

Armathwaite School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112102
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	289173
Inspection date	9 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Geoffrey Yates

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	4–8
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	35
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Mary Robinson
Headteacher	Mrs Jennifer Dixon
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2003
School address	Armathwaite School Armathwaite Carlisle Cumbria CA4 9PW
Telephone number	01697 472296
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Armathwaite School is a very small school situated in a rural area of Cumbria. It is one of only two first schools in the county. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. Pupils are predominantly from White British families. The school has a below average number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. When pupils start school, they have average skills. The school has many awards including the ArtsMark Gold award, the Healthy Schools award and the Sports Active award.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school that provides excellent value for money. The headteacher and her staff have been highly successful in creating an environment where pupils feel secure and learning flourishes. The school's outstanding care promotes exceptional personal development. The pupils behave very well and make the most of every minute in school. Their well developed independence allows them to flourish as learners. Above average attendance levels demonstrate that pupils enjoy their education. Pupils are safe and happy because they are well known by staff, well respected by other pupils and are confident in their ability to succeed. This, together with their very high standards in learning, prepares them very well for the future. The strong emphasis on pupils' personal development ensures that they develop their understanding very well of how to keep fit and healthy. The small size and friendly atmosphere in the school provide a good basis for excellent communications among and between staff, parents and the local community. Parents are rightly highly satisfied with the education provided. One parent's comments sums up the views of many, 'I am amazed at how well teaching is geared to the individual needs of each child.'

Pupils of all abilities and backgrounds achieve very well not only in reading, writing and mathematics but in other subjects such as design and technology. Children, from an average starting point on entry to school, exceed national expectations by the time they enter Year 1. These results reflect high quality early years provision. Pupils in Year 2 attain well above average standards. By the end of Year 3, pupils continue to make outstanding progress, with a high percentage of pupils reaching the level expected of older pupils.

The curriculum and teaching are excellent. They ensure that learning is at the hub of what the school does. The curriculum extends well beyond the school, allowing pupils to achieve really well and develop their own interests in an innovative way. For example, ample time is provided for pupils to plan, do and review their individual topics. Teachers know pupils' needs very well and plan lively and purposeful learning in all subjects. This is because very good use is made of assessment information about what pupils know, understand and can do. But not only that, every effort is taken to involve pupils in evaluating their own learning.

Leadership and management are excellent. The headteacher ensures that the work of the school is firmly focused on raising standards and on ensuring the quality of provision. The school's self-evaluation is rigorous and very effective because of the excellent teamwork that exists to ensure that action is taken to improve any weaknesses that are detected. Governors play a significant part in the life of the school. Leadership and management have been exceptionally effective in ensuring an exciting curriculum and excellent attention to pupils' care and personal development. This and the constant striving to become even better demonstrate the school's excellence and their outstanding capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- There are no significant weaknesses for the school to address.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Standards are well above average and pupils' achievement is outstanding. Standards are not only very high in reading, writing and mathematics but also in science. Children get off to a

flying start in the Reception Year. By the end of the Foundation Stage, children exceed the early learning goals expected for their age. Significantly, children benefit tremendously by being involved in planning and evaluating their own learning. Results in the Year 2 national assessments are above average but, because of the very small number of pupils involved, show some variation. What is crystal clear from the school's own assessment records and pupils' work is that achievement is outstanding for pupils of all abilities, including the more able and those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This is again because pupils are highly involved as learners and are very clear what the next steps should be to improve on previous best. Pupils of all abilities continue to make outstanding progress in Year 3 with the majority already working at the levels expected of older pupils. Parents describe how their children have 'the best possible education'.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils are very happy at school, as demonstrated by their good attendance. Their attitudes and relationships with others are of the highest order. They enjoy the challenge provided for them in lessons and are highly motivated to do their best. Pupils reflect responsibly because self-evaluation is a key part of their learning. For example, time was provided for a reception aged child to talk confidently to the whole school about how she might improve the model vehicle she made in design and technology. She then invited other pupils to come up with their suggestions. Pupils plan challenging work for themselves to do but also say that the work they are given to do by teachers is challenging but not so challenging that they cannot do it. Pupils respond very well to the school's clear values and their behaviour is excellent. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. For example, cultural awareness is promoted very well by links with schools in different socio-demographic areas and by pupils coming into contact with artists from countries such as Ghana. Pupils particularly enjoy contributing to their own and the wider community. The school building is used frequently by the community so links are not just one way. Pupils develop excellent skills, which prepare them very well for later life. For example, their involvement in their own learning is at a level not normally experienced in primary education. Pupils are self-assured and mature learners for their age who are a delight to be with.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding and enhanced by the contribution of skilled teaching assistants. The key factors that make teaching outstanding include:

- the innovative way pupils are successfully encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning
- the strong relationships and genuine sense of enthusiasm in learning shared by pupils and staff
- the very good use made of assessment information in planning work; and
- the excellent use and deployment made of teachers with specific curriculum knowledge and skills to ensure that the curriculum is very strong in all areas.

The focus in this school is on pupils' learning and on ensuring no matter what individual learning styles pupils have they are allowed to flourish. The high level of involvement of pupils in

improving their own work ensures that they understand precisely what they have to do to improve on their previous best. Teachers are extremely skilled at using the responses of all groups of pupils and, as a result, pupils' self-esteem is high and they are not afraid to 'have a say'. Pupils' speaking skills are excellent and their responses are rapid. Excellent readily accessible resources, such as, the beach area housed in a garden shed in the playground are skilfully used to engage pupils in learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school provides an outstanding curriculum that contributes very significantly to pupils' achievement and personal development. The way it is organised ensures that it enriches pupils' experience and makes learning more relevant and enjoyable because the focus is on learning experiences linked to every day life. A wide range of high quality extra-curricular learning opportunities is provided to enhance provision. These include artists working in school and many visits out of school to provide first hand experiences. The national awards for the work done in art and physical education bear true testimony to the fact that pupils experience a very wide and varied curriculum. Children in the Foundation Stage experience all aspects of the early year's curriculum and full use is made of the inside and outside areas. Links between subjects are excellent throughout the school. For example, the work done in design and technology includes every possible connection with other subjects, resulting in learning experiences and finished products of the highest quality. There are many opportunities for pupils to develop their creative, musical and sporting skills, during and after school. Time is used exceptionally well with staff, parents and pupils totally focused on ensuring that pupils are given the best possible learning experiences. The school has reorganised the writing curriculum further to ensure that pupils know how to improve on their previous best. Links with the community are at a very high level with the school rightly claiming that it is the centre for learning for people of all ages within the community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

All adults place a high priority on pupils' safety and academic achievement. Provision for pupils' safeguarding and personal welfare include child protection procedures that are firmly in place and reviewed regularly. Pupils are given excellent support personally and this ensures that they feel safe and secure in school. The small proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is catered for very well. The key to the school's success in the very high level of care it provides is that all members of staff take an interest in pupils as individuals. This means that pupils work and play together happily and successfully. Achievement and effort are recognised and valued highly. Pupils know their targets and these are changed regularly when they have been achieved, keeping expectations high. Teachers keep excellent records of pupils' attainment and progress and the information is used very well to plan future learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are of the highest quality. The school's success in ensuring outstanding pupil achievement is the result of the headteacher's vision and ability to focus on what really matters; that 'pupils are at the heart of the community and their education is our

core task.' She successfully leads and manages a school to ensure that pupils are valued for what they are with life long learning at the heart of all it provides. Pupils and parents are consulted on a regular basis and made to feel valued. The staff are fully involved in all aspects of leadership and management and work very closely to monitor the work of the school regularly and rigorously. All members of staff feel valued for the contribution they make and fully support the headteacher's relentless drive to ensure the very best for the pupils. They also create many opportunities for the pupils to contribute to the wider community. The school's strengths and areas for improvement are very well understood by staff and by the excellent team of governors who know and support the school very well. Governors always listen to parental views; for example, about pupils having to leave the school at the end of Year 3 and are doing what they can to enlarge the school to full primary status. The school has improved very well since the last inspection.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

10 May 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Armathwaite First School, Armathwaite, CA4 9PW

What a fabulous school you attend!

Thank you for the very friendly welcome you gave me when I visited the school recently. I really enjoyed my time with you and seeing some of you in lessons, even if it was only for a short time. I was really pleased to take some part in the archaeological dig. It was wonderful to see the pupils in the Reception age group being so successful in finding Blackbeard's treasure!

I am very pleased to tell you that your school is outstanding, which means it is one of the very best, not just in Cumbria, but in the whole country. You do very well in lessons and in tests because you work hard and understand the importance of this for the future. I agree with you that your teachers and other adults make lessons very interesting and that if you need help, you get it. I like the way that the teachers involve you in planning your work and in the way they involve you in deciding how to improve your work even further.

Your behaviour is excellent and I was very impressed with how polite you were. You were all very active at lunchtime and you benefit from very good playgrounds. You told me that you feel safe in school and that if problems occur an adult will sort it out quickly when you tell them about it.

I have asked the teachers to carry on with what they are doing in ensuring that you receive the very best education. Keep on working hard and as a result you can continue to play a major part in ensuring that your school continues to be highly regarded by all who come into contact with it.

Yours sincerely

Geoffrey Yates

Lead Inspector