

Millom School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112388
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	357097
Inspection dates	6–7 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Shirley Gornall HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	640
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	66
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Prof Colin Richards Hmi
Headteacher	Mr Ian Smith
Date of previous school inspection	6 May 2009
School address	Salthouse Road Millom Cumbria LA18 5AB
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 34 lessons taught by 33 teachers and two teaching assistants. They held meetings with staff, members of the governing body, students and representatives from the local authority. They looked at a wide range of documents including planning, assessment records, monitoring reports, minutes of meetings, students' books, policies and records relating to safeguarding, and the school's self-evaluation. They analysed 123 questionnaires received from parents and carers, 15 from staff and 361 from students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The achievement of groups of students, particularly in English and modern foreign languages.
- The extent to which teaching engages students, particularly boys and those with lower attainment, and meets their needs.
- The impact of the school's care, guidance and support on students' achievement and well-being.
- The quality, consistency and capacity of leaders at all levels to drive improvement.

Information about the school

Millom School is smaller than the average sized secondary school. It serves a community which is geographically quite isolated. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is similar to the national average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is much lower than average and practically all students speak English as their first language. The proportion of students identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average, as is the proportion with a statement of special educational needs. The school has National Healthy School status and Football Association chartered status. It was redesignated as a specialist technology college in 2010 and is an extended school. It holds Artsmark silver award. The school received awards from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust in 2010 in recognition of its greatly improved performance at GCSE level over the last three years.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**2****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****2**

Main findings

This is a good school in which tenacious leadership and committed teamwork have secured strong gains in provision and outcomes since the previous inspection. Students enjoy all that the school has to offer and their achievement is good. Attainment is close to the national average and rising. Standards are above average in design and technology and science subjects, reflecting the impact of the school's specialism. Progress in English has been weaker than in mathematics, but is now improving as a result of determined action to enhance engagement, teaching and learning. Students' skills in reading, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) are strong but their skills in writing are less well-developed. The school is an inclusive, harmonious community where all students are treated as unique individuals. Students' behaviour is good, characterised by positive attitudes and pride in their school. This is reflected in their very high attendance.

The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection and is good overall, with some that is satisfactory and some that is outstanding. Relationships between staff and students are mutually respectful and lessons are generally well paced and interesting. On some occasions, however, teachers do not ensure that the degree of challenge provided is appropriate to the prior attainment of different groups of students in the class. In many lessons, teachers gauge the progress made by students through skilful questioning. Students' self-assessment is increasingly effective. The school has worked diligently to improve the quality of teachers' marking, but there is still some inconsistency and students do not routinely act upon the suggestions made by their teachers in order to improve their work. A satisfactory curriculum has been developed, including a skills-focused programme in Year 7 and a sufficient range of courses to meet most students' needs at Key Stage 4. Good care, guidance and support, including that provided through a wide variety of agencies, contribute significantly to students' happiness, security and self-esteem and to their good progress. The school's exemplary arrangements for safeguarding are clearly communicated and regularly reviewed.

The headteacher and senior leadership team articulate a vision which staff and students recognise and subscribe to; they are determined that 'every lesson counts' and have worked hard to evaluate, improve and share good practice. In partnership with the dedicated and insightful governing body, leaders at all levels ensure a climate which nurtures talent and celebrates achievement. They have a very accurate understanding of the school's performance. Robust self-evaluation involves staff, students, parents and carers, the governing body and the local authority, and underpins focused improvement planning. The school has a clear track record of improvement since its previous inspection. Its success in tackling underachievement, combined with its streamlined and responsive management systems and the high morale of staff, mean that it has good capacity to sustain further improvements.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate students' progress and raise attainment by:
 - carefully matching activities to students' attainment levels, particularly in English
 - increasing the proportion of students who achieve a good qualification in modern foreign languages.
- Improve students' literacy skills by:
 - ensuring that there are opportunities across the curriculum for students to develop their writing for different purposes
 - developing a consistent approach to improving the presentation and accuracy of writing.
- Further improve the quality and consistency of marking and ensure that students act upon their teachers' comments.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students enjoy all that the school has to offer and achieve well from starting points which are broadly average and in some respects above average. For example, the proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE qualifications at A* to C grades has steadily increased and was well above average in 2010. The proportion attaining five good grades, including English and mathematics, dipped in 2010 and was lower than average, principally because a group of students did not attain as well in English as they did in mathematics. Girls performed consistently better than boys in 2010. The school's data indicate that boys' progress has now accelerated so that boys and girls make good progress. Results secured by Year 11 students, who have taken examinations early, indicate a strong rise in attainment in 2011. Students' attainment is high in the school's specialist subjects of design and technology and science. Very few students study a modern foreign language at Key Stage 4 and attainment in this area is depressed.

School data and lesson observations confirm that students make good progress. In English, progress has been weaker than in mathematics but has now accelerated as a result of focused leadership, curriculum review and concerted effort to improve the quality of teaching and learning. More students are now meeting ambitious targets in both English and mathematics. The progress made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is similar to that of their peers due to high quality support, including through early intervention and individual support to boost students' achievement in Key Stage 3.

Students behave well in lessons and around the site. They arrive punctually to lessons, concentrate well and work constructively and sensibly in groups. Students report that incidents of inappropriate behaviour or bullying are extremely rare and are dealt with immediately and effectively. Attendance is well above the national average. Students use ICT well, but some have under-developed writing skills, producing work which is sometimes poorly presented and inaccurate with regard to spelling, sentence structure and punctuation. They participate enthusiastically in school events, including sports, drama and music. The very talented school band, including students of all ages and conducted by a former student, is a powerful symbol of the strong and inclusive school

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community. Students are justifiably proud of their wide-ranging charity work. They actively promote Millom's Fairtrade status, and readily give support to local residents, including visiting elderly neighbours and helping younger children to develop sporting skills. They are aware of potential dangers to their health, including alcohol misuse. They take adequate exercise but do not routinely make healthy food choices. Students show good ethical awareness but their understanding of multicultural Britain is less well-developed.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection due to a continual focus on developing and sharing good practice. Professional development seminars, led by staff and supported by the local authority, have broadened the repertoire of teaching styles, and this has been recognised and appreciated by students. The majority of teaching is now securing good progress and learning and some is outstanding. The best lessons are lively and well-paced, characterised by high levels of student involvement. This was the case in an outstanding health and social care lesson in which students relished the challenge of exploring and presenting information to their peers. Where teachers present real contexts for writing, and model the composition process clearly, students learn to articulate their ideas and to find vocabulary that is well suited to audience and purpose. This was demonstrated in an ambitious lesson in which Year 7 students wrote persuasive letters in support of an actual school trip. Peer assessment is a feature of many

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lessons and students provide sensitive feedback on their classmates' work. Most students know their targets although, on occasions, these are not sufficiently specific. The standard of marking has improved since the last inspection but is still not of consistently high quality. Students do not routinely act upon the comments made by their teachers with regard to improving their work, particularly their writing. At the time of the previous inspection, some boys were found to lack engagement in lessons. Teachers have worked hard to ensure that all students are interested and involved in their learning. As a result, there is now no noticeable difference in attitudes and motivation between different groups of students.

The school has developed its curriculum to include a learning to learn programme in Year 7. This is popular with students and builds on the school's effective transition arrangements. Most students are able to pursue courses that meet their needs at Key Stage 4 and they receive adequate guidance regarding post-16 provision. The school offers a range of extra-curricular activities, which are well attended.

Relationships between adults and students are a strength of the school. All students are known as individuals and their achievements are celebrated. The support they receive for their personal development is good and exemplary for students whose circumstances make them vulnerable.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Ambitious, principled leadership by the headteacher has ensured that staff feel included in the process of school improvement. Skilled and experienced senior leaders have well-defined roles and work cohesively as a team. Difficult decisions have been taken to improve standards cost-effectively, including a reconfiguration of responsibilities that enables closer monitoring of performance and swifter intervention and support. There is a firm focus on raising achievement, realised through consistently implemented systems for monitoring all aspects of the school's work. Middle leaders have worked hard to raise standards in their subjects through rigorous quality assurance and ensuing action to improve the quality of teaching. There is increasing evidence of good practice being shared across the curriculum, for example an assessment tool developed by the head of ICT has been embraced by other departmental leaders. There is a lack of consistency regarding the improvement of students' literacy standards; this is being tackled by school leaders.

Governors provide effective support and rigorous challenge, ensuring that all strategic decisions are fully considered. Equality of opportunity is ensured through the school's

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curriculum policies and through interventions that support students with special educational needs and/or disabilities in accessing all that is provided by the school. There are no significant differences in the performance of different groups. Safeguarding procedures are exemplary, including clear detail regarding roles and responsibilities of all members of the school community, and related policies are kept under close review. The school is aware of its own context and contributes well to community cohesion, particularly at a local level but also through international links such as that forged with a community in Nepal. The school is well placed to build on its success and there is a palpable sense of optimism about future developments.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

The small sixth form makes a clear contribution to the whole school. Some students are associate members of the governing body and many provide support in varying ways to younger members of the school community. Sixth formers achieve well and make good progress from starting points which are below average. The school provides a range of courses that meet the needs of most. Numbers in classes are very small and the school is exploring partnerships with other providers to safeguard and broaden the curriculum. Teaching is good and work is personalised to support individuals' progress. Students say that they receive good preparation for their next stages in education or employment. They instigate and participate in a wide range of activities and are excellent role models for students in the main school.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Most parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire say that they are happy with their children's experience at school. They feel that the school is well led, that teaching is good and that the needs of their children are met. A small minority feel that the school does not help them to support their children's learning. Inspectors took particular note of this view by considering students' reports, work books, newsletters and information included on the website. They found that the support provided to parents is satisfactory, and is particularly effective for parents and carers of students identified as having special educational needs and/ or disabilities. However, many students do not make good use of their planners for recording key information and homework, so parents and carers do not always know what work their children are required to complete. A few parents and carers feel that the school does not manage behaviour effectively. Inspectors, through scrutiny of records of behaviour incidents and through discussions with students, found that on occasions low level disruption has occurred in lessons taught by substitute teachers. School leaders are aware of this issue and have taken appropriate steps to address it. Inspectors found behaviour to be sensitively and consistently managed, with effective use made by teachers of sanctions and rewards.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Millom School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 123 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 640 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	28	23	82	67	11	9	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	32	26	88	72	2	2	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	35	28	72	59	13	11	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	30	24	79	64	10	8	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	19	15	83	67	16	13	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	21	17	68	55	26	21	2	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	14	11	77	63	26	21	1	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	19	15	89	72	6	5	4	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	24	20	87	71	10	8	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	24	20	70	57	22	18	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	18	15	81	66	17	14	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	20	16	75	61	19	15	2	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	29	24	76	62	16	13	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



8 July 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Millom School, Millom, LA18 5AB

Thank you for the very warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school recently. Particular thanks to those of you who gave up time to speak to us and those who completed the questionnaire. We agree with you that your leaders and teachers provide you with a good quality of care and support, keep you safe, help you learn and prepare you well for life beyond school. Many of you willingly take on extra responsibilities and make a valuable contribution to the positive way in which your school is regarded by the local community.

We consider Millom School to be a good school. It provides you with a good standard of education and most of you make good progress. The vast majority of you behave very well and your attendance is outstanding. Many of you enjoy the extra-curricular activities; I was very impressed when I listened to the exceptional music played by the school band during the rehearsal for the summer concert.

We have identified several points for improvement. First, we have asked the school to help you attain higher standards, particularly in English. You can help by letting your teachers know whether the work set for you is challenging enough. Second, we have asked that teachers in different subjects should help to improve the standard of your writing. You have a major part to play by taking care over presentation and trying to express your ideas fully and accurately. Third, we would like you to act upon the comments your teachers make when they mark your work in order that the impressive improvement in the school's results is maintained and that you leave school having achieved the best qualifications of which you are capable. Finally, we have asked the school to ensure that more of you achieve a good qualification in a modern foreign language.

Please continue to support your school and your community as strongly as you do. On behalf of the inspectors, I would like to wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Shirley Gornall

Her Majesty's Inspector

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