across parallel classes.

The curriculum is enhanced well through the use of visits and visitors. These regularly provide pupils with opportunities to develop future life skills. A successful creative partnership bid gave pupils the opportunity to experience film making by working with a professional photographer. Some became reporters as they described features of the school in unscripted extracts that were compiled as an interactive digital video disc. A popular range of extra-curricular activities, some based on links with the neighbouring football club, promote sport and creative experiences well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support for children are good with very positive relationships between pupils and staff. The school provides a wide range of support, including breakfast and after school clubs and 'Place2Be' counselling provision. Bullying is rare and children know that there will be an effective response should any occur. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils and for child protection are robust and used effectively. All staff have been trained in these procedures. Appropriate health and safety measures, including risk assessments, are in place. The school provides well for vulnerable children, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, by the careful deployment of support assistants. Through the employment of an inclusion mentor and other measures, pupils' attendance has improved. The school involves parents in their child's learning through the popular 'stepping stones' programme. Although pupils' personal and academic progress is tracked effectively and they usually know how to improve their work, there is some inconsistency between subjects and year groups in the advice given about targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher, through his good and purposeful leadership, is ensuring the focus within the school is on achievement within a caring and supportive environment. He is supported effectively by an experienced deputy who has contributed well to developing the role of senior leaders through a programme of coaching and mentoring. Leaders' skills are deployed well with a senior manager for each key stage, good representation of core subjects and an appropriate focus on teaching and learning strategies. The governors are well informed and use their performance and standards committee to focus on monitoring pupils' academic and personal development. Parents express very high levels of satisfaction regarding aspects of pupils' academic and personal development.

School leaders have been successful in bringing about improvements in attendance, the quality of teaching and the accuracy of the self-evaluation. Success in addressing previous inspection shortcomings and ensuring that pupils achieve well at each key stage typifies the leaders' abilities to improve standards and tackle issues confidently. Working well together they are well placed to make further improvements. The revised reading, writing and mathematics targets set for pupils currently in Year 4 confirm that school leaders expect this cohort to make faster than expected progress compared to their attainment at the end of Year 2. The school provides good value for money.

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Annex A

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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of boarding provision	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

Annex B

8 October 2007

Dear Pupils



Inspection of Croftway First School, Northumberland, NE24 2HP

Thank you for the help you gave us when we inspected your school. We all enjoyed meeting you and we were impressed by your friendliness, good manners and good behaviour. We enjoyed visiting your classrooms, looking at your work and talking to you about your school. We know that Mr Ellis and the staff want you to have a say in how your school develops and your school councillors told us much about how you have helped to improve it.

These are the things we found out about your school. You attend a good school. We know that you make good progress as you move through each school year and by the time most of you leave at age 9 you achieve the standards we would expect to see. Many of you told us you are enjoying 'big writing' and that it is helping you to produce stories full of your own ideas. You also told us that you feel safe and happy at school and you know how to get help quickly when you need it. We know you like helping at school by taking on responsibilities such as serving on the school council, being a 'playground pal' and assisting with daily jobs. You also enjoy the many opportunities to learn when visitors come to school to work with you. We were particularly interested in viewing the DVD that showed us your work as young film-makers. The sequences show you really worked well together on this project. We really enjoyed eating the fresh tomatoes and cucumber you sent for our lunch from your school garden – thank you!

There are some things that the school could do better.

- Your teachers will make sure that you all understand the targets you have to guide your learning. They will also make sure that you know how to improve your work so that you can reach them.
- We also think that you can improve your handwriting because this will help the presentation of your work in several subjects. You can do something about this by working hard and doing the best you can for your teachers.

We wish you and all the staff the very best for the future.

Derek Sleightholme
Lead inspector