



Inspection report

# Irthington Village School

**Better  
education  
and care**

Unique Reference Number 112113  
LEA Cumbria

Inspection number 275657  
Inspection dates 16 and 17 May 2005  
Reporting inspector Mr R Hartley HMI

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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Type of School	Primary	School address	Irthington
School category	Community		Carlisle
Age range of pupils	4 to 11 years		Cumbria
			CA6 4NJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01697 72913
Number on roll	30		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr T Appleby
Date of previous inspection	November 2003	Acting Headteacher	Mrs M Alston

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Age group	Published	Reference no.
4 to 11 years	14 June 2005	275657

## Introduction

When Irthington Village School was inspected in November 2003, it was judged to require special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education. Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools (HMI) subsequently visited the school on two occasions to monitor its progress, and reinspected the school in May 2005.

### Description of the school

Irthington Village School is situated on the outskirts of Carlisle. The school is much smaller than average, with 30 full-time pupils who are grouped into two classes. The number on roll has declined slightly in recent years, although numbers have stabilised and are forecast to rise after the current year. Almost all the pupils live in the village and the immediate surroundings. There are no pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds. Four pupils are eligible for free school meals. Seven pupils have been identified as having special educational needs, including one with a Statement of Special Educational Need.

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## Overall effectiveness of the school

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.

For the past two years, Irthington Village School has experienced staffing difficulties which have affected both classes. There have been four headteachers during this period which has also led to major discontinuities in the Key Stage 2 class. However, the current situation is more stable; the temporary headteacher, the Key Stage 2 teacher, who is also the headteacher designate, and the Key Stage 1 teacher have made a determined and successful effort to address the weaknesses in the school. Their hard work has resulted in the school now providing a good education for its pupils. Standards overall are reaching national expectations and are at times above them, although older pupils would achieve more highly if gaps in their learning had not developed over time. Nevertheless, standards are rising and progress in learning is brisk, due to teaching which is consistently good and at times very good. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good in the Key Stage 1 class and increasingly so in the Key Stage 2 class, where the pupils are beginning to work co-operatively and show a keenness to do well. The requirements of the National Curriculum are fully met and pupils benefit from an extensive range of social and cultural events and clubs, supported well by both parents and staff.

### Improvement since the last inspection

The inspection of November 2003 required the school to address key issues concerned with improving teaching and learning in Years 3 to 6, underachievement in Years 5 and 6, and leadership and management. There has been good progress in relation to all three key issues, although standards could rise still further towards the end of Key Stage 2.

### Capacity to improve

The school has shown rapid improvement over the last year and is now well placed to make further improvement. The temporary headteacher has set a keen pace for bringing about change, created stability amongst the staff, and achieved a good measure of consistency in the teaching and learning. She has been ably supported by the staff, particularly the Key Stage 2 teacher who since becoming the headteacher designate has been able to work closely with the experienced temporary headteacher. Information about the pupils' achievements has been collated, regular assessments now take place, and pupils have been set realistic targets for improvement. This information is used effectively to plan work relevant to pupils' needs.

The local education authority (LEA) has given good support and the governing body is becoming increasingly effective in checking the school's performance. The school's further progress will depend on its ability to minimise the effect of its weak budgetary position, caused partly by the falling number of pupils, until admissions begin to rise as projected.

The school has devised plans to ensure the pupils continue to receive good quality provision.

What the school should do to improve further

The key priorities for the school's development plan are to:

- improve the pupils' handwriting, spelling and general presentation of work;
- keep the arrangements for the organisation and teaching of the curriculum under review;
- continue to reduce the legacy of gaps in the pupils' learning at Key Stage 2.

## Achievement and standards

The pupils make a good start in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 class. They enter school with wide variations in skills and educational experience. Their learning needs are quickly identified and all the pupils make good progress. At Key Stage 2 the pupils' progress continues to be brisk, although weaknesses in past provision, particularly in writing and transferring knowledge to practical problems, have led to some underachievement. Nevertheless, the present temporary headteacher and Key Stage 2 class teacher have made a determined effort to bring about improvement.

The school's results in the 2004 national tests at both key stages reflect the pupils' wide ability. However, the cohorts taking the 2004 tests were extremely small - six pupils at Key Stage 1 and four at Key Stage 2 - and therefore comparisons or trends over time would present an unreliable picture. However, standards in lessons are at least satisfactory and often good, especially in English, mathematics and science, and there are examples of good work in design and technology and personal, social and health education. Where standards could be higher, this is a result of gaps in the pupils' learning which have developed over time, especially at Key Stage 2. As a consequence there are weaknesses in spelling and handwriting, and applying mathematical knowledge to make calculations in practical contexts. However, these shortcomings are being addressed and the pupils are beginning to display increasing confidence in using their skills in a variety of contexts.

## Personal development

The pupils' behaviour and attitudes to work are at least satisfactory and often good. The instances of challenging behaviour and casual attitudes to work in Key Stage 2, noted at the last inspection, have been eradicated. Throughout school the pupils' interest in the work is uniformly high and they show good levels of concentration and perseverance. The two teachers have high expectations of the pupils and set a brisk pace to the learning. As a result, the pupils settle quickly to their tasks, show independence in selecting equipment,

and organise themselves efficiently. Despite the small number of pupils in each age group, they work co-operatively from an early age although some pupils at Key Stage 2 prefer to work on their own, for example, in designing an investigation.

The pupils' attendance remains good and there have been no unauthorised absences or exclusions during the year.

Relationships between the pupils are friendly and caring; they show interest in what each other is doing, listen politely, and are supportive of one another. In all these ways, the adults lead by example.

The school makes good provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Despite the school's limited resources, there is a broad range of extracurricular activities including sports events, cultural visits, celebrating festivals and forging links with other schools. French and music lessons are available; football training has been provided by regional professional teams; and visits have taken place to concerts and plays. The pupils learn to consider communities less fortunate than themselves through various awareness and fund-raising activities.

## Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is good overall; on the last two monitoring inspections it was never less than good or very good. The picture is much improved when compared with that in 2003.

The lessons were consistently well planned, prepared and organised and the work was accurately differentiated to meet the needs of year groups or combinations of different-aged pupils. Learning objectives were shared with the pupils at the outset, although less frequently referred to during the lessons to check on progress. There were opportunities for the whole class to be together, although for much of the time the pupils worked in small groups or independently, reflecting the wide age and ability range in each of the classes; for example, in a Key Stage 1 numeracy lesson, the whole class shared in the mental and oral opening section then moved into separate areas of the class for focused activities led by the class teacher and teaching assistant.

In all the lessons tasks were presented in an interesting way and were well resourced. The teaching assistants made important contributions to the lessons, particularly in leading groups.

The school has completely revised its assessment procedures and has established a thorough system for assessing and tracking the pupils' progress. The information from tests and assessments carried out by the teachers has been carefully analysed and targets have been set in English, mathematics and science. The information has enabled the teachers to plan work which takes better account of the pupils' individual learning needs.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets national requirements. The school has given a lot of time to improving the pupils' basic skills in literacy, numeracy and science, and also to providing opportunities for the pupils to practise these skills across a range of practical situations and different subjects.

The provision for pupils with special educational needs is now on a firm footing. All these pupils have individual education plans with relevant actions and targets which are shared with parents.

The school's links with parents are a growing strength, in contrast to the situation at the time of the inspection in 2003. A wide range of information is now available to parents through newsletters, meetings and consultation sessions. Adults are welcomed into the school and a number of new initiatives are having encouraging results, including supporting children's reading in class, a homework partnership scheme, and hosting a successful toddler group.

## Leadership and management

The leadership of the school has undergone a considerable period of instability since the inspection in 2003; there have been four temporary headteachers. Apart from the current temporary headteacher, who has been in post since September 2004, the other appointments have been for short periods. As a consequence, opportunities to make extensive changes have been limited, compounded by the additional requirement to teach the Key Stage 2 class for part of each week. However, since September, the current temporary headteacher has made significant headway in addressing the school's weaknesses, and has been aided by the appointment of the Key Stage 2 class teacher. The temporary headteacher has successfully addressed the broad curricular issues which were holding back the raising of standards and has also tackled the management and organisational requirements to aid planning and refine daily routines. A succinct set of policies has been written, including guidance on teaching and learning and on assessment. Together with a review of job descriptions and responsibilities, these policies have set the tone and expectations. There is a good deal of consistency between the two classes in how the wide age ranges are catered for, aided by the two teachers having joint responsibility for literacy, numeracy and science.

The governing body, which was almost completely re-constituted with relatively inexperienced governors at the time of the last inspection, has taken advantage of extensive training from the LEA; it is now able to comment on and take decisions about a wide range of school issues. It gives a good level of support to the school and is keen for it to do well. The LEA has given extensive support to the school through the link inspector and specialist officers. It has responded quickly and effectively to unforeseen events such as the staffing difficulties experienced by the school.

The Key Stage 2 class teacher has been appointed the substantive headteacher from September 2005. The current temporary headteacher is to remain as a mentor and consultant to the new headteacher, an arrangement which bodes well for the school's continuing improvement.

## Appendix – Information about the inspection

Irthington Village School was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in March 2003. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was designated as having serious weaknesses.

The school was visited by an Additional Inspector in November 2003 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of March 2003. 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. 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 since it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in May and September 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of November 2003.

In May 2005, one HMI returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, and the inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

During the visit six parts of lessons and one assembly were inspected. The pupils' conduct was observed around the school and on the playground at break and lunchtimes, and samples of their work were inspected. A sample of pupils from all the key stages were heard reading and their writing over the year was examined. Discussions were held with the temporary headteacher and a representative from the LEA, and informally with other staff. Account was 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 November 2003 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.

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