

Valley Primary School and Nursery

Whinlatter Road, Whitehaven, Cumbria, CA28 8DA

Inspection dates 3–4 March 2015

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher and other leaders are highly effective in improving the quality of teaching and speeding up pupils' progress.
- Teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. This leads to consistently good learning for pupils and rising standards.
- Governors know the school well and have a good range of skills and experience. Working closely with the headteacher, they challenge leaders to help bring about continuous improvement.
- The curriculum provides pupils with a lively and exciting range of activities to ensure their social skills as well as their health and emotional well-being are developed strongly.
- Pupils say they feel safe and are confident staff will always listen to their concerns and take effective action to resolve any issues quickly.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They are polite, courteous and considerate.
- Pupils are enthusiastic learners. Classrooms are calm and pupils take a pride in their work.
- Attendance is average. The school continues to work closely with parents in order to ensure that pupils attend regularly.
- Teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) very effectively to enliven learning and to enthuse pupils in different subjects of the curriculum.
- Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They are enthusiastic and ensure that pupils are inspired to learn.
- From their starting points, all groups of pupils make good progress. Standards in English and mathematics are improving.
- Children in the Reception and Nursery classes thoroughly enjoy a wide range of exciting activities which capture their imagination and ensure they make good progress.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Skills pupils learn in mathematics are not fully developed, including through rich and relevant problem-solving opportunities in other subjects.
- Teachers do not always ask questions that challenge pupils' thinking enough.
- Teachers' marking does not always help pupils know how to improve their work in mathematics, nor do pupils regularly have time to respond to the feedback they receive.
- Teachers do not plan work to challenge the most able pupils regularly enough.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed the work of 12 teachers, including through one joint observation with the headteacher.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, staff, pupils, parents and governors.
- The inspectors observed break time and talked regularly with pupils as they moved around school.
- The inspectors scrutinised pupils' work and listened to pupils read.
- A wide range of the school's documentation was checked including systems for tracking pupils' progress, safeguarding arrangements, the school development plan and pupils' work in their books.
- The inspectors took account of responses to the school's most recent questionnaire for parents alongside 14 responses from the online questionnaire (Parent View).
- The inspectors analysed 19 questionnaires completed by staff.

Inspection team

Sue Sharkey, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Alastair Younger	Additional Inspector
John Ellwood	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Valley Primary and Nursery School is an average-sized primary school.
- Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. Very few pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils, those supported by the pupil premium, is well above the national average. The pupil premium is additional government funding the school receives for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The headteacher was appointed in February 2014.
- The school offers a daily Nursery class each morning and each afternoon. Children in the Reception class attend full-time.
- There are before- and after-school clubs on the school site, which are managed by the governing body.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching to outstanding in order to raise pupils' progress further by:
 - ensuring that skills learnt in mathematics are fully developed in other subjects through relevant, problem-solving activities
 - making sure that questioning by adults is probing and challenges pupils to think deeply and give extended answers
 - ensuring that teachers' marking of mathematics books consistently helps pupils know what they have to learn next and also that pupils regularly are given time to respond
 - making certain that teachers consistently plan work that fully challenges the most able pupils in English and mathematics.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- It is through the headteacher's determined leadership that the school has improved significantly since the last inspection. The headteacher is extremely well supported by two assistant headteachers and together they continually and successfully strive for ways to improve teaching and pupils' achievement. The school is well placed to continue to improve further.
- The rigorous checking of lessons, pupils' work and their progress has ensured that teaching across the school is now good and sometimes outstanding. The school's view of how well it is doing is accurate and its self-evaluation has a sharp focus on pupils' achievement.
- Subject leaders are playing a more effective role in driving forward improvement. Leaders have a clear view of teaching in their areas so they can support their colleagues and check on the impact of any actions taken. Everyone in the school is eager to improve. There is a strong team spirit and a shared commitment to the school's vision and ethos.
- The school has a well-structured system for the management of staff performance which is linked closely to staff training, pupils' performance and teachers' pay. Training on the teaching of phonics, for example, is having a positive impact on the pupils' performance in reading.
- Leaders have a clear focus on ensuring that pupils have equal opportunity to succeed. For example, the careful spending of the pupil premium funding ensures that disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as other pupils. The school fosters good relations and tackles discrimination well.
- Parents speak highly of the school and they are very happy with what the school provides for their children. The school welcomes parents into school during the daytime when they enjoy taking part in the family learning group sessions during which they compose stories and learn art and craft skills. Parents thoroughly enjoy their time in school and say this assists them to support their children's learning at home.
- The local authority has worked closely with the school since the previous inspection, including by carrying out checks on teaching with the headteacher, providing training for governors and providing consultants to work with staff. It has also successfully engaged the support of an outstanding school to work with school leaders. Observations of lessons have taken place and leaders and teachers have had opportunities to see outstanding teaching.
- Through the curriculum pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. They have a wide range of opportunities to develop positive relationships, celebrate successes and enjoy extended sporting opportunities as well as educational visits. All these activities ensure that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. The school is pleased with the spending of the primary school sport funding. Pupils now have opportunities to enjoy a wider range of sports and, as a result, when competing against other schools in team games, they are now much more successful.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Since the last inspection, the governing body has attended training to improve the way it supports, challenges and monitors the school. As a result, governors visit the school regularly and review pupils' work. They monitor, for example, the new mathematics scheme, by visiting lessons and talking to pupils. Governors check the achievement of different groups of pupils as well as the support they receive to ensure that they make good progress.
 - Governors are involved in overseeing the process for setting targets for teachers; they ensure that there are clear links between the quality of teaching and salary progression. They are pleased that the pupil premium funding and the primary school sport funding are used well to make a difference to the achievement and experience of pupils. Governors ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective and meet statutory requirements.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school because teachers help them to learn and improve their work and lessons can be fun. Pupils are polite and friendly, work hard in lessons and are very keen to do well.
- Pupils get along together with one another from starting in the Nursery class. These good relationships strongly support their learning when they collaborate, particularly in pairs, in the class. They share ideas enthusiastically and this helps to improve their speaking and listening skills.

- Pupils' books show that they are proud of their work. Pupils wear their school uniform smartly and move around the school sensibly while enjoying chatting quietly to their friends.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe is good. Pupils say they feel safe and speak confidently about how they can talk to any adult in school if they have any problems. They know that they will be listened to and that adults will help them sort out any difficulties. Pupils say bullying is rare. They have learned about the different kinds of bullying, including cyber-bullying, verbal and physical bullying, through regularly talking about the subject during lessons and assemblies and through listening to visitors.
- Pupils' attendance is average. Attendance and punctuality are rigorously checked and the school is aware of the importance of continually working closely with parents to improve their children's attendance.
- Pupils enjoy taking on responsibilities, for example, as play leaders in the playground or representing their class on the school council. School council members were keen to talk about how they would like to improve the playground as well as the play equipment. Pupils enjoy raising funds for different charities including both national and international ones.

The quality of teaching

is good

- A broad range of evidence, including school records, parents' views and observations of lessons during the inspection, shows that teaching is good.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and work. Pupils respond well to these so classrooms are orderly and learning goes on unhindered. Teachers are very successful in planning tasks that interest pupils so they concentrate well and are keen to succeed.
- Good use is made of the skilled support staff in school, particularly in helping pupils who might otherwise struggle with their work. This ensures that all pupils are able to cope with the tasks they are given and are fully included in lessons.
- Learning is good because teachers share their good subject knowledge effectively with pupils. A wide range of ICT devices help to capture pupils' interest in their learning. Often, during lessons, pupils use tablets not only to seek information but also to record data or to create art.
- Work in pupils' books shows that pupils make good progress. Work is marked regularly and teachers frequently add helpful and positive comments which pupils respond to. However, this practice is less developed in mathematics books than it is in English.
- The quality of displays in the classrooms and around the school, along with the harmonious relationships between adults and pupils, reflect the very positive attitudes of the school. Good relationships have created a purposeful atmosphere for learning in classrooms where everyone is expected to do their best.
- Relationships between pupils are also strong and pupils trust one another especially when they are working together. During a Year 6 lesson pupils had to draw on all their number skills to solve a problem. Working in pairs one of the pupils thought of a number while the other one had to work out what the number was. Questions and answers were carefully recorded as pupils asked questions such as, 'Is it a three- digit number?' or 'Is it divisible by five?' Pupils listened very carefully to each other, respecting the need for everyone in the room to work quietly while remaining focused.
- Teachers use questioning well to draw out ideas from pupils and carefully check their understanding. However, there are occasions when questions do not fully extend pupils' thinking or allow for pupils to give extended answers.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Since the previous inspection, pupils' progress has improved. The good progress that children make in the early years continues through the school for all groups of pupils, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds. All parents spoken to during the inspection and most who responded to Parent View agree.
- In Key Stage 1, pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils have good reading skills. In the 2014 Year 1 phonics screening check (matching letters to the sounds they make), although the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard was below average, it was a higher than it had been in 2013. Projected targets indicate that this rising trend continues and the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in 2015 is currently on target to be in line with the national average. This is because reading is taught well and promoted strongly across the school. There are attractive areas in

classrooms for pupils to select new books to enjoy. As result, pupils develop good reading habits and a love of books.

- During a Year 1 phonics lesson, pupils thoroughly enjoyed reinforcing their knowledge of letter sounds as well as learning new ones. They were very excited as the teacher moved swiftly from pupils saying the 'aw' sound to using this sound in different words. This progressed to different sounds and words before pupils were given words to write. The pupils reacted very positively to their learning, understanding the sounds and spellings of different words. The teaching of phonics is having a strong impact on pupils' good progress in reading.
- Pupils are enthusiastic learners and talk confidently about what they are learning. Standards by the end of Year 6 are below average but work seen during the inspection and the school's projected targets for Year 6 indicate that they are improving rapidly and are currently on target to be closer to the national average in 2015 in reading, writing and mathematics. Although pupils have many opportunities to write in different styles, they do not have the same opportunities to use their mathematical skills in other subjects by carrying out relevant problem-solving activities.
- Through the rigorous checking of pupils' progress the school is aware that the percentage of pupils making expected progress and better than expected progress is rising. For example in 2013, 29% of pupils made more than expected progress in reading while in 2014 that has risen to 48%.
- The most able pupils make good progress from their starting points. The percentage of pupils achieving Level 5 is rising. In reading in 2013, 31% of pupils achieved Level 5 and this rose to 40% in 2014. Predicted targets indicate a rise in reading, writing and mathematics in 2015. However, this group of pupils is not always challenged enough during lessons in both English and mathematics. Even though pupils often explore different activities during these lessons, there are occasions when all pupils are carrying out the same work and this slows the progress of the most able.
- The school's tracking of pupils shows that disadvantaged pupils make good progress from their starting points. Last year there was a gap between the attainment of these pupils and other pupils in the school, especially in reading where the gap was five terms, whereas it was one term in mathematics and three terms in writing. The school is very successfully narrowing these gaps as well as reducing the gap with the attainment of non-disadvantaged pupils nationally. This reflects well-targeted support using specific funding for these pupils and the effective promotion of equality of opportunity.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress. The provision for these pupils is well managed and they are given work that is carefully tailored to their individual needs. Teaching assistants provide a good mix of support, encouragement and challenge in class that helps pupils cope well with tasks so that they achieve well.

The early years provision

is good

- When children start in the early years, most have skills that are lower than those typical for their age. A high proportion has skills and abilities that are significantly below. Teachers and teaching assistants show a very good understanding of how children of this age learn and develop and this helps to ensure that children settle quickly when they start in the Nursery.
- Children have many opportunities to explore, both outdoors and in the classrooms, to be imaginative and to learn on their own. On occasions, adults work closely with children to teach essential skills. For example, children in the Nursery used large fabric ladybirds with a number hidden under the wings and were challenged to match the right number of counters to this number. Some children had one counter too many so the adult took the opportunity to introduce the concept of subtraction.
- The behaviour of children is good and they are safe. Children are eager and keen to join in different activities. They get on well together, and begin to form very good relationships not only with adults but also with one another. In groups, they listen carefully to the adult, taking turns or waiting to give an answer.
- Early writing is taught well. Teachers find interesting contexts to stimulate children's writing. Following a visit to the local fish and chip shop the teacher talked to the Reception children about the thank-you letter they should write. Children contributed well to the words while both the teacher and individual children wrote the letter.
- The early years is well led and managed by the Reception teacher. She is well supported by the Nursery teacher and teaching assistant and together they form an effective team. Good systems are in place to regularly check children's progress, ensuring that all groups of children are making good progress across the different areas of learning. Children are prepared well for learning in Year 1.

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	134214
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	452022

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	260
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Noctor
Headteacher	Nigel Shipton-Smith
Date of previous school inspection	23 April 2013
Telephone number	01946 694152
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