

Acomb First School

Bishops Hill, Main Street, Acomb, Hexham NE46 4PL

Inspection dates

24–25 November 2015

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not yet good because

- School leaders have allowed the quality of teaching and learning to decline since the previous inspection.
- Governors do not hold school leaders to account effectively. Their knowledge and understanding of the school's work are insufficiently robust to procure the best possible outcomes for pupils.
- Leadership roles are underdeveloped. A lack of wider accountability and professional development opportunities has hampered school growth.
- Teaching does not always support or challenge different groups of pupils appropriately, in order to enable all pupils to reach their potential. Thus the rate of progress for some is too slow.
- Teaching assistants and other adults are not always deployed in a manner that benefits pupils. Their skills in supporting pupils are variable.
- For some pupils, adults' expectations are not high enough, and an over-reliance on adult direction hinders progress and puts a ceiling on learning.
- Improvement is required in developing pupils' awareness of the diversity of modern Britain and their understanding of other cultures and countries.

The school has the following strengths

- Newly appointed leaders are beginning to have a positive impact on school improvement.
- In Key Stage 1, outcomes for pupils overall are significantly above average.
- Pupils are happy, safe and confident, and attendance is above average.
- Disadvantaged pupils do well. In some subjects the gap seen nationally has reversed and this group outperform their peers in school. Parents are extremely supportive of the school and value the opportunities that the distinctive ethos provides for their children.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve and expand the skills of leaders and managers at all levels to drive the school forward by:
 - further refining school improvement planning so that there are clear lines of accountability, strict time frames and sufficient detail about expected impact and outcomes
 - ensuring that governors are skilled and have clearly defined roles and responsibilities as well as a greater sense of accountability for school improvement
 - equipping leaders with the knowledge, skills and understanding required to secure rapid improvement across the curriculum
 - supporting as well as challenging all staff through high-quality continuous professional development, setting effective targets for teachers to improve and regular monitoring opportunities.
- Raise the quality of teaching and learning in all classes by:
 - developing teachers' abilities to analyse and use school information productively to bring about precision in teaching and planning for all groups of pupils
 - addressing the barriers which prevent girls, most-able pupils, disabled and special educational needs pupils reaching the higher standards of achievement and progress that should be expected of them
 - improving the consistency with which pupils take more ownership of their learning, developing resilience, independence and higher expectations of themselves.

An external review of governance should be taken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management **requires improvement**

- Leadership has undergone significant change and this has impacted on the rate of school improvement. A commitment to improvement, however, is now tangible among leaders. Increased clarity about the school's position as well as a realistic strategy for driving the school forward is thereby developing rapidly.
- The recently appointed acting headteacher provides motivational leadership. Staff, parents and governors share her vision for improvement. Her immediate actions, for example putting statutory safeguarding requirements fully in place, have secured the school site, informed practice and guaranteed protection for children.
- Continuous professional development opportunities for staff have been minimal. Recognising this, the acting headteacher has quickly and accurately identified development needs among staff and delivered or secured relevant training. As a result, staff now have higher expectations and take greater responsibility.
- The breadth and balance of the mathematics and English curriculum is evident in books and shows a wide range of subject matter being addressed. There is scope, however, to develop the curriculum further to ensure that pupils develop more informed, positive and accurate views of other cultures. In this way they will be better prepared for life in modern Britain and the world in which they live.
- The local authority brokered the support of a school improvement partner to challenge and support school leaders and to systematically check on standards in the school. Weaknesses have been correctly identified by this representative but the local authority has failed to respond with sufficient urgency to her advice and recommendations, meaning that school improvement has been too slow.
- Leaders and managers are now making effective use of the expertise and support of school improvement partners to tighten improvement planning. As a result, leadership roles across areas of responsibility are better defined, and plans for improvement are becoming more detailed and evaluative.
- Disadvantaged pupils have been supported effectively. The school's good use of additional money from the government to improve outcomes for this group of children has resulted in gaps in Key Stage 1 closing in reading and mathematics and narrowing in writing. This is a real strength of the school.
- The primary sport funding is used well to improve children's fitness and heighten their awareness of healthy life choices through the use of outside expertise and visits. Pupils have particularly valued the extra-curricular tag-rugby and regular swimming sessions, and their skills have developed well. Pupils would welcome a more varied choice of extra-curricular sporting and creative activities.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The new Chair of the Governing Body holds high aspirations for children and staff. He is proactive in securing improvement in governance and has, for example, now set up weekly meetings with the acting headteacher to discuss and act on improvement strategies. Consequently, a more informed, accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of school performance and practice is palpable.
 - With the recent skills audit and subsequent restructuring of the governing body, specific duties for individual governors have been spelled out, making obligations and commitments more transparent. In this way, governors have better clarity about their roles and responsibilities.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment **requires improvement**

- Teaching requires improvement. There is a lack of consistency with which pupils are taught across the school and across subjects. For example, expectations about presentation and handwriting are not always high enough, or insisted upon. The rate of pupils' progress therefore is variable.
- Higher-ability pupils sometimes find their work too easy. They do not always have the challenge they need to extend their thinking or deepen their understanding. Consequently pupils are not reaching the greater reaches of achievement that should be expected of them, particularly in mathematics.

- Lower-ability pupils are not always supported effectively to catch up with their peers and at times are over-reliant on adults. The pace of learning periodically moves on too quickly and they are unable to make links between new concepts and their existing knowledge. This inhibits their progress.
- Most teachers exhibit secure subject knowledge, particularly in mathematics and English. Technical vocabulary is used productively to prepare pupils for the next steps in their learning and to develop conceptual understanding. However pupils' misconceptions or misuse of key terminology is not always identified or corrected by teachers or support staff, meaning that some errors are left unchecked.
- Teaching assistants and other adults are sometimes used effectively to further learning. Where practice is strongest, pupils benefit from their contributions. Sometimes, however, weak subject knowledge means that learning is not promoted effectively or correctly, and in these cases pupils' learning is slowed down.
- Teachers adhere to the school's marking and feedback policy, meaning that pupils are clear about marking criteria, rules and expectations as they move from class to class and between subjects. This aids communication and helps pupils when moving on to the next stage of their learning.
- Pupils come to school keen and eager to learn. They are very respectful of staff and each other, responding to requests and direction politely. At times however, they are over-reliant on teacher direction and display a lack of interest in lessons, indicating underdeveloped skills of independence.
- The acting headteacher has devised a whole-school assessment system in line with the requirements of the new National Curriculum and uses this to monitor the progress of individual pupils closely. Other local schools have adopted the system as a basis for devising their own assessment systems, signifying wider confidence. However, the tracking of the progress of groups lacks rigour and results are not analysed effectively by teaching staff to ensure that barriers and gaps are identified and addressed.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement since pupils are too often not actively involved in their learning, and at times are insufficiently challenged or inappropriately supported to progress efficaciously.
- Pupils' viewpoints of other countries, races and cultures are underdeveloped and naïve. Pupils are respectful and curious. However, their ability to appreciate similarities, celebrate differences and understand the viewpoints of others is stifled by inexperience and lack of opportunities. In this way, pupils are unprepared for their future.
- Attendance is above national standards and the few examples of persistent absence are steadily reducing. This exemplifies strong home and school links and demonstrates how keen pupils are to come to school each day. The daily educational opportunities provided by the school are valued.
- A positive culture and ethos pervades the school. Staff and pupils acknowledge each other in a friendly, interested manner, showing mutual respect. A caring atmosphere is thereby engendered.
- Pupils are happy, form close friendships and say that they feel safe. Their safety and well-being is of great importance to staff and measures have recently been taken to improve the premises. Pupils value, for example, the new door entry systems and gates which contribute to their feelings of safety.
- An understanding of democracy is actively being developed in pupils. For example, even the youngest learners participate in democratic processes by voting their peers onto the school council. The school council's subsequent success in securing new nets for the school climbing frame promotes a core British value of democracy in action.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Learning behaviours in classes are not consistently good, with inattentiveness and low-level avoidance behaviours too frequently displayed. Thus, teaching and learning at times lack momentum.
- Pupils do not always take pride in their work. Writing and artwork in topic books, for example, does not match the quality of work that is found in English books. Lowered expectations are, in this way, contributing to poorer-quality learning behaviours and attitudes within certain subjects.
- Pupils are confident that any instances of bullying, which are rare, will be dealt with by adults in the school promptly and fairly. Alongside adults, they discuss and tackle any examples of derogatory language or poor behaviour proactively. These measures are equipping pupils with self-worth.

- Parents are confident that positive behaviours are promoted and developed from the outset. One or two parents requiring support in terms of managing their children's challenging behaviours on entry to school find the constructive, consistent help from staff very beneficial.
- Pupils behave with consideration and respect for adults and each other. They follow instructions, obey rules and are mindful of the impact of their actions on others. This leads to a friendly, happy atmosphere at lunchtimes and breaktimes.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Gaps between boys and girls in terms of their attainment and progress exist across subjects and year groups. Boys do better than girls in early years, in the phonics test (the sounds that letters make) in Year 1 and in reading and mathematics in Key Stage 1. Not enough has been done to identify barriers and redress the balance.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs do less well than others in all subjects in Key Stage 1. The progress of individuals within this group are not tracked carefully enough to be able to understand the reasons for underachievement. The targeted support provided is not analysed effectively to see if it is actually making a difference.
- A proportion of children in the early years do not make the good level of development that is expected of them. The majority come to school with broadly typical skills for their age but low expectations, coupled with teaching that requires improvement, are having a detrimental impact on their rates of progress. Girls do particularly poorly in comparison with others nationally and others within school.
- Extra money given by the government to support disadvantaged pupils has been used effectively and the gaps between this group and others have closed in reading and mathematics and narrowed in writing. This bucks the national trend of poor outcomes for this group across subjects and signifies an area of strength.
- Key Stage 1 outcomes in 2015 were significantly above national averages across reading, writing and mathematics, indicating good attainment for some groups of pupils. Proportions of pupils reaching the higher levels of attainment, however, were below national expectations, particularly in mathematics.
- Year 1 and Year 2 phonics screening results were above national standards for all groups of pupils. This signifies strength in the teaching and learning of phonics in Key Stage 1.

Early years provision

requires improvement

- Children enter the early years with broadly typical skills and levels of development. They are curious and excited about learning and are able to articulate their needs clearly to the adults working with them. However, insufficiently high expectations of their capabilities lead to attainment and progress that fall below national expectations and require improvement.
- Low expectations of children's skills in writing, including letter and number formation, mean that poor examples of children's work are celebrated. This leads to children having low expectations of themselves and results in poor-quality work.
- Teachers do not assess and track children precisely enough to ensure that tasks and activities match children's needs. This means that higher-ability children are not always suitably challenged and lower-ability children do not always have the carefully targeted support they need to ensure that they make rapid progress.
- Misconceptions are not consistently addressed by staff, meaning that children form and embed inaccurate or incorrect concepts. For example, in saying the sounds that letters make, poor enunciation modelled by adults hinders children's progress.
- Positive classroom relationships and rules, alongside some well-established routines, support children to feel confident and safe in the early years classroom. As a result, children usually listen respectfully to adults and each other, and display caring, positive attitudes.
- Parents are made highly welcome and feel involved in their children's learning. Parents speak positively about the good communication that they have had from staff and the acting headteacher. They welcome the regular opportunities and support that the school is providing to discuss early skills development, for example how children learn to read. Home-school links are strong and viewed positively by parents.

School details

Unique reference number	122170
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10000741

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	First
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	63
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Christopher Hamlin
Acting Headteacher	Angela Speed
Telephone number	01434 603870
Website	www.acomb.northumberland.sch.uk
Email address	admin@acomb.northumberland.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	7–8 February 2012

Information about this school

- Acomb First School is a smaller than average school.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding is similar to schools nationally.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage and there are no pupils for whom English is an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled or special educational needs pupils is similar to that seen nationally.
- The school is highly stable and mobility is rare.
- The school works closely with Little Oaks, the adjoining nursery school, to provide a breakfast club for children from both settings.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning in all classes on both days of the inspection. On one of these days she observed jointly with the acting headteacher. In addition, the acting headteacher accompanied the inspector on a number of short visits to classrooms to observe learning and classroom environments.
- Meetings were held with the coordinator for disabled and special educational needs pupils, groups of pupils, the commissioner for schools in Northumberland, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and the school improvement partner brokered by the local authority to support the work of the school.
- Together, the acting headteacher and the inspector conducted a book scrutiny of children's work from all classes. Additionally, children's work displayed throughout the school was examined by the inspector and information displayed to support learning was evaluated.
- The views expressed in 15 responses from parents submitted during the course of the inspection via Parent View (the online questionnaire) were taken into account and the inspector also spoke with parents at the beginning of the school day.
- The inspector looked at school information, observed the school's work and examined a range of documents, including the school's own records relating to the monitoring of teaching and learning, the performance management of staff, governing body minutes, and evaluations of attendance and behaviour.

Inspection team

Fiona Manuel, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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