

# Amble Links First School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	122173
<b>Local Authority</b>	Northumberland
<b>Inspection number</b>	314229
<b>Inspection dates</b>	18–19 June 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Michael Sheridan

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	First
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–9
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	134
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Audrey Jones
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Jackie Brown
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 November 2004
<b>School address</b>	Links Avenue Links Estate Amble Morpeth Northumberland NE65 0SA
<b>Telephone number</b>	01665 710667
<b>Fax number</b>	01665 711116

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

## Description of the school

Amble Links First School is a smaller than average school that draws the majority of its pupils from the town of Amble in Northumberland. The school serves an area of above average social and economic deprivation and the number of pupils who receive a free school meal is well above the national average. The number of pupils with a learning difficulty and/or disability is above average and there are an above average number of pupils with statements of special educational needs. The school has achieved a healthy school award and the Activemark.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

Amble Links First School provides pupils with a standard of education that is satisfactory overall. Most parents are positive about the school and some comment on the improved ethos and behaviour in the school. However, a significant minority have concerns over behaviour and the instability of staffing in Year 2.

Personal development is satisfactory. The majority of pupils understand the importance of conducting themselves sensibly around the school although the behaviour of some pupils in Key Stage 1 is immature. The school has good systems in place to promote positive attitudes and challenge inappropriate behaviour. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and that they feel able to talk to adults if they have a problem. They are confident that problems get sorted out. Relationships between staff and pupils are positive and pupils are well supported and cared for.

The quality of teaching currently varies from very good to satisfactory and is satisfactory overall. Children enter the school with skills and experiences below expectations for their age and leave with standards that, typically, are just below expectations for their age. This represents satisfactory progress overall.

There has been some underperformance in Key Stage 1 and this has been compounded by several changes in staff in the Year 2 class over the last two years. Underperformance is most noticeable in boys' reading. Generally, boys are a year behind the national average in reading by the time they are seven.

In Years 3 and 4 learning accelerates, particularly for those pupils who have previously underachieved, with the result that by the time they leave, previous underachievement has been eradicated. This is largely due to the good teaching and exciting, relevant curriculum in these year groups and the additional support provided for pupils in Year 3.

The curriculum is satisfactory overall. It is better in Years 3 and 4 than it is in Years 1 and 2. In Years 3 and 4, pupils enjoy their education a great deal because the curriculum is well planned and pupils learn through a wide range of exciting and relevant experiences. In Key Stage 1, pupils' enjoyment is satisfactory. They listen well and join in to activities as instructed. However, pupils do not always understand the learning within activities and sometimes complete tasks because it is expected of them rather than because they are excited and motivated.

The quality of academic guidance is satisfactory overall, but varies considerably within the school. In some classes, pupils know exactly how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work. In other classes pupils are less focused on what they are learning because they are not given clear advice on how to improve.

Leadership is satisfactory. Senior leaders have developed their understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and understand the challenges they face. They are determined in their drive to move the school forward and plans are in place to tackle priorities. Their impact on school improvement is satisfactory.

## Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

### Grade: 2

The provision in the Foundation Stage has been developed this year through the introduction of a foundation unit which combines Nursery and Reception.

Overall, children enter the Nursery with a range of skills and knowledge that are below what is typical for their age especially in the areas of communication and personal development. However, children in the Nursery represent a full range of abilities.

Children get off to a good start in the Foundation Stage and make good progress. There is good accommodation in bright and airy classrooms and a well equipped outdoor space. Resources are organised well. Learning areas are used imaginatively to catch children's attention and make learning fun. Exciting activities give children many opportunities to learn to work and play together. A good balance of child initiated and teacher led activities leads to confident children who enjoy learning and are willing to show off what they know. The provision of an outdoor curriculum with continuous access by children is good. Leadership and management are good. Teachers constantly assess children's progress and use the information effectively to plan for their development. Support for children individually and in groups is good. Targeted intervention in the Nursery mean that children's communication skills and personal development catch up with other areas of learning by the time children start their reception year.

Parents appreciate the provision and they say that their children enjoy attending school.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Raise standards in Key Stage 1, particularly in boys' reading.
- Ensure the curriculum is exciting and challenging throughout the school.
- Ensure pupils have appropriate and timely guidance to help them improve their work throughout the school.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

Pupils overall, leave school having reached standards that are just below what is typical for their age. This constitutes satisfactory progress given their below average starting points.

There has been some underachievement in Key Stage 1, most notably seen in the standards reached by boys in reading. Average standards for boys in reading are well below those found nationally by the age of seven. Pupils achieve no better than satisfactorily in Key Stage 1 and standards at the end of Year 2 are low. Action taken to stabilise staffing in Year 2 following two years of turbulence has seen standards begin to rise but there remains a legacy of underachievement.

Progress accelerates in Key Stage 2. This is particularly noticeable for pupils who have underachieved in Key Stage 1. Many pupils make good progress. Some pupils make exceptional progress in reading in Year 3 and this enables them to catch up with their peers.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 3**

The personal development and well-being of pupils is satisfactory overall. Pupils develop a sense of right and wrong and usually make appropriate choices. Pupils understand the need to take care in a range of situations. They conduct themselves in school appropriately and with

increasing maturity, particularly in Key Stage 2. Pupils enjoy coming to school and settle into their class community. Rates of attendance have improved this year and are now satisfactory.

In Key Stage 2, pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good. Pupils in Year 4 hold positions of responsibility and take these very seriously. By the time pupils reach Year 4, they understand about different cultures and religions and can talk about these with sensitivity and maturity. In Key Stage 1 social, moral, spiritual development is satisfactory. There are opportunities for pupils to reflect spiritually and learn moral lessons. However, the relevance of these opportunities to their own lives and attitudes is not always made clear and, as a result, they have a limited impact on the maturity and behaviour of some pupils.

Pupils have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles. They know about healthy eating and frequently make healthy choices. Pupils willingly take part in a good range of active lunch time games and after school clubs.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

The quality of teaching and learning varies. Whilst there is good teaching seen throughout the school, there is not enough to raise standards sufficiently in Key Stage 1. This has been exacerbated by the prolonged lack of consistent teaching staff in Year 2.

In Key Stage 2, much of the teaching is of a high quality. In these good lessons pupils are interested in what they are learning because teachers have designed carefully crafted lessons. These lessons capture pupils' imagination and link effectively to previous learning. Pupils know what they need to do to improve and the expectation to achieve is high.

In satisfactory lessons, work is less well matched to the full range of abilities and interests. Pupils focus less on what they are learning about and more on completing tasks. This is because guidance for improvement lacks focus or is presented in a way that is too difficult for pupils to understand. In these lessons, pupils are compliant rather than motivated and enjoyment of learning is satisfactory.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 3**

The curriculum is satisfactory. All statutory requirements are met and the range of activities is satisfactory. The curriculum ensures that the skills pupils learn build on prior attainment, particularly in the Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 2. Where teaching is good, the curriculum is organised so that links between different subjects are developed and clear opportunities are provided for pupils to practise basic skills through different subjects. However, these opportunities are less well developed in Key Stage 1.

The school provides a good range of after school activities and many pupils enjoy these. The curriculum is further enhanced through themed weeks and a range of trips and visits.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 3**

The care, guidance and support of pupils are satisfactory. Policies and procedures to keep pupils safe are in place. Child protection procedures are robust. The school works with a range

of professionals and agencies to further enhance pastoral guidance and support. The development of a Children's Centre in the school is beginning to improve engagement with parents and a range of activities and courses are offered to help support parenting.

The school has effectively worked with educational welfare officers and family support advisors to improve attendance to a satisfactory level.

Vulnerable pupils are well supported in school. Class sizes are small and relationships between pupils and staff are strong. The school provides specialist staff, such as a guidance councillor, to provide additional support for individuals. Several parents commented that the school does everything it can to overcome difficulties and support pupils and their families.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The impact leaders have on school improvement is satisfactory. Senior leaders acknowledge that they have benefited from support and advice from a school improvement partner and local authority advisors. They are now able to use data effectively to self-evaluate and identify precise areas for improvement.

Underachieving groups of pupils are now identified early and intervention and challenging targets are being used to drive up standards.

Subject leadership is good for literacy and numeracy. These subject leaders audit their subjects effectively and provide timely and accurate advice and challenge to teachers in school. Subject leadership is less well developed in other subjects.

Governors are beginning to hold the school to account more effectively. Individual governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses well and are determined to support leaders in their drive for improvement. Governors fulfil their statutory duties satisfactorily.

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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?	3
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?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

### Achievement and standards

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

### Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
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	3

### The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Amble Links First School, Northumberland, NE65 0SA

You may remember that I inspected your school recently. This letter is to let you know what I found out. Your school is a satisfactory school.

I found that you feel safe in school and, on the whole, you enjoy school. Your attendance has got much better this year. This makes a big difference to your education, so well done.

I found that you do particularly well when you first start school and in the last two years before you go to Middle School. I found that some of you do not do as well in Key Stage 1 and I have asked your school to do something about this. I was pleased to see that many of you who didn't do very well last year in Year 2 did catch up in Year 3. I know that you and your teachers have worked hard for this to happen and some of you have had extra help. I was also pleased to see pupils in Year 2 this year working hard and, because of this, the quality of your work is improving.

I have asked your teachers to make sure the following things happen:

- that you are able to do harder work and understand harder books by the time you finish Year 2, particularly boys
- that you all know what you can do to improve your work and you are given the chance to do so
- that lessons and activities in school are always interesting and make you think hard.

I would like to finish by saying thank you to all of you who took the time to talk to me. I enjoyed listening to what you told me and you helped me understand your school.

I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Michael Sheridan

Lead inspector