



**Office for Standards
in Education**

Inspection report
Low Furness CE Primary School

Cumbria Education Authority

Dates of inspection: 3 and 4 November 2004

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act

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Basic information about the school

Name of school:	Low Furness CE Primary School
Type of school:	Primary
Status:	Voluntary Controlled
Age range of pupils:	4 to 11 years
Headteacher:	Mrs M Longstaffe
Address of school:	Church Road Great Urswick Nr Ulverston Cumbria LA12 0TA
Telephone:	01229 894135
Name and address of appropriate authority:	The governing body, address as above
Chair of governors:	Reverend C Honour
Local education authority area:	Cumbria
Unique reference number:	112299
Name of reporting inspector:	Mrs S Øyen HMI
Dates of inspection:	3 and 4 November 2004

Introduction

1. Low Furness CE Primary School is a small school in Great Urswick, a village a few miles west of Ulverston in Cumbria. While some pupils live close by, most come by bus from neighbouring villages. All of the pupils are of white British heritage and are from a range of social and economic backgrounds. Seven per cent of the pupils, which is well below the national average, are eligible for free school meals. The number of pupils on roll has fallen in the last two years to 87. The four classes all have pupils from two age groups. The headteacher shares the teaching of the class of pupils from Years 1 and 2 with two part-time teachers. Five nursery pupils currently join the reception class in the afternoon. The pupils' attainment on entry to the nursery varies but is generally as expected for their age. Eight pupils in the school have been identified as having special educational needs; no pupil has a Statement of Special Educational Need.

2. The school was inspected in February 2002. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

3. The governors drew up an action plan to address the key issues from the inspection of February 2002. The school was visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) on six occasions to monitor the progress being made.

4. In November 2004, two HMI returned to inspect the school, assessing the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of February 2002 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.

Main findings

5. In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils. The main findings of the inspection are:

- a rise in standards is most evident in the performance of the younger pupils, who are generally making good progress: in the 2004 national tests, all the Year 2 pupils attained the level expected for their age in reading, writing, mathematics and science. Most of the pupils in Year 6 have a lot of ground to make up to reach the standard expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. In other year groups, standards are at least satisfactory and many pupils are achieving well across the curriculum. Nevertheless, common weak spots in English and mental mathematics limit high attainment;
 - the pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good. They have improved markedly, most especially in Key Stage 2, in response to the teachers' higher expectations and the more varied range of learning activities. The pupils are well motivated and ready to learn. They are industrious and often highly enthusiastic when their interest is caught. The improvement in the pupils' attendance, now well above average, reflects their enjoyment of school. All
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the pupils get on amicably with each other and with the adults in school. They can be trusted to behave maturely indoors and out;

- the overall provision for the pupils' personal development is good. The school is a warm, welcoming and supportive Christian family where all are encouraged to do their best. The adults set a good model in their respect for others and their expectation of good manners. They have time for the pupils, and value their opinions and their ideas to add to the smooth running of the school. Attractive displays support the pupils' learning and also celebrate their personal and academic successes;
- the quality of teaching varies but is good overall. Recent changes in staffing have strengthened the provision for the older pupils. The headteacher leads by example in her work with the Key Stage 1 pupils especially in the good match of challenge for different groups. In all classes, the teaching was confident, thoughtfully planned and conscientiously prepared. The better teaching was focused, purposeful and set a brisk pace. In some lessons, the pupils did not progress as much as they could because the teachers did not do enough to exact the best from them;
- improvements have widened the curriculum and made it more coherent. New links with different agencies have enhanced the pupils' opportunities to take part in community projects and cultural events. The strong focus on English and mathematics is being increasingly linked to work in other subjects. There is a good emphasis on practical experiences for the youngest pupils. While the provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is much improved, there is considerable scope to use the resources more in all lessons;
- the school has a growing range of information about the pupils' progress and attainment but is only at an early stage in analysing it profitably to highlight the implications of how best to meet the needs of every pupil;
- the leadership and management of the school have many good aspects. The headteacher is an enthusiastic, tireless leader who is driving the school forward. She has been particularly effective in cementing a strong bond with the community and opening up the school to new ventures. Morale is high and there is a tangible commitment to improvement shared by staff, governors and pupils alike. New members of staff have quickly found their feet in the classroom but are taking longer to make their mark in leading school developments. This has taken the edge off the strong impetus evident in the summer term. Nevertheless, the school has good capacity to improve further;
- the quality of school governance has improved significantly. The governing body has a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and the underlying factors. It has not shied away from taking difficult decisions about the school's future, given the drop in the number of pupils coming into the reception year and an increasing deficit in funds. Although there is a very detailed plan of action for the current school year, there is little to indicate the governors' intentions for the school in the longer term;

- the local education authority (LEA) has provided good support. It has regularly monitored and reviewed the school's progress and tailored support to the areas of most need. The work to develop the skills and expertise of subject leaders has been particularly influential.

Key issues

6. In order to improve the pupils' quality of education further, the governors, headteacher, senior managers and staff need to:

- continue to raise standards, particularly in writing and mathematics, and minimise underachievement across the curriculum;
- further improve the quality of teaching;
- make increasing use of information from monitoring and assessment to inform decisions about teaching, learning and the curriculum;
- establish a longer-term improvement plan for the school and ensure that key people have the skills and expertise to carry it out.

Inspection findings

Standards achieved by the pupils

7. Standards are rising as a result of stronger, more focused teaching which is capitalising on the pupils' willingness to learn. Remnants of the patchy picture reported in 2002 continue but there are clear signs of improving consistency. The pupils in the Foundation Stage get off to a sound start and nearly all pupils in Years 1 to 5 are working at the level expected for their age, with a growing number doing better than this in one or more subjects. There is still some underachievement. The pupils in Year 6 have numerous gaps in their learning from previous years, especially in reading, writing and mathematics. Many have more than a year's progress to make up to attain the level expected for their age. The school has set very challenging targets for the pupils' attainment at Levels 4 and 5 in the 2005 national tests.

8. The school's results in the 2004 national tests were an improvement over the previous year at Key Stage 1, but overall, much the same at Key Stage 2. For the first time, all of the pupils in Year 2 attained the target Level 2 in reading, writing, mathematics and science. As in 2003, one in three pupils attained the higher Level 3 in reading. There was a slight improvement in attainment at Level 3 in writing. Although the results in English were also higher at the end of Key Stage 2, compared with 2003, this was entirely due to the pupils' strong performance in reading. In writing, the pupils did badly. Too few pupils were able to produce well-organised writing with accurate spelling and a range of correct punctuation. In mathematics, the overall standard fell slightly as there was little high attainment, and the results were far short of the school's targets. In science, the test results were similar to those of 2003, when the school's performance compared well with the national average. The school has some way still to go to raise standards at Key Stage 2 and to out-perform schools in similar contexts, especially in English and mathematics.

9. When the pupils start school, their attainment is generally as expected for their age. The nursery and reception pupils had settled quickly into class routines and they showed a good level of self-sufficiency and maturity. The pupils in the reception year took an active interest in numbers, words, letters and sounds. Some had started to write independently and to solve simple number problems confidently. This favourable early start gives a good springboard for work in the Key Stage 1 class where the pupils progress well in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy.

10. Throughout the school, the pupils' good oral language skills have a positive impact on the quality of their reading and work across the curriculum. The pupils are attentive, appreciative listeners and confident, able conversationalists. Many are highly articulate in expressing and justifying their views. They draw on these skills and their often good general knowledge in interpreting and discussing what they read. However, when the pupils come to put their ideas on paper, the rich quality of the content is often marred by inaccurate spelling, omissions in punctuation and immature organisation. The older pupils, especially, have limited knowledge of spelling rules. Standards of presentation have improved but vary. Many pupils consistently produce neat work and take care when using joined handwriting. There are some instances, however, where poor habits persist in forming letters, numbers and setting out work.

11. Standards in mathematics could be higher throughout the school. The higher-attaining pupils are not always challenged enough and there are gaps in the pupils' knowledge and skills, especially in Year 6. In all classes, the pupils are generally secure in following mathematical procedures and many use a range of strategies to solve number problems. Pupils in Year 2 confidently explained how they had worked out missing numbers. When calculating, however, too many pupils in all year groups, including the higher-attaining, struggle to recall key number facts and they make simple errors. Pupils in Year 6 resorted to fingers and reciting multiplication tables to give answers they should have recalled instantly.

12. The school is starting to link work in literacy, and to a lesser extent mathematics, with work in other subjects. There were several good examples of tables, diagrams, letters and recounts in science and history, particularly from the school's recent history week.

13. In science, many pupils do well as they acquire a good bank of facts, understand scientific terms and are confident in carrying out simple investigations.

The pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

14. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good overall. They were good in all of the lessons and there were very good aspects in the pupils' conduct in and out of the classroom. Break times were true social occasions. The pupils were caring towards one another, polite and respectful to adults. The 'pupils of the week' wore their golden sweatshirts with pride. This is a marked improvement since the inspection of 2002, when the pupils' behaviour was judged to be unsatisfactory. The change in culture is a direct result of the teachers' higher expectations of the pupils, the strong focus on recognising and rewarding achievement, and also the more varied range of learning experiences. The vestiges of apathy evident in the summer term in the demeanour of the oldest pupils have gone. There is now a strong work ethos throughout the school.

15. The pupils enjoy school life; their attendance is well above average and many are rarely absent. They are quickly motivated, ready to learn and keen to meet a challenge.

When their interest is really caught, they work with a will. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 were highly enthusiastic and totally absorbed in using bricks and trays of sand to work out how the slaves moved huge stone blocks in Ancient Egypt. They worked maturely in groups, discussing and trying out ideas and needing minimal supervision. The increased focus on such practical tasks, discussions with partners and shared problem solving has fostered the pupils' engagement and willingness to give of their best. When this is combined with an opportunity to reflect on and review what they have done, the pupils often make good strides in learning and show pleasure in what they and others have achieved.

16. The overall good provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development has many strong features. It is particularly effective in fostering very good moral and social attitudes. The school is a warm, welcoming and supportive Christian family. There are close links with the village church and the vicar regularly leads the school assembly. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on and appreciate the achievements, attitudes and values of others. The staff take care to display the pupils' best work and to celebrate items about the pupils that appear in the newspapers.

17. The adults set a good model in how they interact with and treat others; they have time for the pupils and welcome their ideas. They encourage the pupils to take on responsibilities from the daily 'special helper' in the Foundation Stage to the election of head boy and girl and school councillors, whose suggestions for improvements are taken seriously by the headteacher and governing body. The school has become increasingly involved in local and national projects, such as those related to healthy eating and environmental issues, as well as joining other local schools for sports and arts events.

The quality of education

18. The quality of teaching varies but is good overall. It was very good in one lesson, good in nine and satisfactory in six. The improvement in teaching, most especially for the Key Stage 2 pupils, reflects changes in staffing and also the teachers' willingness to act on advice and lift the quality of their work. The headteacher leads by example in her good teaching of the Key Stage 1 pupils and in her work with other staff to share effective practice. Her influence has been marked in the shift towards the enthusiasm and enjoyment in teaching and learning that is now evident throughout the school. Relationships are warm between teachers and pupils and there is a high level of commitment on both sides.

19. There were examples of good teaching in all classes and the teaching was consistently good for the pupils in Years 3 and 4. All the teachers were confident and clear about what they intended to teach. They planned their lessons thoughtfully, prepared materials conscientiously and discussed the content with support staff. The teachers made good use of the space available to set up different zones and provide information about current topics to support the pupils' learning. Classroom routines, including regular homework and activities to challenge pupils during registration periods, were well established. The adults' predominant use of praise for effort and achievement kept the pupils focused and there was a positive, productive working atmosphere in all classes.

20. The development of the use of 'talk partners', individual small whiteboards and group problem-solving activities has raised the level of engagement of the pupils, especially in class sessions. The teachers have improved their questioning to include more challenges to the pupils to explain how they came to their answers. This has enhanced the learning,

especially for the average and lower-attaining pupils. In the most effective lessons, the teachers reminded the pupils of class and individual targets. They often made similar references in their marking, although this is not yet of a consistent quality.

21. Lessons often got off to a lively start. The headteacher's use of music and a bag with different objects was very effective in grabbing the pupils' interest and stimulating their ideas for a spell. In several lessons the teachers drew the class and groups of pupils together at different times to review what they done and to set new challenges. This developing aspect of practices reflects the teachers' stronger awareness of the spread of attainment and needs in their mixed-age classes. In some lessons, however, the pupils did not progress enough because the teachers directed their learning too much and missed opportunities to reinforce old and new information, concepts and skills. Some of the teachers' planning is not sharp enough to indicate precisely what different groups of pupils are to learn and the steps needed in the teaching.

22. Reliable and rigorous systems are slowly developing to track the pupils' progress and to set challenging targets. Gaps in data from previous years have limited the teachers' ability to track progress over time in different subjects, particularly for pupils in Key Stage 2. The introduction of regular sessions to check the pupils' progress and systems to analyse their strengths and weaknesses, especially in reading, writing and mathematics, place the school in a sound position to identify how best to meet every pupil's needs.

23. Improvements have widened the curriculum and made it more coherent and relevant, given the mixed-age classes. Nevertheless, the depth and the quality of the work in many subjects continue to vary. There is a good emphasis on practical, first-hand experience indoors and out for the youngest pupils. The teacher, new to the school this term, is building up resources to widen the range of experiences. The setting up of a small computer suite and the acquisition of new equipment, including interactive whiteboards, has strengthened the provision for ICT. There is considerable scope for this to be an integral part of the pupils' learning in all lessons. New links with the local secondary school offer good opportunities for the pupils to work with older students to compile a school website.

Leadership and management

24. The quality of leadership and management has strengthened significantly at all levels and has many good aspects. The many weaknesses reported in 2002 have been removed and the school now has effective systems and structures to guide its work. It is in a strong position to continue to develop and to cope with necessary changes because of a fall in the number of pupils joining the school and stringent budgetary constraints.

25. The headteacher, who took up the post in September 2003, has built on the foundations established by the acting headteacher over the previous four terms. She has brought an enthusiastic, fresh approach and been tireless in her work to take the school forward and to develop its role as part of the local community. Two successful ventures have been the school's use in the summer as a base for those taking part in an archaeological dig nearby, and the school's part in re-establishing the traditional rush-bearing ceremony early in the autumn. The headteacher has shown by example how to combine teaching and leadership roles, supported others in developing their skills and ensured that all are aware of her high expectations of them and the pupils. Her willingness and promptness to take action ensured a growing momentum in improvement in the last school year, despite changes in staffing and

staff absence. The momentum has slowed slightly this term as the two new teachers, although quick to find their feet in the classroom, are taking longer to have an impact on school improvement. They have taken on new areas of responsibility and have yet to prove themselves in leading plans of action to raise standards. Nevertheless, morale is high and there is a shared commitment to improvement as well as existing good practice in the management of subjects and whole-school aspects.

26. The quality of governance has improved significantly. The chair of the governing body meets regularly with the headteacher and ensures that other governors have a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and the underlying factors. A good initiative has been the involvement of some governors in deciding how well the school is making progress. The governing body is working with the headteacher and LEA to plan for the future and has not shied away from making necessary but difficult decisions, particularly about how the school will reduce the deficit in funds. A comprehensive school improvement plan has been produced for the current school year but there is little to indicate the governors' intentions for the school in the longer term. Given the expected fall and then increase in numbers on roll in 2006, too little is being done to plan how the school will ensure that all the pupils' needs are met.

27. The LEA has provided good support which helped to kick-start the process of raising standards and improving the effectiveness of middle management. Its intention to continue this programme of support and to tailor it to precise needs over the current school year provides a good opportunity for new and other members of staff to benefit.

Implementation of the action plan

28. The inspection report of February 2002 required the school to address five key issues. These related to: raising pupils' attainment and improving their achievement; improving the leadership and management of the school; improving the boys' behaviour; improving the use of accommodation and the organisation of the school week; and improving equality of opportunity. Adaptations to the school's action plan reflected changing circumstances and the need to repeat some actions when the pace of progress slowed in the spring and summer terms of 2003. The school has made good progress in strengthening the leadership and management, improving the pupils' behaviour and altering the timetable to ensure a more balanced curriculum. It has made reasonable progress in the other two aspects.

29. The school quickly made progress in setting new parameters for the pupils' behaviour. There was an immediate improvement, although a low level of challenge in lessons often led to passivity and a lack of application from the older pupils. As the teachers' expectations have risen so the pupils have behaved more maturely and responsibly. The reduction from five classes to four in September 2003 eradicated the cramped conditions that were reported in 2002 and further reorganisation has increased space for group sessions and improved storage facilities.

30. The leadership and management of the school are now much stronger. The LEA seconded an experienced headteacher early in the summer term of 2002 to run the school until the end of the academic year in 2003. He worked closely with the governing body, LEA and staff to set out a clear direction for the school, against a significant fall in the number of pupils on roll and a budget deficit. The appointment of the substantive headteacher from

September 2003 brought stability to the school. All the staff are clear about what she expects of them and are working to develop their management roles further.

31. Much greater emphasis is now placed on the school meeting the needs of individuals and ensuring all have the best chance to succeed academically and personally. There are still inconsistencies in the effectiveness of what the teachers do to boost progress and to challenge the pupils, but far fewer pupils are marking time than reported in 2002. The school has taken effective steps to widen the range of curricular activities and choices available to the pupils. It has also increased their involvement in the running of the school.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

The school was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in February 2002. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in October 2002, in April, July and November 2003, and in March and June 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of February 2002.

In November 2004, two HMI returned to inspect the school for two days to check the progress being made. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

During the inspection, 16 lessons or parts of lessons, 2 assemblies and 3 registration sessions were inspected. The pupils were observed at break and lunchtimes and samples of their work were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior staff, the chair of the governing body and representatives from the diocese and the LEA. Informal discussions were held with other staff and pupils. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was also taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of February 2002 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.