

Morpeth First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122210
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	301686
Inspection dates	27–28 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Joan Elton

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	
School	339
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Michele Rickitt
Headteacher	Miss Elaine Reay
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2003
School address	Goose Hill Morpeth Northumberland NE61 1TL
Telephone number	01670 512893
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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

Morpeth First School is a larger than average school. It serves a predominantly White British population with a very small proportion of families from minority ethnic backgrounds. All but a very small minority of pupils have English as a first language. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average. A below average percentage of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Morpeth First School is an outstanding school. It is very well led by a highly committed team of staff and governors who ensure an excellent education for all pupils. The school has a vibrant curriculum; its teaching and learning are of the highest quality; care, support and guidance are exemplary. As a result pupils achieve exceptionally well and their personal development is outstanding. The school is held in very high esteem by a very large number of parents. Typically they comment on the very good ethos, the strong leadership, the dedicated staff and the high standards of behaviour. They appreciate the school's attention to individual needs and praise the exciting arts and music programmes, the visits and the extra curricular activities. 'Fantastic school!' and 'Great school!' are typical comments.

Pupils' achievement is outstanding and they reach high standards. Pupils make a good start in Foundation stage. Excellent progress is maintained throughout Key Stages 1 and 2 and standards by Year 2 are well above national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. By Year 4 pupils perform well above the expected levels in English, mathematics and science. In addition, results in both Key Stages exceed the local authority's projected targets for the school. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with English as an additional language also achieve as well as all other pupils. This is because of the school's very successful inclusion policies, which include early identification of needs and accurate targeting of support.

Most pupils enjoy school and behave exceptionally well. They feel very safe, secure and happy in school. They understand how to lead a healthy lifestyle and develop enthusiasm for a wide range of interests. They organise fund-raising and participate fully in town and community projects. They are very well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Excellent relationships between staff and pupils, very high expectations, the brisk pace of lessons and a very accurate understanding of individual needs typify the excellent teaching and learning. Teachers' marking also gives plenty of guidance to pupils. The curriculum is outstanding and includes excellent development of basic skills, with well focused yet creative topics spanning a number of areas such as French, role-play and problem solving activities.

The school's leadership and management are outstanding. As a team, they work very well together and share the same vision and drive for improvement. Their judgements are based on objective monitoring and their self-assessment is accurate in every respect. The school's outstanding leadership and management and the considerable progress made since the last inspection demonstrate an outstanding capacity for further improvement. The school gives excellent value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Foundation Stage is good. Most children enter Nursery with skills typical for their age. They make very good progress and by the end of Reception nearly all children reach the expected levels for this age group, with the majority exceeding them. Children make especially good progress in communication, language, literacy, mathematical development and, personal, social and emotional development because staff are very successful at teaching these skills and nurturing their personal development. Children respond very well to the expectations of how they should behave. They grow in confidence and begin to work together, learning to

share equipment and to take part in group activities. The curriculum, teaching and learning are good. There is a smooth transition between the Nursery and Reception classes.

Staff provide many interesting and creative activities, both inside and outside the classroom. Their care of the children is outstanding and they give much encouragement and praise. However, sometimes learning is restricted by teachers' over-direction. As a result, time is lost and opportunities for developing independence are limited. Leadership and management are good. Regular checks are made of how well children are doing. Parents take a very keen interest in helping their children and the school gives them very good information about their children's progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that approaches to teaching and learning further develop children's independence in the Foundation Stage.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils' current work and the school's data show that standards are consistently high and achievement is outstanding. When children begin school most have skills typical for this age group. Effective Foundation Stage provision ensures that children adjust quickly and achieve well. By the end of Reception most exceed the nationally agreed early learning goals. Pupils' achievement is outstanding in Key Stage 1 and many pupils in Year 2 are currently performing above national expectations. This reflects the provisional 2007 Key Stage 1 assessment results, which were well above national averages for 2006 and well above the local authority's projections. These high standards have been sustained over many years.

In Key Stage 2 achievement continues to be excellent. Many pupils are working beyond expected levels. Assessment data for Year 4, in 2006 and 2007, shows that standards were very high in English, mathematics and science. Pupils not only met the challenging targets projected from their Key Stage 1 results, they exceeded them. In Key Stage 2 girls outperform boys in writing, but both perform exceptionally well. Nevertheless, because of successful teaching strategies, this gap is narrowing. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and pupils with English as an additional language also achieve as well as their peers. This is because their needs are quickly identified and resources are effectively used to provide the necessary support.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and their well-being are outstanding. The school works very successfully to ensure pupils develop into effective learners and become valuable members of society. Attendance is good. Behaviour is outstanding and has a very positive impact on learning. Pupils demonstrate excellent attitudes towards school and clearly enjoy being there. They feel very safe and secure. They express their views confidently and listen to those of others. They are extremely polite and make visitors very welcome. They are given good levels of responsibility and independence as they get older, which they willingly accept and carry out. This is particularly reflected in the amount of charity work, which is initiated as well as organised by the pupils. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to lead healthy lives, and they take part in an outstanding range of physical activities. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent; pupils have many opportunities to take part in a wide range of artistic and musical

activities. The reflective nature of assemblies, with clear links made between modern life and Biblical text, make a huge contribution to pupils' spiritual development. Pupils, especially those who are representatives on the school council, have a good understanding of how they can help the school improve and how successful their earlier ideas have been. Outstanding personal skills and very secure skills in literacy and numeracy prepare pupils extremely well for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding and include many strong features. These include a brisk pace to learning, a lively and humorous approach and excellent use of resources. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and this leads to very high results. They also have a very accurate understanding of pupils' individual needs and provide well matched activities and additional support. Teachers and support staff plan together very effectively to ensure consistency and equality of opportunity. Effective routines and well structured, sharply focused lessons result in good use of time and smooth transition from one activity to the next. As a result, lessons are free from disruption and children sustain concentration. Overall, classroom organisation and management of pupils are excellent. Teachers have high expectations and encourage children very effectively through positive comments both in lessons and in books. Relationships between pupils and staff are particularly strong and give pupils the confidence to share their ideas in groups and with the whole class. Positive working relationships also result in very good attitudes to learning and sustained concentration. Teachers' assessment is accurate and used very effectively to help pupils make extremely good progress. Pupils' involvement in their own assessment is helping them to understand what they do well and what they need to do to improve. It is also developing their independence.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. Although high priority is given to basic skills and their application across the curriculum, the school develops the whole child. As one parent writes, 'the learning and broader creative opportunities are fantastic'. A key aspect to the school's success is its focus on how pupils learn. This effectively increases their independence and accelerates their progress. In addition there is very good provision for personal and social development. Pupils learn how to be healthy, safe and active citizens both in school and the wider community. Pupils study some interesting topics, which link several subjects. These reinforce knowledge and deepen understanding. A carefully thought-out programme of visits and visitors enriches the curriculum very well. A good example is the 'Altogether Active Fortnight', where members of the local Sports Partnership team lead activities and health professionals give presentations. There is a remarkably wide range of very popular lunchtime and after-school clubs. These increase sports and arts provision particularly well. The recently improved information and communications technology (ICT) facilities enhance children's learning across the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Procedures for safeguarding children are very robust and the school meets all requirements for health, safety, child protection and security. Staff know pupils well and are most perceptive of their needs. Parents are very appreciative of the care provided. 'I feel very secure knowing my children are very well cared for and most of all, happy!' is a typical comment. Academic guidance is excellent. Pupils are very active in assessing their own progress guided by clear criteria. They learn from teachers' marking and discuss how well they are doing and how to improve. Systems for tracking pupils' academic and personal progress are very rigorous. They are used to inform lesson planning and to provide additional resources that are well matched to pupils' needs. The school has very good links with other agencies. These provide specialist support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for pupils whose first language is not English. Transition is very well managed and children look forward with confidence to the next stage of their education.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The energetic and highly committed headteacher has a very clear vision for the school. This includes the provision of a high quality learning environment, where all pupils are cared for and all pupils achieve. She communicates this vision effectively to all members of staff, who receive regular training and much encouragement to ensure its success. The school is very well organised and very efficiently run. The headteacher and staff provide rich experiences for the pupils and are very receptive to new developments. As a result the school is an exciting place and there are many carefully selected initiatives. All staff are involved in the monitoring process to ensure high standards and gain an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Very effective senior staff lead many of the developments and currently provide high quality training for new staff.

Governance is also outstanding. Governors are very proud of their school and very supportive of the headteacher and her staff. They share the same vision for the school and work very hard to provide the best resources and conditions. They are kept very well informed about all aspects of school life by the headteacher and from their own monitoring. They have developed very good working relationships with staff and know the strengths and areas for development very well. As a result, they make informed decisions and resources are used efficiently, although because of the age of the building, much finance is spent on essential repairs.

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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?	1
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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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.

Annex A

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

29 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Morpeth First School, Northumberland, NE61 1TL

Thank you for the welcome you gave the inspection team when we visited your school recently. You were most polite and friendly. We appreciated all the help you gave us. Your behaviour is excellent and you are so keen and interested in your lessons.

We were most impressed with your school. We know now why it is so popular with you and your parents. It is an outstanding school, where pupils achieve very well indeed. Teaching and learning are excellent. You learn about a wide range of topics and the activities you do are very stimulating and often creative. Your teachers care for you very well. They help you know how well you are doing and what you have to do to make improvements. Your headteacher, staff and governors work very well as a team and run your school very well indeed. We have asked the school to help children in Nursery and Reception become more independent and less reliant on teachers' instructions. I know they will succeed in this because they always work so well to improve your school.

You can help your teachers make this an even better school by carrying on working hard and doing your best. I know some of you have an excellent or 100% attendance record and are never late. Well done! Let's hope more of you reach this target next year!

We send you all our good wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

J Elton

Lead inspector