

St Columba's Catholic Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112364
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	395503
Inspection dates	14–15 June 2012
Lead inspector	Naomi Taylor

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	208
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steve Donnan
Headteacher	Claire McDonald
Date of previous school inspection	6 May 2008
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Introduction

Inspection team

Naomi Taylor
Robert Birtwell

Additional inspector
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed eight teachers and visited 16 lessons. They listened to pupils read and attended an assembly. Discussions were held with school staff, groups of pupils, a representative of the local authority and members of the governing body. The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation including safeguarding documents, the school's self-evaluation and development plans, local authority evaluations, records of pupils' attainment and progress, and pupils' work. The responses to questionnaires from 62 parents and carers were analysed as were questionnaires from pupils and staff.

Information about the school

St Columba's is a smaller than average size primary school. The great majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. The proportion of pupils supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average. The school exceeds the government's current floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

Since the previous inspection there have been changes in staffing, including a new headteacher. The school has achieved Sports Activemark, Healthy School status and International School Award.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	2

Key Findings

- St Columba's is a good school. To be outstanding the quality of teaching needs to be better than good overall, and more pupils need to reach the higher levels in mathematics by the time they leave school. All pupils, parents and carers who gave their views about the school were extremely positive.
- Good achievement has been sustained since the previous inspection. From starting points that are generally below those expected for their age, pupils make good progress throughout the school leading to average levels of attainment in mathematics and above average in English when they leave Year 6.
- Teaching is good overall. Most lessons have good pace and challenge. Occasionally, pupils are not given enough independence in their learning and marking is not consistent across all subjects and year groups.
- Behaviour and safety is outstanding. Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning and one pupil summed up the views of many by saying they 'loved every single thing they do' in school. The school is an exceptionally strong and caring community which pupils, parents and carers, and staff value highly. Pupils feel strongly that they feel very safe in school and learn how to stay safe in their local community and this is reflected in parents' and carers' comments. Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in above average attendance.
- The headteacher and leaders and managers at all levels, including the governing body, are deeply committed and relentless in their desire to improve the school. With new initiatives, they aim to provide opportunities for pupils to reach their full academic potential while becoming responsible members of their school and wider community, although these are not yet embedded. With a focus on teaching and learning, performance management is used effectively to address and improve satisfactory teaching. The curriculum provides opportunities to develop basic skills and there is outstanding provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of teaching in order to increase the proportion of outstanding lessons and so accelerate achievement, particularly in mathematics at the higher levels, by:
 - giving pupils, particularly the more able, more opportunities to learn independently using their basic skills to investigate issues and solve problems
 - providing more consistently precise marking so that pupils know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further.
- Leaders and managers, including the governing body, should embed new initiatives across the school and monitor closely their impact on overall school improvement.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Children settle well when they join the Reception class, due to excellent transition arrangements and the care and support of staff and older pupils in the school. Since the previous inspection, the headteacher has initiated changes to the Early Years Foundation Stage area to provide easy access to outdoors. This has enabled adults to provide a good balance of both adult-led and child-initiated experiences beyond the classroom which the children clearly enjoy. Children in Reception make satisfactory progress overall although speaking and listening and writing remain weaker due to their very low starting points in these areas. In Key Stage 1, previous inaccurate assessment has been tackled with the support of the local authority and pupils make good progress. Throughout Key Stage 2 all groups of pupils, including those disabled or with special educational needs, make good progress and some better. Pupils' attainment in mathematics is average and in English is higher than average by the time they leave school. Fewer pupils reach the higher Level 5 in mathematics than in English. Disabled pupils or those with special educational needs make similar progress during their time in school to others, and some better.

Changes to the teaching of reading skills have led to children making good progress throughout the school. In the Reception class, children demonstrated their ability to use their understanding of linking letters and sounds to write a postcard describing their adventure on a treasure island. They were able to work out spellings by sounding out the letters of words. Similarly, Key Stage 1 pupils who read to the inspectors had the confidence to work out words which were unfamiliar to them and could retell the story in their own words, demonstrating their good understanding of what they had read. By the end of Year 2, pupils attain broadly average standards in reading. This is a reflection of good teaching and the regular opportunities that the Year 2 teacher provides for the children and their parents and carers and grandparents to go to the local library and choose different books to read. Pupils reach above average attainment in reading by the time they leave Year 6 and have a good understanding of the importance of reading for their future.

The positive changes to the curriculum, including a skills-based approach to learning and forest school experiences, are improving pupils' achievement and contributing to good learning and performance overall in lessons. Quite rightly, almost all parents and carers who

responded to the Ofsted questionnaire believe their children are making good progress. One parent described the views of many saying, 'expectations, both academic and behaviour, are high.'

Quality of teaching

Teaching is good and parents, carers and pupils unanimously agree. A priority of the headteacher and senior leadership team is to improve the quality of teaching and learning. New ideas have been introduced to the curriculum such as the forest school approach. A display in the corridor showed how pupils clearly enjoyed outdoor opportunities to learn about Venn diagrams and extend their development of numeracy skills using nature outdoors.

Pupils find learning is fun and this was clearly demonstrated during a lesson when a small group of Key Stage 1 pupils were improving their reading skills by playing 'Tricky Word Bingo.' After completing the game, one pupil exclaimed 'this is the best game in the world...can we play it again?' Immediately, the teaching assistant adapted her plans and played the game again with the pupils while developing further their vocabulary. In another lesson where teaching was again outstanding, Year 4 pupils were developing their creative writing skills. There were many ways in which the teacher fired the imaginations of pupils using captivating storytelling, musical and visual stimuli. One pupil, who did not have a talk partner, turned to the inspector and with great confidence started expressing his ideas about how he was going to start writing his story and how he would create a 'cliff-hanger' ending. Pupils were confident in using alliteration, metaphors and similes to add interest to their writing.

Some weaker lessons lack pace and do not give pupils the opportunity to explore and investigate for themselves. In a mathematics lesson, although pupils could demonstrate secure mental numeracy skills, they were not given the correct level of number sentences and problems to solve, resulting in the pace of pupils' progress being hampered. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are given well-targeted support both in class and through precise intervention work by staff and/or external agencies.

A new marking policy has been introduced to help pupils understand how well they are progressing but this is not yet being applied consistently throughout all subjects and year groups. This is reflected in a small number of pupils responding negatively to the Ofsted questionnaire in response to knowing how well they are doing in school.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils behave exceptionally well together and towards staff and visitors to the school. With an atmosphere of mutual respect and compassion towards one another, the school is, as one parent put it, 'like one big family'. Pupils overwhelmingly say they feel safe in school and this is reflected in responses from parents and carers too who told inspectors that as long as they can remember exemplary behaviour has been a key feature of this school. They are taught how to measure risks and pupils on the Children's Improvement Team have first-hand experience of working with staff to undertake risk assessments and ensure that the school and activities beyond school pose no danger to pupils. Pupils are adamant that bullying just does not happen but they would be able to talk to any adult if they thought that this was happening to them or someone else. They are very secure in their understanding of different types of bullying as seen by a display of pupils' work on Anne

Frank which reinforced their understanding of racism. Prefects play an important role in helping younger children to feel safe during breaks and are themselves well prepared academically and socially for the next stage in their education. During an assembly, the headteacher was exceptionally skilled in emphasising how important each and every member of the school is. Choosing pupils from each year group and members of staff, pupils were encouraged to reflect on how each and every person in the school is special and how through their friendship they provide support for each other. In lessons, pupils make an exceptional contribution to their own learning. For example, when assessing their own and each other's work. In an English lesson they were pro-active in checking their spellings independently using a dictionary rather than relying on asking the teacher.

Pupils whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable and their families are exceptionally well cared for and, as one parent wrote, 'I cannot praise the teachers enough for their support.' Pupils really enjoy being a part of their school and this is reflected in above average attendance for all groups of pupils.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has led a number of positive changes since taking up her post. Together with the senior leadership team there have been a number of staff changes and alterations to the staffing structure, such as separate coordinators for writing and for reading, together with a recently new appointment of a numeracy coordinator. The headteacher has rightly prioritised teaching and learning and through performance management has tackled weaker performance and been pro-active in providing professional development for staff by seeking specialist support from the local authority. Inconsistencies in assessment in Key Stage 1 have, as a result, been eradicated and together with the new tracking system this is having a positive impact on improving teaching and learning and improving pupils' achievement. With complete support from the members of the governing body who provide a balance of challenge while being stalwart ambassadors for St Columba's, the school demonstrates good capacity to improve.

Changes to the planned curriculum, including an emphasis on developing basic skills, has already had an impact on the engagement of pupils. They have a vast array of opportunities beyond lessons and are champions in the locality in a number of sports competitions. Art and music are also an important part of school life, reflected in the very high standard of displays and performances by pupils. Through these opportunities, pupils are able to play an important role in the life of their local community, engaging with the elderly and pro-actively raising money for local, national and international charities. The breadth of opportunities both in the classroom and beyond ensures pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. An effective focus on equality and tackling discrimination is seen through disabled pupils and those with special educational needs achieving as well and sometimes better than their peers. Pupils gain a broader perspective on multicultural Britain through a raft of visits and visitors to the school and through global links. The older pupils have pen-pals in Germany and learn about lives of others less fortunate through their links with Zambia. Excellent approaches to safeguarding, including exemplary child-protection procedures, ensure that the school is a very safe and secure environment where pupils also learn how to keep safe within their local communities and beyond.

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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



18 June 2012

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of St Columba's Catholic Primary School, Barrow-in-Furness,
LA14 3AD**

Thank you all so much for the warm welcome that we received when the inspection team recently visited your school. The assembly I attended highlighted just how well you all get on together and the way in which you fully support each other. Your behaviour was excellent and you sang beautifully. We enjoyed seeing you working hard in lessons and playing well together. It was really interesting to hear your extremely positive views of the school which were reflected in comments by your parents and carers. Yours is a good school where you are well taught and cared for extremely well.

To improve further, we have asked that in all your lessons, but particularly in mathematics, your teachers:

- give you more opportunities to learn independently using your secure basic skills to investigate issues and solve problems
- provide more consistent and precise marking so that you know how well you are doing and what you need to do to improve further.

Teachers will also monitor carefully the new opportunities for learning that you now have and ensure that they are helping you to reach your full potential.

You can help your teachers by continuing to work hard in lessons and attending school regularly. I wish those of you in Year 6 who are leaving St Columba's all the very best for the next stage in your education.

Yours sincerely

Naomi Taylor
Lead inspector

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