

Vicarage Park C of E Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112269
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	310834
Inspection date	18 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Andrew Scott

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	199
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Norma Bates
Headteacher	Miss Anne Hallam
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2005
School address	Vicarage Drive Kendal Cumbria LA9 5BP
Telephone number	01539 773628
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues - the standards of pupils' writing, the quality and impact of the curriculum and the effectiveness of its self-evaluation. Evidence was gathered from observations of lessons, analyses of pupils' work, performance data, parents' questionnaires and the school's documentation including its self-evaluation, and discussions with pupils, staff and governors. 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, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This average sized school serves an area where socio-economic conditions are mixed, but broadly average. The pupil population is fairly stable and almost all pupils come from White British families. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is currently average, but there is a high proportion of pupils with a statement of special need. The school is a strategic resource facility for pupils with severe learning difficulties and/or physical disabilities in the Kendal area.

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 good school with outstanding features. It has a delightful atmosphere where all pupils are highly valued. It has an outstanding level of care and a powerful philosophy that espouses 'a wonderful child-centred approach to education', as one parent said, echoing others. The inclusiveness of the school is intrinsic to all that the school does, which is especially evident in the full part played by the pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The outstanding leadership of the headteacher, senior staff and governors has ensured that the school has continued to improve since the last inspection and is extremely well placed to improve further.

Achievement is good. Children enter the school with standards that are slightly below the expected level and by Year 6 standards are usually above average. Progress is consistent in each year group. Standards fluctuate to some extent from year-to-year according to the abilities of pupils. They generally do well in reading, science, information and communication technology (ICT) and art. Shrewd analysis into the comparative weaknesses in writing skills and, to a lesser extent, mathematics, has instigated sharp, corrective actions. These have been successful. In writing, for example, staff have been enthused by new training and their fresh approach has clearly begun to boost pupils' vocabulary, expression, spelling and grammar. As a result, predictions for the current and future Year 6 year groups are being adjusted even higher.

Good teaching ensures that pupils learn well. Teachers' confidence in their subjects motivates pupils. New learning is explained adeptly and supported with thoughtful resources so that concentration and application levels are high. The excellent rapport between staff and pupils guarantees flawless behaviour and promotes independent learning. All pupils work responsibly in groups, although their pace of learning benefits when an adult is involved in their discussions. Teachers make good allowances for different abilities, but pupils say that the level of challenge could sometimes be higher.

The curriculum is good, with outstanding elements. Teachers' planning is thorough and is often enriched by some excellent activities such as visits, visitors and exciting activities. These broaden pupils' learning in lessons and help develop basic skills such as literacy and numeracy. The school is beginning to incorporate these stimulating activities much more into teachers' planning to improve the basic skills of pupils further, especially the most able. However, these are not yet part and parcel of everyday learning. After school and lunchtime clubs are plentiful, varied and very well attended. The school has improved its provision for pupils with particular skills or talents, notably through links with the secondary school, specialist clubs and weekend activities.

Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding. These pupils make excellent progress academically and when measured against their own personal goals. Teaching is both very well focused and sensitive. When possible, all pupils learn together, often with very skilled assistance by all staff. When necessary, pupils are taught separately with specialist staff and resources – to great effect.

Pupils love coming to school. Their high attendance speaks volumes about the pleasure they say they derive from their learning, their various activities and the camaraderie that abounds. Pupils automatically help one another regardless of any age or gender gap. In a Year 4 ICT lesson on electronic presentation, for example, they readily turned to their neighbour for advice. Even though pupils were concentrating on their own work, such advice was freely given. Pupils understandably praise the staff, especially for the advice they give about their work. The school

ensures that each pupil has an adult in whom to confide. This is typical of the excellent pastoral care. It is no surprise, therefore, that pupils feel secure and relaxed and they, in turn, treat others similarly. They become thoughtful and mature individuals.

Social development is impressive because all adults are excellent role models and have high expectations. Behaviour is also excellent despite occasional problems; harmony is the prevailing mood. Pupils are very keen to be healthy; sport is high on their agenda. Pupils benefit from excellent cultural opportunities. They thoroughly enjoyed their active involvement in the theatre activity which took place during the inspection. Work on a local art project on a jungle theme meant that the school was filling up with all manner of tropical 'life', including a huge papier mâché okapi. Another excellent community link was the pupils' recent production and live broadcast on Kendal Youth Radio. Pupils develop considerable spirituality through assemblies that promote Christian values and opportunities to reflect; their self-esteem is high. All in all, pupils are well prepared for life ahead.

The leadership of the headteacher is inspirational and colleagues fully support this view. Her high quality leadership is certainly apparent in the cohesiveness of senior staff, their shared sense of direction and sheer enthusiasm for their work. The headteacher has a firm, caring and highly organised approach. Governors are all part of this rich mix and are fully involved in all aspects of the school as a very critical friend. The school knows itself inside out and has the right priorities to become even better.

Parents sing the school's praises. They appreciate the fact that the staff know and meet their children's particular needs, and that their children are very happy. 'I worry that my children will refuse to leave when it is time to move on,' said one, reflecting the thoughts of others. A few parents believe the school does not seek parental views enough, but the inspection found no evidence to support this. Procedures for safeguarding are in place and underpin the outstanding care throughout the school. Recently improved systems to track pupils' progress are exemplary and are beginning to raise pupils' standards further through more challenging targets and specifically focused support. New staff appointments are proving very effective. With the headteacher temporarily on secondment, the school continues to run seamlessly.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The Reception class gives children a good start to their education. Every effort is taken to ensure that they make a smooth transition from the local nursery schools. As elsewhere in the school, there is a very positive atmosphere in which children feel safe, happy and motivated. Teaching is well focused on basic skills in all areas, especially on personal and social development. Children tend to be weaker in these aspects and in early language skills when they enter school, so their attainment on entry is slightly below what is typical for four year olds. Good progress enables children to reach the goals expected of children at the end of the Reception year. The well organised use of the very good space and facilities inside and outside helps children experience the full range of activities and develop their independence.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make the most of all opportunities to improve key skills through greater diversity and richness of the everyday curriculum.

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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	1

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	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	1
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?	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	2
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	2
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

21 April 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Vicarage Park C of E Primary School, Cumbria, LA9 5BP

I am writing to thank you for the part you played in the recent inspection of your school. I thoroughly enjoyed my visit, meeting you and all the staff, and I learned a great deal about your school in the short time I was with you.

I agree with you that yours is a good school; it also has some excellent features. You work very hard because teachers have high expectations of you and teach you well, and so you all make good progress. Those of you with particular learning or physical difficulties make especially good progress. By Year 6, you tend to achieve standards that are higher than average although your writing is not as good as your reading. As you know, the school has been introducing new ways to overcome this and I saw how much this is helping you to improve.

What particularly impressed me was – you. As a result of the excellent care, leadership and support by the headteacher, all staff and governors, as well as the many opportunities you have to broaden your horizons outside lessons, you become kind, considerate and responsible individuals. You look after one another extremely well. Behaviour is not always perfect but overall you all behave extremely well. You help your friends or anyone in need without a second thought, even when you are in the middle of something. I approved of the way you all just got on, regardless of your differences. Your attendance is impressive and can only help your progress.

However good your school is, there is still room for some improvement. I think that even more interesting and stimulating lessons will help you to improve your knowledge and skills; your school agrees. I know that you really appreciate all the various activities, clubs, visitors and visits that help to keep you fitter and wiser. I hope that you will soon discover that similar activities will be flavouring your lessons more. I have every confidence that you will enjoy these and work even harder.

I wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Scott

Lead inspector