

Distington Community School

Church Road, Distington, Workington, Cumbria CA14 5TE

Inspection dates

22–23 March 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils do not make consistently good progress across key stages 1 and 2, and as a result, pupils' levels of attainment have declined.
- There are marked variations in the progress made by pupils who are in the same year group but different mixed-age classes. This is because teachers do not ensure that the work they set consistently meets the learning needs and age-related expectations of all of the pupils in their class.
- Teachers do not consistently provide sufficient challenge for the most able pupils, and as a result, too few reach the high standards of which they are capable.
- Teachers do not consistently identify and tackle mistakes and misconceptions in pupils' learning. As a result, teachers' feedback to pupils has less impact on moving their learning forward than it should.
- Governors do not have enough knowledge or understanding of the school's performance information to fully recognise the school's strengths and weaknesses. As a result, their views of the school's performance are overly generous.
- Governors do not ask the challenging questions needed to hold school leaders effectively enough to account.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher and other leaders have a realistic view of the school's position and are determinedly tackling weaknesses. Their work is already bearing fruit as progress for most current pupils is beginning to accelerate.
- Pupils' behaviour is good and they say that they are happy and feel safe in school. Parents agree, and are very supportive of the school.
- The school provides high levels of care to support potentially vulnerable pupils.
- Children get off to a good start to their time at school because the effective provision in the early years helps them to make good progress.
- Phonics teaching is a strength of the school and this means that pupils quickly develop key early reading skills.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning across key stages 1 and 2 and so accelerate rates of pupils' progress, by ensuring that teachers:
 - extend the most able pupils with work that challenges them to reach the high standards of which they are capable
 - plan work for pupils in mixed-age classes that more consistently matches their learning needs and age-related expectations
 - identify and address pupils' misconceptions more quickly.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - increasing governors' understanding of information about pupils' outcomes so they are better able to recognise the school's strengths and weaknesses
 - ensuring that governors ask more challenging questions of school leaders and hold them to account more rigorously for the achievement of pupils.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders and governors reacted slowly to a decline in pupils' achievement and in the effectiveness of teaching and learning since the school was last inspected. This was compounded by an initial lack of urgency in making the necessary changes to the curriculum for English and mathematics, and to strategies for assessing pupils' progress and attainment. Consequently, the school's overall effectiveness has dipped.
- School leaders have not been able to ensure that teaching is consistently effective across the school, which slows the pace of pupils' learning.
- The headteacher knows the school well and has an accurate and realistic view of its current strengths and weaknesses. She has successfully ensured that other members of the leadership team also recognise the challenges facing the school, and share her ambition and drive to improve. Together, leaders are beginning to tackle the improvements that are needed. The emerging picture of improving progress in most year groups shows that their efforts are beginning to bear fruit.
- Middle leaders, including the leaders for English and mathematics, have a good understanding of the issues in their subjects. This was partly gained from a detailed analysis of the disappointing outcomes of the key stage 2 tests in 2016. From this, leaders were able to identify some key actions to accelerate pupils' progress, such as introducing a reward system to encourage pupils to learn multiplication facts. This illustrates the increasingly effective role middle leaders are playing in securing school improvement.
- The school provides pupils with a curriculum that is broad and well balanced, and which is enhanced by additional extra-curricular clubs and trips to places of interest, such as Eden Camp history museum. The school has further enriched the curriculum by taking part in a number of different projects, including working with poets and artists, and setting up a well-equipped outdoor education area in the school grounds.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively and also ensures that they develop a good understanding of fundamental British values. Pupils are able to talk about tolerance and respect for others, and some older pupils described the idea of 'democracy' and could name the major political parties that had taken part in a recent local by-election.
- Leadership of the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is strong. The leader responsible works with class teachers to identify pupils' academic and pastoral needs, and ensures that appropriate support is put in place. She then checks to make sure that any intervention work is having a positive impact on these pupils' learning. This represents good use of the school's special educational needs funding.
- Pupil premium funding is being used increasingly effectively across the school. This is particularly the case in phonics, where disadvantaged pupils regularly outperform their classmates and other pupils nationally. Leaders also ensure that disadvantaged pupils access the same range of activities as other pupils in the school. The pupil premium funding has a positive impact on the academic and pastoral aspects of disadvantaged

pupils' experience in school.

- The primary school's physical education and sport funding is used effectively to ensure that pupils experience a range of sporting activities, both in school and through extra-curricular clubs. Pupils particularly benefit from having access to excellent on-site sports facilities, such as a large sports hall, and from specialist coaches in sports, such as hockey and cricket.
- Procedures for managing teachers' performance are now more robust, and they are being held more effectively to account for the quality of pupils' learning in their class. Teachers welcome the increased access to professional development, and many identify improvements to their practice that have come about as a result of good-quality training or visits to other schools.
- The local authority has provided largely effective support for the school, particularly during a period of instability in staffing and leadership during 2014 and 2015. Its representatives provided support for the then new school leaders. The local authority is still involved with the school, although it has great confidence that the current leadership team has the capacity to move the school forward again.

Governance of the school

- Governors have an overly generous view of the school's current performance. This is because they do not have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the school's performance information, including published assessment data. Consequently, governors are not fully able to accurately recognise the school's main strengths and weaknesses.
- Over time, the governing body has not been fully effective in holding school leaders to account for the quality of education. Records of the governing body meetings show that where governors have raised questions or concerns they have not been sufficiently challenging or followed up with enough rigour. As a consequence, the governing body has not tackled the decline in the school's performance effectively.
- Governors show great commitment to the school and visit frequently. They meet regularly with staff and have their own cycle of monitoring activities, which ensures that they are aware of the work going on around the school. This impact of these activities has been limited, however, because of the lack of rigour in governors' understanding of what they should expect to see.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- School leaders have successfully established a culture of vigilance and awareness in school. Staff have a clear understanding of what to do if they are worried about a pupil's well-being and records confirm that any concerns raised are followed up rigorously. The school has established strong partnerships with external agencies to ensure that the most vulnerable pupils and their families receive the help they need.
- Staff and governors all receive regular training to ensure that their knowledge of safeguarding is up to date. Detailed checks are carried out to ensure that staff, governors and volunteers are suitable people to work with children, and these are

carefully recorded.

- The headteacher, as designated leader for safeguarding, is knowledgeable and diligent in her approach to the role. She has established a highly efficient team who ensure that the school's effective safeguarding practice is complemented by high levels of care and support.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- There are inconsistencies in the effectiveness of teaching across key stages 1 and 2, which have led to pupils' progress being uneven. This is particularly the case for year groups where a cohort of pupils are divided between two, mixed-age classes. Where this happens, teachers do not ensure that the work they set consistently matches pupils' different learning needs so that they have the best possible chance of achieving their year group's end-of-year expectations.
- Teachers do not consistently ensure that the most able pupils in their classes reach the higher standards of which they are capable. Teachers too often fail to provide the most able pupils with challenging enough activities that would deepen their learning and encourage them to stretch themselves.
- Teachers, on occasions, do not pick up quickly enough on pupils' mistakes or misconceptions. When this happens, pupils' learning slows.
- In mathematics, calculation skills are taught effectively and most pupils are typically confident working on addition, subtraction, multiplication and division tasks at a level that is appropriate for their age. However, pupils in key stage 2 have not developed the secure knowledge of key mathematical facts, such as times tables, which they should have. Evidence in pupils' books shows that problem-solving is being used increasingly effectively across the majority of classes.
- Writing is largely taught effectively across the school, although there are still some inconsistencies between year groups and in teachers' subject knowledge. In classes where progress in writing is swiftest, pupils are given plenty of opportunities to write, both in English lessons and across the broader curriculum, and they are, therefore, able to practise the writing skills that have learned.
- The teaching of phonics is a strength of the school. Pupils work in small groups led confidently by teachers and teaching assistants, who model specific sounds well and skilfully question pupils to check their understanding. Levels of engagement are high. As a result, outcomes over time in phonics are above average.
- This strong start to developing pupils' early reading skills is now being built on more effectively. Reading is well promoted across the school through a range of different strategies. As a result, the older, most-able readers are able to talk enthusiastically about books that they have enjoyed and can identify favourite authors, such as Michael Morpurgo and Roald Dahl.
- Teaching assistants make a positive contribution to pupils' learning. They work well with pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to ensure that they are well supported. They are increasingly also providing extra support for pupils who need to catch up, and this is beginning to have a positive impact on their achievement.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The atmosphere in the school is one of calm and purposeful endeavour. Relationships between pupils and staff are warm and positive, and pupils are supportive of each other in lessons and at break times.
- Pupils say they feel safe in school, and staff look after them well. They understand that there are different types of bullying, such as racism and cyber-bullying, but say that bullying in their school is very rare. They have great confidence that staff would deal with any problems should they arise.
- Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe in different situations, such as taking care when crossing roads. They also understand the potential dangers of using the internet and ways that they can reduce these dangers, such as not giving out personal information.
- Pupils enjoy taking on positions of responsibility in school. School councillors are elected by their classmates, a role which gives pupils a good insight into how democracy works, and become involved in different projects, such as to improve the school grounds.
- School staff and leaders have put in place strategies to build up pupils' stamina and resilience as learners. This work is beginning to have a positive effect, as pupils learn to work more effectively on their own or to cooperate and take turns when working in groups.
- Parents are very positive about the school, and particularly praise the school's caring and nurturing environment. All of the parents who completed the 'Parent View' survey would recommend the school to other parents.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are friendly and welcoming to visitors, and display good manners, such as when holding doors open for adults. Their conduct around school is good and they move around the building sensibly. Pupils play together well outside at break times and particularly enjoy joining in with games of football or practising skipping.
- Pupils display positive attitudes to learning. They listen well, are keen to answer questions and usually settle quickly to get on with their work. Pupils take pride in their work and try hard to make sure that it is presented neatly.
- Attendance rates and rates of persistent absence are broadly in line with the national average, and no group's learning is adversely affected by poor attendance. Pupils say they enjoy school and almost every parent who responded to 'Parent View' confirmed that this was the case.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- The small numbers of pupils assessed at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2 each year make it difficult to make year-on-year comparisons. For example, Year 6 data in 2016 was based on a cohort of nine pupils. However, the school's assessment information and work in pupils' books indicate clearly that there has been a decline in standards in key stage 2 in recent years. The proportion of pupils working at and above the level expected for their age is not as high as might reasonably be expected.
- In 2016, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard at the end of Year 6 was well below the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. The progress they made from their different starting points was also significantly below average, and in the bottom 10% of all schools nationally. Standards in key stage 1 were stronger in reading and mathematics, but were below average in writing.
- The majority of current pupils in key stages 1 and 2 make the expected amount of progress in each year group, although progress is stronger in key stage 1 than in key stage 2. The school's own tracking, and pupils' work, show that the majority of pupils in key stage 1 are working at the expected standard for their age but there is still a legacy of previous underachievement to be tackled later in key stage 2.
- As a result of few pupils making accelerated progress across key stages 1 and 2, not enough pupils, including those who are most-able, go on to reach the higher levels of which they are capable.
- Most disadvantaged pupils make progress from their starting points that is at least in line with, and frequently better than, the other pupils in the school. Although the attainment of disadvantaged pupils at the end of key stage 2 in 2016 was low, as it was for all pupils, their performance in key stage 1 was in line with that of their peers. In some areas, such as phonics, the performance of disadvantaged pupils is already ahead of other pupils nationally and in other areas there are promising signs that differences are diminishing.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making good progress from their different starting points. Well-targeted support ensures that these pupils move forward with their learning and regularly achieve their individual targets.
- Attainment in phonics has long been a strength of the school, and in both 2015 and 2016, all Year 1 pupils reached the expected level in the Year 1 national phonics screening check. Pupils currently in the school learn phonics quickly because of the effective organisation and teaching of phonics.

Early years provision

Good

- Children begin in the Nursery class with skills and knowledge that are generally below those that are typical for their age. A significant number of children have particular weaknesses in speaking and listening, social development, literacy and number. Effective links with home help to ensure that children settle in quickly. Parents are happy with the start that their children make in school, and more than one commented on how friendly and caring the early years staff were.
- In the early years, teachers plan learning which is engaging and well thought out, and

as a result, children make good progress across the Nursery and Reception classes. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of their time in the early years is typically at least in line with that found nationally, which means that they are well prepared for the move into Year 1.

- Staff provide children with a mixture of activities, some of which children choose for themselves and some of which are led by an adult. In one session in the Reception class, the teacher developed children's knowledge of different shapes through skilfully giving them clues about a shape's properties, while the children excitedly searched for the correct shape.
- Staff assess well children's learning and achievements by making very effective use of online systems for recording observations and tracking individual children's progress. This information is used well to allow staff to plan additional, targeted activities that are focused on a specific, identified need.
- Behaviour in the early years is good and relationships between adults and children are highly positive. Staff in the Nursery class model and encourage sharing and turn-taking, and by the time they reach Reception class, the vast majority of children play confidently with each other. Staff have ensured that all statutory welfare requirements are met.
- Leadership of the early years provision is good. The early years leader is a knowledgeable and experienced practitioner and, although he works in a different class, he provides good support for the early years team. He and the early years staff are aware that currently activities in the outdoor area are less effective, and plans are already in place to develop the area further and to provide staff with further training opportunities.

School details

Unique reference number	133264
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	10032370

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	132
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sandra Parry
Headteacher	Angela Jones
Telephone number	01946 830526
Website	www.distington-comm.cumbria.sch.uk
Email address	head@distington-comm.cumbria.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	9–10 July 2013

Information about this school

- The school is much smaller than the average-sized primary school. Pupils in key stages 1 and 2 are taught in four mixed-age classes.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average.
- In the early years, children attend the Nursery class every morning. Those who are in the Reception class attend on a full-time basis.
- There were too few pupils in Year 6 in 2016 to report on whether the school met the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' achievement in Year 6.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

- There have been significant changes to the school leadership since the previous inspection. The headteacher took up her post during 2015 and the deputy headteacher joined the school in 2016.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning in all classes, and was joined on a number of these visits to lessons by the headteacher. The inspector also looked at pupils' work in books, records of children's learning in the early years and other information about pupils' attainment and progress.
- The inspector listened to pupils read and held discussions with a group of pupils. He also talked informally with pupils around the school and in the playground.
- The inspector considered the 21 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and information from parents' surveys conducted by the school. He also talked briefly with some parents at the end of the school day.
- The inspector held meetings with two groups of governors, including the chair of the governing body, and had a telephone conversation with another governor. He also had discussions with a number of staff in school, including the leader responsible for the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, the leader for the early years and the leaders for mathematics and English.
- The inspector spoke with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector examined a range of documents. These included information about pupils' attainment and progress, the school's reviews of its own performance, governing body meeting records and adviser reports. The inspector also examined safeguarding documentation and various records of pupils' attendance and behaviour.

Inspection team

Neil Dixon, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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