

Blackford CofE Primary School

Blackford, Carlisle, Cumbria, CA6 4ES

Inspection dates 15–16 January 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Although, overall, pupils make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 2, too few pupils are making better than expected progress in Key Stage 1, particularly in writing and mathematics.
- There are examples of good teaching, but occasionally teachers do not always plan lessons well enough to consistently get the best out of all of the pupils, particularly in Key Stage 1 mathematics and English lessons.
- Although pupils behave well and are part of a safe environment at school, attendance overall is average and the progress of some pupils is hindered by absences.
- The headteacher has introduced many positive changes to ensure improvements to the quality of teaching. However, middle leaders do not always check rigorously enough on how well teachers are using information on pupils' learning to plan lessons to meet the needs of all abilities. The governing body is still building on its capacity to monitor the impact of new initiatives.

The school has the following strengths

- This is an improving school. The strong leadership of the headteacher is driving change. New staff have been appointed since the previous inspection and the teaching of reading across the school has improved.
- All staff are dedicated to providing a caring environment in which pupils can learn.
- Behaviour and safety are good. Pupils are respectful towards each other, the adults around them and visitors to the school. They enjoy coming to school and are keen to learn.
- Since the previous inspection, the governing body has developed its role in providing both support and challenge for the school.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed three teachers and visited 10 lessons. In addition, a number of short visits were made to lessons.
- Discussions were held with school staff, groups of pupils, subject leaders, parents, a representative from the local authority and members of the governing body.
- The inspector observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation including safeguarding documents, reports of the school's checks on how well it is doing, development plans, local authority reports, records of pupils' current attainment and progress, documents relating to pupils' attendance and behaviour and pupils' work.
- There were six responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) prior to the inspection and these were taken into account when planning the inspection. Three responses were recorded during the inspection and a letter was received from a parent. These were taken into account by the inspector.

Inspection team

Naomi Taylor, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Blackford is a much smaller than average-sized primary school.
- Almost all pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is comparable to that found nationally.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action is well above average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is higher than average.
- Pupils are mainly taught in three classes in the mornings: Class 1 comprises of Reception, Year 1 and Year 2; Class 2 comprises of Years 3 and 4; Class three comprises of Years 5 and 6. In the afternoons, Key Stage 2 are taught together. Some pupils are taught in small groups or individually for part of the week, depending on their particular needs.
- There are increasing numbers of pupils joining the school, particularly during Key Stage 2.
- The school has Healthy School status.
- Since the previous inspection there has been significant building work to improve the size of the classrooms and outdoor areas.
- The headteacher had been in post for just a few weeks at the time of the previous inspection and has since instigated many changes, including the appointment of new staff.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all Key Stage 1 pupils are learning quickly enough in mathematics and English through at least good or better teaching by:
 - planning lessons well enough to get the best out of all pupils, remembering that some work more quickly than others
 - checking that pupils clearly understand the task that they have been given and that they have the skills to solve problems on their own, particularly in mathematics
 - providing pupils with the skills to check and edit their writing, particularly punctuation and spellings, across a range of subjects.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - developing further the role of middle leaders so they have the skills needed to improve teaching in their areas of responsibility
 - building further the ability of all members of the governing body to measure the impact of new initiatives on improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- Improve attendance so that all pupils can benefit from uninterrupted learning and have a better opportunity to reach their full potential.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- In the Early Years Foundation Stage there are effective links between school and home which help the children to settle quickly. Staff ensure a secure and happy environment which contributes to children in Reception building positive relationships.
- Most children start school with skills that are below those typically expected for their age. They make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage as a result of a curriculum which provides a balance of activities led by adults and opportunities for children to play together and find out things for themselves.
- In Key Stage 1, most pupils make expected progress but too few do better than that, particularly in writing and mathematics. Occasionally, the work is too easy or too hard and this slows their pace of learning.
- Pupils join Year 3 with skills in writing and mathematics that are below those expected for their age but their reading is in line with the national average. Throughout Key Stage 2, pupils make good, and for some, better progress. Generally, pupils leave Year 6 with skills in mathematics and English that are in line with national expectations and better for those who have attended the school since Year 1.
- Most of the pupils with special educational needs are also supported by the pupil premium as they are eligible for free school meals. These pupils do just as well as others in the school.
- Those pupils who join the school during Key Stage 2 are usually below the standards expected for their age, nevertheless they, too, make good progress because of the support that they receive. This demonstrates that the school promotes equality of opportunity.
- Overall, children's abilities in speech and language when they join the Reception classes are lower than those expected for their age. Pupils learn letters and their sounds in Reception and practise linking them to work out words. In Key Stage 1, the speed at which pupils learn to read means they reach standards typical for their age at the end of Year 2. Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 2 so that by the time they leave Year 6, pupils' ability to read is generally typical or better for their age.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- While there is some good teaching, overall it needs to be improved, especially in English and mathematics in Key Stage 1. This is why most pupils are not reaching average standards in writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2.
- In some lessons, the tasks do not always get the best out of all pupils and the pace at which pupils are learning is not rapid enough. An example of this was seen in a mathematics lesson in Key Stage 1, when some pupils who were working independently did not fully understand the activity and found the work too hard. Although the teacher adapted the lesson, too little progress was made by some pupils.
- The most effective teaching captures the imagination of pupils and inspires them to investigate and find out things for themselves. For example, in a Year 5/6 English lesson, pupils were analysing a poem about the wind. Good teacher planning ensured that pupils had to think hard and work out things for themselves as they planned their own poem based around contrasts. They clearly enjoyed the challenge and made good progress.
- Teaching assistants play an important role in supporting individuals giving pupils much praise and using skilful questioning to encourage pupils to think for themselves.
- Good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) to encourage pupils to find out things for themselves. Topic work has helped pupils to explore areas which are of particular interest to them. This increases pupils' enjoyment of learning which was clearly demonstrated when they talked about both their 'Space' and 'Chocolate' projects.

- New strategies to develop literacy skills have been introduced and pupils now have regular time for guided reading in lessons which has improved their reading. Occasionally, pupils are not always reminded to apply their writing skills across a range of subjects and topics and this slows the pace in improving their punctuation and spellings.
- Teachers check on pupils' understanding of what they are learning during lessons and they regularly mark pupils' work which helps pupils improve. Pupils are encouraged to check their own and each other's work, thereby developing their ability to learn on their own.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils in lessons and around the school is good. Pupils show respect for each other, the staff and visitors to the school and this leads to a strong school community where pupils are happy. Parents say Blackford has a good reputation.
- Pupils say they feel safe in school and they learn how to stay safe in their own community and other environments. The older pupils were able to explain how to keep safe when using computers and the potential dangers of making friends through the internet. Parents and staff are confident that the school provides a safe and secure place which encourages pupils' personal and academic development.
- The new curriculum ensures pupils learn about different forms of bullying; pupils are adamant that bullying is very rare at Blackford. They are also clear that they could turn to any adult if they had any concerns.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school. This is due to the ethos in the school and the opportunities for personal development through the planned curriculum and extra-curricular activities.
- Pupils have good attitudes to learning and generally find lessons interesting. They particularly enjoy topic work. Pupils help each other and enjoy opportunities to share ideas with each other but equally work well on their own.
- Attendance overall is average. The rate at which some pupils learn is interrupted by too many absences.
- All staff are dedicated to looking after the pupils at Blackford and one parent commented on 'the clear warmth and care for the children'. Being such a small school, all staff have many and varied roles. Many parents were confident in saying that all staff know every child really well.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The strong headteacher has a very clear view of how successful the school can be. School leaders, including the governing body, are very committed and determined to drive forward improvements. Staff talk about positive changes that are being made and that they 'all work together as a team'.
- The local authority now provides 'light touch' support due to the headteacher and new staff who are successfully bringing about positive changes to the school.
- Leaders and managers now regularly check the progress that pupils are making through the new tracking system. There are procedures in place to check how well teaching is helping pupils to learn. However, there is not yet enough rigour in seeing how well teachers use information on pupils' progress to plan activities to ensure all individuals are learning quickly enough, particularly in Key Stage 1.
- A more creative curriculum is now being used and this gives pupils the opportunity to learn through topics, which they clearly enjoy.
- The headteacher checks on the quality of teaching to decide on salary progression.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is very committed to seeing the school improve. The governors ensure that the school fulfils its statutory responsibilities; all staff have been vetted and trained

appropriately to keep pupils safe and free from harm. They have an accurate overview of overall provision. However, governors are not yet challenging staff well enough on why progress in Key Stage 1 is not yet as strong as that in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 2 and the link to the quality of teaching. Closer monitoring is needed on the impact of new, whole-school initiatives. Governors are now playing a more central role in shaping the long-term plans for the school based on how well pupils are progressing compared to other schools. They have taken important spending decisions, including changes to staff contracts. They have also agreed the use of pupil premium funding to ensure that all pupils make the same progress. Since the previous inspection the local authority has provided training for members of the governing body so that they are now able to provide better challenge and support for the school.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	112300
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	405387

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	50
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dorothea MacKay
Headteacher	Linda Smith
Date of previous school inspection	12 October 2010
Telephone number	01228 674614
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