



Bellingham Community Middle School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 122350
Local Authority Northumberland
Inspection number 292378
Inspection dates 11–12 January 2007
Reporting inspector Pat Kime HMI

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary	School address	Redesmouth Road
School category	Community		Bellingham, Hexham
Age range of pupils	9–13		Northumberland, NE48 2EN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01434 220235
Number on roll (school)	160	Fax number	01434 220176
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Preston Hoggan
		Headteacher	Mrs Susan Dowson
Date of previous school inspection	1 June 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This much smaller than average school caters for pupils from Year 5 to Year 8. This means that pupils normally start the school halfway through Key Stage 2 and leave two-thirds of the way through Key Stage 3. The school serves a very extensive rural area stretching from a few miles north of Hexham to Kielder and Otterburn and close to the Cumbrian border and the Scottish Border. Many pupils travel long distances to attend school. A number of them experience social and/or economic disadvantages associated with an isolated rural life but, at three percent, the proportion in receipt of free school meals is low. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) is broadly in line with the national average. The number of pupils on roll has fallen by a fifth in the four years since the last inspection and a continuing reduction is predicted. All the pupils are White, almost all White British with English as their first language.

The school is used for many community activities, including adult education, youth clubs and out of school care and it is a hub centre for outreach provision. A Sure Start hub nursery is based at the school. The school has Investors in People status and a Helping Hands award from Education Bradford for its work with looked after children.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school has continued to improve since it was last inspected four years ago. It is now a good school. Pupils make good progress academically and in their personal development and gain attributes and skills which should stand them in good stead for the future. The school provides very good pastoral care that promotes pupils' development as individuals and a good curriculum that broadens their horizons. Teaching is good and all groups of pupils achieve well, making good gains in learning from a below average starting point in Year 5. As a result, standards are now broadly average by the end of Year 6. In Year 8 standards are above expectations with pockets of high attainment. Pupils acquire sound information and communication technology (ICT) skills but have limited opportunities to apply them. Senior staff and governors have shown the strategic vision necessary to continue to improve what the school offers its pupils.

Pupils enjoy school and appreciate all that the staff do for them. They particularly value:

- the very good personal support they receive
- the very effective programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE)
- the good range of extra activities, educational visits and visitors
- the additional provision for pupils with LDD and the more able.

Nonetheless, the school's recent pupil survey and the inspection questionnaire for parents show that a significant minority of pupils and their parents think the school could take more account of pupils' views.

The school is very well led. Senior staff and governors are aware of the challenges it faces and recognise the value of working in partnership with first schools and high schools to promote pupils' achievement. They have made considerable progress in building such relationships. The small size of the school makes it hard to ensure the necessary expertise among the staff to provide the range and depth of work across all subjects in Key Stage 3. The school is looking at utilising resources beyond its own staff to overcome this challenge.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further develop partnerships with its feeder first schools and with high schools in order to:
- promote continuity and progression in Key Stage 2 so pupils can achieve as well as possible by Year 6
- ensure sufficient staff expertise at Key Stage 3.
- Extend the arrangements for involving pupils in school life and decision making so all feel they have a voice.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to develop and use ICT in other subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' achievement is good. Standards are broadly average by the end of Key Stage 2. They are higher overall, relative to age, in Year 8. Pupils start the school in Year 5, halfway through Key Stage 2. Nearly all the feeder first schools provide information about the standards pupils have reached by the end of Year 4. This shows that, overall, pupils' attainment on entry to Bellingham is below average. The standards pupils reached in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2006 were a significant improvement on those of the previous four years. This reflects teachers' higher expectations for pupils. Pupils had caught up to where they should be and, in English and mathematics, there was a significant increase in the proportion reaching a higher level than is expected for their age. Pupils continue to do well in Key Stage 3. A significant number of pupils in Year 8 are already working above the level expected for pupils a year older, notably in mathematics. The good progress in this key stage is confirmed by pupils' results in the Key Stage 3 tests a year after they leave middle school.

The school tracks pupils' progress carefully and its records show that all groups of pupils achieve equally well. Boys' writing tends to be weaker than girls' but this gender gap narrows considerably as pupils move up the school. Work in geography and design and technology was examined and showed average standards in Year 8. At the previous inspection, standards in French were not high enough. This weakness has recently been tackled and, in Year 8, standards are securely satisfactory and pupils are making rapid progress as a result of improved teaching.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress in their personal development. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, with moral and social development particularly strong. They are well-behaved in lessons and around the school where an orderly yet relaxed atmosphere pervades. Many pupils transfer from very small first schools. The school places great emphasis on helping them to adjust to the change and developing their confidence and self-esteem. Its success in this is seen in the maturity, thought for others, responsibility and good attitudes and skills for learning of the older pupils. Pupils enjoy school and most take advantage of all that is on offer, including activities outside lessons and the support with homework provided at lunchtimes. Nonetheless, there is scope to develop pupils' contribution to the life of the school as a community; a significant proportion feel that, despite the Pupils' Forum, their views are not heard sufficiently. That said, pupils' contribution to the local community is good. Pupils appreciate the PSHCE programme which very successfully promotes their personal development and their understanding of how to look after their safety and health. They have a good understanding of a healthy diet and the importance of exercise and generally put this into practice. They know and understand the rules and routines to ensure their safety in subjects such as science and physical education.

Pupils' rate of attendance is satisfactory. Last school year attendance recovered from a two-year decline and the school's records show that the improvement was maintained in the autumn term this year.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall and this is the main reason why pupils achieve well. The lessons seen by inspectors confirmed the school's evaluations of teaching. Among staff there is an enthusiasm for teaching and discovering more about how pupils learn most effectively. Much of the teaching is good but some is simply satisfactory. Throughout the school teachers have very positive relationships with pupils. Lessons are usually enjoyable and often fun as teachers present new learning in lively ways. Teachers make the purpose of each lesson clear to pupils and maintain an orderly working atmosphere so lessons move along without disruption. Marking is often good, showing pupils clearly what they need to do to improve. Some marking, notably in English in Key Stage 3, is of an outstanding quality and sets challenging but achievable targets for pupils of all abilities. Even so, some pupils are not entirely clear about the standards they are expected to reach and their short-term targets. In the most successful lessons, teachers' very good knowledge enabled them to move pupils' subject-specific knowledge and skills forward very effectively. Furthermore, time was used very effectively to keep pupils on their toes, for instance through a progressive series of time-limited activities. In the satisfactory lessons time was not used so well; fewer pupils were actively involved; and, for a few pupils, work was not tailored to their learning needs.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school offers a good curriculum which covers all that is required and is enriched with a very good range of activities beyond lessons and educational visits and visitors. Several of these are provided in partnership with other agencies, such as the School Sport Partnership. The range of cultures explored in lessons is satisfactory but, given the school's virtually mono-cultural composition, greater attention might be paid to cultural and ethnic diversity. The PSHCE curriculum is very good. Continuity in the curriculum when pupils move up from first school is improving as a result of the developing partnership arrangements. Provision for pupils with LDD is very good. The school recognises their needs promptly and provides well-targeted support to meet them.

Library provision, which was unsatisfactory four years ago, has improved considerably. The library now supports the curriculum effectively and offers a base for pupils' independent study.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Overall, the care, guidance and support provided for pupils are good. Pastoral care is very good with some outstanding features whilst academic support and guidance are good. In this small school, staff know their pupils very well.

The arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements fully. The school's track record shows its work with looked after children is highly effective. Pupils speak very highly of the usefulness of the PSHCE programme. Occasional bullying has occurred but pupils confirm that staff deal with incidents very well.

There are many strengths in the arrangements for assessing pupils' learning, keeping track of their progress, and supporting them in their learning. Pupils' good achievement confirms the effectiveness of these systems. Even so, the wealth of data is not always translated effectively into short-term targets for pupils which they understand and know how to work towards.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Since the previous inspection the strong team of headteacher and deputy headteacher has continued to lead the school very well; strengths have been maintained whilst other aspects of the school's work have improved. The fruits of their efforts are now evident in higher standards, stronger partnerships and an enthusiastic, committed staff. They have motivated staff to develop and extend their knowledge and skills and have successfully broadened the leadership team.

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

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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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?	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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	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

Bellingham Community Middle School

Redesmouth Road

Bellingham

Hexham

Northumberland

NE48 2EN

12 January 2007

Dear Pupils

As you know, Shirley Jeffray and I inspected your school recently. We came to find out how well you are all learning. Everyone made us welcome and helped us find out about the school. I am particularly grateful to the pupils who talked to Shirley and me about school and their work. This letter is to tell you what we found out.

Your school has improved since it was last inspected four years ago. It is now a good school. The staff and the governors work hard to make the school a place where everyone makes good progress in their learning and in their personal development. They are determined that you should all do as well as you can.

These are things that are good at your school.

- Pastoral care is very good and you are helped to gain in self-esteem, confidence and maturity in your time at the school. You behave well and work hard in lessons.
- You make good progress. We saw this in the standards of work in lessons and in your books; the results Year 7 achieved last year in the national tests (the SATS); and the records of progress that the teachers keep so they can see if each one of you is on track to do as well as you should.
- Most of the teaching is good and your lessons are enjoyable. The work you do is planned carefully so you cover everything that is required.
- The senior teachers and the governors run the school well and are always looking for ways to make it even better for you.
- There are a lot of 'extras' like clubs, educational visits and visitors to school. All this enriches the curriculum and broadens your horizons.

I have asked the staff and governors to concentrate on three things to improve the school further.

- Build on the partnerships they have established with your first schools and with the high school.
- Give you more opportunities to use information and communication technology (ICT) in other subjects.
- Improve the arrangements for taking account of your views so you all feel your voice is listened to.

I'm sure you will have useful ideas about how to achieve these improvements. You have my best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Pat Kime

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools