

Black Combe Junior School

Moor Road, Millom, Cumbria, LA18 5DT

Inspection dates 7–8 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
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.

- From their low starting points more pupils than previously are making expected and better than expected progress so that standards in reading, writing and mathematics are rising rapidly across the school.
- Teaching is at least good. Pupils make good progress because their teachers and teaching assistants offer skilled explanations and use questioning well.
- Pupils with special educational needs and disabilities receive good support that helps them achieve well.
- Behaviour is good with excellent relationships between teachers.
- Pupils are eager to learn and are proud of their learning and work. They are courteous and behave well towards one another. Pupils feel safe and well looked after in school.
- Pupils respond enthusiastically to the rich and vibrant curriculum and the extensive range of additional activities. Pupils are excited about learning.
- The headteacher has high expectations. Teachers are given effective support to develop their teaching skills.
- The governing body has an accurate view of what the school needs to do to improve and holds leaders to account for the school's performance.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work closely as a team and use a range of strategies to support those pupils in danger of falling behind.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not outstanding.
- In some lessons, activities do not always provide enough challenge, especially for the most able students. When this happens, the rate at which pupils make progress slows.
- Pupils do not get enough practise at writing at length in subjects other than English.
- There are limited opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills to real-life and meaningful problem-solving activities.
- Teachers do not refocus or adjust their teaching and activities well enough in lessons to ensure learning moves on at a good rate.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed six lessons, of which three observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher. In addition, the inspector made a number of short visits to lessons and listened to six Year 3 and two Year 6 pupils read.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, assistant headteacher and subject leaders. The inspectors also met with three members of the governing body and with a representative from the local authority.
- Discussions were held with parents who brought their children to school at the start of the school day and nine parents who agreed to meet with the inspector. There were too few responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) for results to be meaningful.
- Inspectors considered the views expressed in the 10 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors observed the school at work and scrutinised the work in pupils' books, the school's own data on pupils' current progress, the school's improvement plans, planning and monitoring information and minutes of governing body meetings. Records relating to behaviour and attendance, and documents relating to safeguarding and child protection were also considered.

Inspection team

Anthony Kingston, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Black Combe Junior is a smaller than average primary school.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is well above average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well above average.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for support through the pupil premium (additional funding for those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority) is well above average.
- Most pupils are White British.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the amount of outstanding teaching and raise standards in reading, writing and particularly mathematics by:
 - challenging pupils, especially the most able, by routinely setting more demanding work in lessons
 - refocusing activities when necessary during lessons to ensure the most able make consistently good progress, especially in mathematics
 - providing pupils with more well-planned opportunities to write at length in subjects other than in English
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills in different subjects and to solve and investigate mathematical problems.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils enter the school with attainment that is well-below average. Very few pupils enter the school having attained Level 3 by the end of Key Stage 1.
- Over time, standards in reading, writing and mathematics have generally been below average. However, in 2012, standards were above average in reading, writing and mathematics, and the progress made by pupils was in the top 30% of all schools nationally.
- In 2013, standards in writing were average but standards in reading and mathematics fell to well below average. This decline was due to the composition of the Year 6 class and the small but significant proportion of pupils with low standards of attainment who joined the school throughout Years 4 to 6. These pupils tended to leave Black Combe with lower standards than their peers and made less progress.
- Pupils in Year 6 who had been at the school throughout the whole of Key Stage 2 achieved above average standards in writing and only slightly below average standards in reading and mathematics.
- The progress of pupils in all other year groups in 2013 continued to improve at a more rapid rate than that typically expected and, as a result, standards in Years 3 to 5 were higher than in previous years.
- Inspection evidence, including lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work, discussions with pupils and a consideration of internal school performance data, shows that improvements in teaching are continuing to increase the rate at which pupils make progress throughout the school. As a result, attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is continuing to improve rapidly.
- Pupils are enthusiastic readers. This was exemplified by one pupil who said, 'I wish myself into the book and get lost in the adventures.' They read every day at school and love the opportunities offered to them to spend time in the school's exceptionally comfortable and well-stocked library, which pupils describe as, 'fantastic', 'amazing' and 'brilliant'.
- Teachers use a range of methods to make sure that those who may struggle with reading are helped to catch up, including going back to basics and teaching the sounds that letters represent. Consequently, the school has adopted and extended the local infant school's system for teaching phonics. This is having a positive impact on improving pupils' reading skills, particularly in Year 3.
- Pupils' writing is helped by the emphasis that is given to reading, which boosts their vocabulary, and to speaking and explaining ideas in lessons. In a Year 4 class, for example, pupils were learning about similes and adjectives. Challenged by the teacher to write a poem about their visit to Blue Bell Woods one pupil contributed, 'the shimmering light danced on the petals like the deep blue sea.'
- Pupils enjoy writing. However, they do not have enough opportunities to engage in extended writing activities in subjects other than English. As a result, the skills required to reach the higher levels are not sufficiently well developed. Consequently, some more able pupils do not make the progress nor attain those standards of which they are capable.
- In mathematics, standards throughout the school are now improving rapidly. However, the progress of the most able is sometimes slowed because they do not always move on quickly enough to challenging problem-solving activities.
- The school is committed to promoting equality of opportunities for all and keeps a close eye on the progress and achievement of all pupils. The income received by the school to support pupils eligible for the pupil premium is spent judiciously on, for example, one-to-one tuition and employing additional teaching assistants. In 2013, these pupils, including those known to be eligible for free school meals, reached standards which were approximately two terms behind those of their classmates in reading, writing and mathematics. This year, pupils eligible for the pupil premium are making good progress and the gap in attainment between these two groups is closing rapidly.

- In 2013, the number of most able pupils was too small to make meaningful comparisons with the national average. However, inspection evidence shows that the proportion of pupils being identified as being most able is increasing and that most of the work given is at a more appropriate level of challenge. As a result, their progress is accelerating and their attainment is rising.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is typically good. Several observations during the inspection showed some teaching to be outstanding.
- Classrooms are bright and organised well with displays of pupils' work in a wide range of topics. They also contain prompts and information to which pupils can refer when working.
- A particularly strong aspect of all teaching is the respect that adults show towards each other and pupils. This develops pupils' understanding of the need to respect the views and contributions of others. The excellent relationships between staff and pupils mean that pupils are confident learners; prepared to try hard and unafraid of making mistakes because they know that they will learn from them. This approach has created an excellent climate in which pupils can learn and feel safe.
- In most lessons, students learn well because teachers use assessment information effectively to ensure that work is sufficiently challenging for all pupils. However, in some lessons pupils, especially the most able, are not always offered enough hard work. This limits the rate at which they make progress and the opportunities they have of reaching the levels of attainment of which they are capable.
- Teachers have good knowledge of the subjects they teach. This results in clear, precise and lively explanations which capture pupils' interests and promote pupils' understanding.
- In some lessons, some teachers check learning to identify pupils' errors. They use this information to reshape activities and provide further challenge to move learning on. However, this practice is not used well enough to identify those most able pupils who need further challenge within a lesson. This limits their progress. Hence, too few pupils reach the higher level 5.
- The school's strong commitment to creative and innovative practice is seen in the imaginative and effective use of information and communication technology such as tablets, netbooks and computers throughout the school to motivate pupils' learning and encourage them to explore, analyse, exchange and present information.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work closely and effectively together and use a range of strategies to support the learning of pupils who are in danger of falling behind. Pupils who need extra help are supported within classes or in individual or small group sessions. Teaching assistants model language well and their good questioning helps pupils to learn well.
- Pupils with special educational needs are very well supported and the school has a growing reputation for its success in meeting the needs of these learners. Good systems are in place for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities with regular reviews to ensure that support is effective in helping pupils learn.
- Teachers' marking of pupils' work is good. It carefully explains what pupils are doing well and what they need to do to improve. Pupils enjoy the time they are given at the start of lessons to respond to teachers' marking and the challenges which they sometimes set.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are proud to belong to Black Combe Junior School and relish opportunities to escort visitors around the school. Their good attitudes and good behaviour make a significant contribution to the calm yet vibrant learning environment, the quality of their learning and the

sense of belonging to a community in which everyone is valued.

- Pupils are keen to take on additional responsibilities. For example: they help to keep the school clean and tidy by tending the school gardens and greenhouse; help in the school's dining room; and grow their own fruit and vegetables to use in the school's healthy cooking lessons.
- Staff are skilled at managing pupils' behaviour. When pupils find school life difficult they are given the support they need to help them to manage their behaviour successfully in lessons and on the playground.
- There is good use of the well-understood rewards and sanctions system within the school to encourage good behaviour. The use of 'Restorative Practice' is well established to address poor behaviour with good involvement of parents in resolving issues. This is proving highly effective in helping pupils to reflect on and understand the consequences of their behaviour.
- Pupils themselves consider behaviour is good and managed well by all adults. Just occasionally, in lessons where activities are less interesting, a few pupils become fidgety and do not pay full attention.
- Pupils love coming to school. Current attendance is above average.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Pupils say they feel safe in school and their parents agree. Pupils trust their teachers and have a good understanding of personal safety, especially how to keep themselves safe on the internet, when crossing the road and when on their bicycles. They understand what is and what is not bullying and say that it rarely happens in school.
- Very strong support is provided for pupils and their families, and relationships with parents and carers are excellent. There is excellent liaison with parents and carers, schools and other agencies, and this is valued highly by the parents concerned. Effective support is provided for pupils entering the school other than at the start of Year 3 so that they can settle quickly. This is increasingly the case as the school's reputation for supporting pupils with special educational needs grows.

The leadership and management are good

- Under the committed and caring leadership of the headteacher, governors and staff continuously strive for further improvement.
- Leaders know the school well. Their rigorous checks of teaching and learning enable them to provide effective support and clear guidance for teachers to improve their practice. This includes coaching and mentoring and observing one another. This is supported by effective performance management systems to check on how teachers are doing which result in the setting of challenging targets and the identification of the precise steps needed to move teaching to outstanding.
- Teachers feel supported by the headteacher and welcome feedback about their performance in lessons. Feedback is sharp and focused. It leads to clear advice and training.
- The school's system for checking on pupils' progress is rigorous and robust. It is used to provide support for pupils at risk of not making the progress expected of them and to hold teachers to account for the progress made by the pupils in their care. As a result, the progress of all pupils is beginning to quicken.
- The school's plan for improvement is based on an accurate understanding of areas of what the school does well and where it could do better. The actions within it are clear and appropriate. Planning sets out a clear direction for further improvement.
- The school is supported extremely well by the local authority. It has provided the school with helpful guidance and strong support on its journey of improvement.
- The curriculum is based on themes and promotes the development of basic skills. It is exciting and takes pupils' interests into account. It captures pupils' imaginations. It is regularly reviewed and adapted to ensure that it meets the needs and interests of pupils well. However, although reading and mathematics are threaded throughout the curriculum, the opportunities for pupils to

apply and develop their writing skills across other subjects other than English are not so evident. Nor are there enough opportunities for pupils to apply and develop their basic mathematical skills to problem solving or mathematical investigations.

- The curriculum and the extensive range of events, visits, visitors, musical and sporting activities and clubs make a very positive contribution to pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The new primary sport funding has been used well to provide further after-school sporting opportunities such as archery and orienteering with qualified coaches. As a result, an increased number of pupils now participate in sports clubs. These have further improved pupils' enjoyment of school and have improved attendance. The school cricket team has on many occasions reached county finals. The employment of external coaches such as a professional dance teacher has helped develop teachers' skills in teaching different sports and activities.
- Policies and procedures for safeguarding pupils are fully and actively in place.
- Parents are strongly supportive of the school's work. One parent said, 'You can feel the ethos. It speaks of enthusiasm, enjoyment and care.' The school does a good deal to keep parents involved in school life and informed about their children's progress.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are increasingly well informed about what the school is doing well and what needs to be improved. They visit the school regularly to gain first-hand experience of the work of the school. They know about the quality of teaching and how the school's performance management systems help to improve the quality of teaching. Governors have a good understanding of the school's finances. For example, they understand how the pupil premium money is being spent and know that the gap between those in receipt of this funding and those who are not, is closing. They are keen to improve their skills, and many have undertaken further training. They ensure that safeguarding arrangements meet requirements. Governors are ambitious to improve the school and show a growing capacity to hold leaders to account for the performance of 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	112160
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	444122

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	100
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Margaret Bratley
Headteacher	Helen Webber
Date of previous school inspection	7 December 2009
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