

# Alston Primary School

Garrigill Road, Alston, Cumbria, CA9 3UF

## Inspection dates

5 February 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- This is a school that any parent could have confidence in sending their child to. It serves its pupils and the community well.
- Pupils achieve well. From slightly below average starting points in Year 1, Year 6 pupils last year left with above average test scores.
- Standards have risen for three years in a row, from below average to above average. The biggest improvement has been in mathematics.
- Teaching is good because teachers understand the importance of helping pupils to produce their best work and give them good advice about how to make it even better.
- Classrooms are bright, exciting learning places where vivid displays of pupils' best work celebrate achievement.
- Pupils behave well. They feel exceptionally safe and are very happy in school. Their attitudes to learning are good; they take care with their writing and look after their books.
- Leadership, management and governance are good. Since the previous inspection, a lot of good work has been done to improve teaching and pupils' achievement. School improvement continues to gather pace.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not outstanding. Occasionally, a few of the less able pupils find some tasks too hard or do not have time to finish them.
- Teachers are very keen to improve their work but some find it hard to understand the difference between good and outstanding teaching.
- Improvement planning does not include sufficient information about when actions should be completed and how successful completion will be evaluated.

## Information about this inspection

- Nine lessons were observed. Inspectors had many informal conversations with individual pupils and staff.
- Inspectors met with five governors and had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors talked to several parents who were helping in school and also took account of the 50 responses to Ofsted's on-line questionnaire (Parent View).
- Inspectors looked at samples of pupils' work and the surroundings in which they learn and play.
- The information teachers collect about pupils' progress was checked.
- Documentation about how the school makes sure that pupils are kept safe, about the progress they are making and how leaders, managers and governors check on the effectiveness of teachers' performance.
- Inspectors checked the schools plans for improvement and discussed them with leaders, managers and governors.

## Inspection team

Alastair Younger, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Angela James

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The school is a smaller than average-sized primary school. It serves a community in England's highest market town.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is lower than the national average. There are no looked after children and none from forces families.
- A smaller than average proportion of pupils is supported through the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or who are known to have been at some point in the last six years, children who are looked after and children who have a parent working in the armed forces) .
- Nearly all pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs supported through school action is average. This is also the case for pupils at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards. These set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- There have been several significant changes in the teaching staff since the previous inspection.
- The school has been federated with a nearby primary school since 2006. It shares a headteacher and governing body, but each school maintains a separate budget.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of teaching so that it is always consistently good or outstanding by:
  - making sure that all pupils, especially the least able, can successfully complete their work in the time available
  - making sure that all teachers get the opportunity to observe outstanding teaching to help them understand what it looks like.
- Make school improvement planning clearer and more effective by:
  - ensuring that all targets for improvement have a time limit so that governors and senior staff can easily see whether they are ahead, on, or behind schedule in meeting them
  - making sure that targets are more specific about how successful achievement can be measured
  - making sure that there is a clear statement about how achievement of each target is going to contribute to raising standards.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Children increasingly join the school at lower than expected points in their learning and development. They increasingly leave at the end of Year 6 with higher standards than are expected nationally. This represents good progress.
- Pupils generally make good progress throughout Years 1 and 2. Currently, they are making very good progress and are reaching above average standards.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage get off to a good start. They are given many experiences that help them learn through exploration and adventure. Outdoor areas are well used to support learning. Development of children's vocabulary and language is a particular strength.
- Pupils like their books. As soon as they arrive in the nursery group they are surrounded by books and printed material. From then on, they have a wealth of books to inspire and inform them. When leaders and managers realised that this was not enough to improve reading skills they made staffing changes to make the teaching of basic reading skills more effective. This has worked. A greater proportion of younger pupils than average are meeting national expectations for understanding the links between letters and the sounds they make. Older pupils are rarely seen without a book in front of them or carrying one around between lessons. They like stories and they like talking about them. In Years 5 and 6, pupils make good use of what they have read to enliven the creativity in their writing.
- Many of the most able pupils were inspired by a 'maths day' in a visit to an outstanding school which focused them on not being content to be good but on being 'the best'. On the evidence of teachers' checks of progress, the quality of teaching seen, and the work in pupils' books, the current Year 6 pupils are on track to exceed national expectations in mathematics.
- Pupils write with great imagination; a 'news' report about the catastrophe of the school's hens not coming into lay, for example, caught the eye in a very good display of pupils' best writing; it was well written and explained.
- The progress of all pupils is carefully checked but extra attention is paid to making sure that those pupils who may appear to be disadvantaged get the support they need. Nearly always, this is in terms of support for learning but not all of them need this. Some need more emotional support and some need a wider range of experience.
- With help from additional sports' funding, pupils are increasingly being encouraged to participate in, and enjoy, physical activity. This is being greatly enhanced by very effective spending on outside expertise. Pupils thoroughly enjoy the extra sessions they are being given. So do the staff; they are keen to encourage an informed understanding of the importance of exercise.
- This is a small school where one pupil can have a big impact on published data. In such a school, there are wide swings, especially between the numbers of boys and girls. Last year's groups included too few pupils eligible for the pupil premium for any variance to be significant. Across the whole school, these pupils' progression is carefully monitored and shows no difference to any other pupils.
- As well as from learning essential skills in English and mathematics, pupils also make good progress in science, geography and history. This adds enjoyment to their learning and allows a few individuals to shine in areas that particularly interest them.

### The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching is good with a small amount which is outstanding. Teachers inspire in pupils a thirst for learning. They make their classrooms personal and celebrate achievement through good displays of pupils' best work.
- Teachers make learning interesting. Pupils appreciate the way that teachers tell them what they have to learn then show them how to do it. In a good example of this, a group of the most able

Year 6 pupils were seen working out how to draw an accurate shape having being given the absolute minimum of information they needed to do so. They used ropes and big floor displays to help them, and most of them got it right.

- Teachers get on well with pupils. Pupils appreciate this. They say they know that their teachers are trying to get the best out of them and that they know that when they try their hardest it is recognised even if they do not quite get things right.
- The marking of pupils' work is usually good. Pupils are told what they have got right or wrong and are given good advice about how to do even better. Sometimes, teachers encourage pupils to respond to their comments and to say whether they agree or disagree with them.
- Adults, other than teachers, in classrooms add value to pupils' learning experiences. Some are parents and some are volunteers from the community. Teachers make particularly good use of the skills and expertise each has to offer. Paid classroom assistants are especially effective in supporting pupils' learning and behaviour. Teachers value their support enormously.
- Teachers can read as much about what has to be done to be outstanding but they need to be in the presence of it to appreciate the extra dimension that makes it special. At present, there is not enough of this in school to provide the experience.
- Sometimes, too much is asked of a few pupils. At the moment, a lot of attention is being paid to making sure that the most able pupils are fulfilling their potential. These efforts are meeting with success and the most capable pupils are doing very well. In the meantime, there are a few less able pupils who are being given work that they find too hard to do and consistently score lowly in tests because they are being asked to do more than is realistic in the time available.
- Teachers maintain very good control of their classrooms.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils and parents agree. The pupils are a delight. They are friendly to visitors and desperately want the school to be seen in the best possible light. They are tremendously loyal ambassadors for the school because they know that day-in, day-out they are getting a fair deal.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Pupils feel very safe in school. Safety procedures are very well thought out and applied with consistency. All staff place a very high priority on making sure pupils are well cared for and kept safe when at school.
- Pupils want to do well. They take a lot of pride in keeping their exercise books neat and tidy. If they are given squared paper in mathematics, they fill the squares with care; if they are given lined paper to write on, they do so.
- Lessons are not interrupted by misbehaviour, but there are a few instances where it is clear that the presence of adults is a big help in getting pupils into line. This is especially noticeable with younger pupils and those who are testing the limits of new or temporary teachers.
- Pupils of all ages get on well with one another. Older pupils take great pride in helping younger ones to share their joy of books and helping them to read.
- Moral and social values are strongly promoted and pupils respond well. They become good ambassadors for the school within the community and show a good awareness of 'good' and 'naughty' behaviour.
- The promotion of spirituality is celebrated in assemblies and in displays of pupils' best work. Great care is taken to ensure that pupils from this remote community understand what life is like in the wider world. They visit places where cultures are very different from their own, such as big cities and places where not everyone is a White British person.
- Attendance is average. Non-attendance is rigorously followed up.
- Records show that the incidence of misbehaviour is very low and that naughty behaviour is challenged so that pupils are quickly made aware of what they have done wrong and what they have to do to put things right.

## The leadership and management are good

- Leaders and managers are succeeding in improving teaching and raising standards. They have built up an increasingly good bank of information to help them to accurately monitor pupils' progress and to speed it up. This is a big step forward.
- Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their school and an exceptional understanding of the community it serves. They have worked enormously effectively to make the school the hub of this community.
- There has been a successful drive to improve teaching. Some of this has been helped by staff changes. Along with this, there has been a good programme of training and development for all staff linked closely to helping them to meet good individual targets for improvement.
- Increasingly good use is being made of the benefits of federation. Good arrangements are now in place to use expertise in each of the schools to help the other. For Alston this is mainly to be seen in support of improvement in mathematics through the sharing of the experience of a subject manager.
- School improvement planning contains a lot of information but not enough that is relevant. There is no doubting that leaders, managers and governors know what the strengths and weaknesses of the school are, but the way strengths are to be built upon and weaknesses eliminated does not convey a sufficient sense of urgency. This is because a lot of targets are too open-ended. Some targets for improvement do not have set timescales or do not make it clear enough how an action is going to help raise standards or improve provision. In addition, it is not always clear how the success of a target will be evaluated.
- Great care is taken to ensure the safety and safeguarding of pupils. All current statutory requirements are met and parents express great satisfaction about how well their children are looked after.
- In the past, the local authority helped the school a lot. It was influential in supporting the drafting of an action plan to help address the areas for improvement identified by the last inspection. More recently, it has conducted a thorough review to determine how to improve the effectiveness of federation.
- Careful attention is paid to how additional government funding is spent and to what effect. Pupil premium funding is mainly used to support individuals in their learning to make sure that they can achieve equally with all others. A few, though, do not really need this additional support and the school is looking to evaluate more effectively better ways of using the money more imaginatively.
- Primary sport funding is being very well used. A lot goes towards some very effective sports coaching which all pupils benefit from and which they hugely enjoy. Many staff also participate in and enjoy these sessions and are learning well from them about how much more they can contribute themselves.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors recently received a wake-up call about how well they were governing the federation. They have responded promptly, backed up with a much better understanding of the intricacies of balancing support and attention equally between two schools that, though not far apart, are very different and serve different communities. Several governors have, or will have, their own children educated here. They want to make sure their children are getting the education they want for them and they want this to extend to the whole community. They are succeeding. With about a third of governors being staff from the two schools it would be possible, in a low turnout for a meeting, for important majority decisions to be made by a group of staff with a vested interest. The governing body recognises this potential difficulty in a federation where staff are encouraged to participate equally and has good procedures in place to check that conflicts of interest do not occur.
  - Governors know who the school's best teachers are and, with support from the local authority, are beginning to understand how, even when their interests lie with one or the other schools under their charge, there can be mutual benefit for both.
  - Governors are very well briefed by the headteacher but also take care to moderate this

through regular involvement in school. They take a keen interest in checking whether the headteacher is moulding this school into the one they want for their community.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	112101
<b>Local authority</b>	Cumbria
<b>Inspection number</b>	426175

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	100
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Karen Morsman
<b>Headteacher</b>	Debbie Clarke
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	10 November 2011
<b>Telephone number</b>	01434 381213
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