

Alford Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120440
Local Authority	LINCOLNSHIRE LA
Inspection number	313614
Inspection date	19 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Christopher Deane-Hall

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	4-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	331
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs S Spenceley
Headteacher	Mr M H Duncalfe
Date of previous school inspection	13 October 2003
School address	Hanby Lane Alford LN13 9BJ
Telephone number	01507 463414
Fax number	01507 463862

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The following issues were investigated: the pupils' achievement, the causes of the high standards in English for 2007 and the effectiveness of academic care, guidance and support provided for pupils. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation form, lesson observations, discussions with staff, governors and pupils, by looking at pupils' work and information which the school keeps on how well pupils are doing in their learning, analysing parents' questionnaire responses, the school's improvement plan and other policies and documents. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation form, were not justified. These have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average primary school serving the town of Alford. Nearly all of the pupils are from White British backgrounds. An average number of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The proportion identified as needing extra support with their learning is above average. The school has achieved Investors in People accreditation, Basic Skills Quality Mark, National Healthy Schools Gold Award, Artsmark Gold Award and Active Mark. Children start school with skills and knowledge which are slightly below those expected for their 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 school that provides a very high level of care and support to its pupils. This sentiment was reflected by many parents in the questionnaire responses. One parent noted, 'My favourite aspect of its success is the wonderful ethos - the warm, calm and caring atmosphere which welcomes everyone - it's a lovely place to be involved in.' This view is shared by many pupils who feel cared for and valued. This high level of care leads to the excellent personal development of pupils, who show growing maturity and confidence as they move through the school. For instance, older pupils take great care of younger pupils, helping them around the school and at playtimes. Pupils feel very safe and secure because they are well looked after by staff who place emphasis on the individual. Pupils know how to make healthy choices because they are given the knowledge and skills to do so. Although pupils clearly enjoy school, attendance, though improving, is broadly average.

The school's safe and supportive environment enables vulnerable groups such as looked after children and those who find learning difficult, to build self-esteem and progress well. Major reasons for this success are the staff's dedication and successful partnerships with parents, carers and outside agencies. The schools' systems for checking how well pupils are learning help to ensure that targeted support is quickly provided. In this way, pupils who find learning hard make good progress.

Pupils say that they enjoy their lessons very much and as a result, their behaviour is outstanding. The school is extremely successful in developing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. A morning assembly about 'Materials' provided Year 2 pupils with excellent opportunities to show their team work, awareness of the environment and presentation skills. A good range of learning opportunities and out of school clubs complements the school's caring ethos. The 'Activity Afternoons' enhance the curriculum, providing good opportunities for pupils in drama, dance, French and sports. Not content with what is already on offer for pupils, the school is developing a two-year cycle to provide pupils with opportunities to extend their skills and understanding of how to learn. The school rightly regards this 'skills' based curriculum as an important factor in raising levels of pupils' skills in areas such as communication, thinking and negotiation. After the first year in operation the signs are that this is preparing pupils well for the next stage of their education. Early indications are that this is one of the reasons for the improving standards in English in 2007. The skills based curriculum now needs to be fully embedded to further enhance the good curriculum.

Many pupils recognise the positive effect that the interactive whiteboards have in making learning interesting. The consistent use of this resource and the very clear expectations of what pupils will learn in lessons make learning very enjoyable and help to focus pupils' thinking. This is one of the strengths of the good teaching. Teaching often challenges pupils to think hard and work collaboratively. As a result, lessons are often active, purposeful and move along at a brisk pace. This was shown in an English lesson where pupils demonstrated their increasing understanding of different story openings and shared insightful ideas about the characters, the setting and how to 'hook' the reader. Teachers expect pupils to do well. In a Year 3 numeracy lesson pupils were asked to divide a two-digit number by three or nine. They were reminded how to do this by referring to the 'Learning Wall' and sheets were provided to show them what strategies they needed to employ to achieve the learning intention. As a result, pupils knew how to succeed in their learning. The practice of showing pupils the strategies to help them

learn is not yet consistently applied. This was a good example of something that the school had identified as an area for improvement, being successfully tackled.

Children make a good start to school life in the Foundation Stage and progress well. They continue to make good progress through the school, so that by the end of Year 2, many reach average standards. This momentum continues through the upper classes where good teaching helps to ensure that, by Year 6, standards are above average. Over the last few years, standards at Year 6 have been on an upward trend, and in 2007 the national test results at Year 6 showed that standards in English were exceptionally high. Not surprisingly, a key factor in this positive picture is consistently good teaching, particularly where teachers show pupils how to succeed or 'share the secret' with pupils. Other factors that have collectively contributed to the improvement in English standards include teachers' improved knowledge of how to move pupils on to the higher levels in the National Curriculum, the sharing of their expertise with each other and a sustained focus on improving writing, reading, speaking and listening skills over several years. There are signs that, in the best examples, teachers' marking and pupils' self-assessment are beginning to have a beneficial effect on their learning. However, the school recognises that this is not yet consistent across the school.

Good leadership and management, under the excellent leadership of the headteacher and deputy headteacher, result in all staff pulling in the same direction and putting pupils' welfare and progress first. Careful checking of pupils' accomplishments and evaluation of teachers' work ensure that achievement and standards are good. The school's view of its effectiveness is generally accurate, with a rounded view of its strengths and areas for improvement. Governors are committed and actively involved in providing the school with a good balance of support and challenge. The school improvement plan is correctly focused on how to improve pupils' achievement still further. Parents overwhelmingly value the work of the school, as reflected in one parent's comment that 'the school strives to support all children promoting fairness and equality and learning for all, working with families and the wider community.' The steady improvements since the last inspection, including improving standards at Year 6, the good analysis of pupils' progress and better consistency in lesson planning show that the school can continue to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Staff work closely with children's parents when their children start school and provide a welcoming learning environment into which children quickly settle. All staff work closely to provide for the needs of the children so that many make good progress towards the goals expected of them by the time they enter Year 1. Learning opportunities are wide and well tailored to the needs of the children. For example, a parent who happens to be a veterinary surgeon provided a valuable opportunity for children to learn about the care of animals. Both children and staff listened to her with rapt attention, with children offering sensible answers to her questions. The outdoor learning environment is a little restrictive for learning, but the school is aware of this and is improving it further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to embed the 'Skills' based curriculum
- Make sure the practice of telling pupils what they need to do to improve is consistently applied across the school.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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?	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	3
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the 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?	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?	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	1
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

20 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Alford Primary School, Alford, Lincolnshire LN13 9BJ

Thank you for making me so welcome when I came to inspect your school recently. I very much enjoyed meeting you and was very impressed by your excellent behaviour. I particularly enjoyed your assembly and talking with so many of you at playtime and in the school council. This letter is to tell you what I learned about your school.

You know that you go to a good school where your teachers look after you exceptionally well. You told me that there is always someone you can speak to if you are sad or worried, and that things will be sorted out. Many of you have a lot of jobs around the school, and the school council is good at letting teachers know what you think about things. Many of you enjoy your lessons because your teachers and teaching assistants explain things and support you well. You have many opportunities to widen your learning and many of you said how much you enjoy the Activity Afternoons. As a result, you make good progress and do well in your tests. I have asked your headteacher and the governors to keep working to make sure that all of you understand how to learn even better and provide you with regular opportunities to help you know what you need to do to improve your work.

I am sure that your school is well placed to get even better and you can do your bit by making sure that all of you come to school regularly, carry on working hard, and by thinking about what sort of things help you to learn in lessons, and telling your teachers about these.

I wish you all well for the future.

Christopher Deane-Hall

Lead inspector