



Milnthorpe Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 112184
Local Authority Cumbria
Inspection number 289195
Inspection dates 10–11 October 2006
Reporting inspector Kathleen McArthur

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary	School address	Firs Road
School category	Community		Milnthorpe, Cumbria
Age range of pupils	3–11		LA7 7QF
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01539 562344
Number on roll (school)	141	Fax number	01539 564154
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Marina Miles
		Headteacher	Mr Andy Blackman
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2002		

Age group 3–11	Inspection dates 10–11 October 2006	Inspection number 289195
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This small school occupies a spacious building near the centre of the small market town of Milnthorpe. Most pupils live in the town, but many Nursery pupils travel from several nearby villages. Attainment on entry to the school is below that expected for children this age. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is a little above average. A Children's Centre has recently opened at the school to provide a range of services for children and families.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. Good leadership by the headteacher has resulted in good improvement since the previous inspection. He has created a strong senior management team, strengthened the staff and, consequently, standards have risen. The school is a happy learning environment for all pupils so they attend well. Governance is good, demonstrated in stringent financial management that enabled the school to move forward despite severe budget difficulties. Value for money is good. Links between home and school are generally strong, and one typical parental comment was, 'My child has settled well and enjoys school'. There are good working links with local authority and community services, and there is a Children's Centre on the school site. Partnership with the Children's Centre is at a very early stage of development.

Standards are broadly average. Pupils achieve well and make good progress. In Key Stage 2, standards in science have risen considerably and are above average. This is due to very knowledgeable input from the subject leader and lively lessons that challenge pupils with practical investigations. By the end of Key Stage 2, the majority of pupils reach national standards in English and mathematics, preparing them satisfactorily for their economic well-being as adults. Writing skills, particularly for boys, are relatively weak. In Key Stage 1, standards are average. A slight downward trend in mathematics reflects pupils' lower starting points and, in some lessons, learning is not always challenging enough. Provision in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory and children make adequate progress. They almost reach the goals expected for their age except in language and calculation skills where standards are below average because pupils are not always fully challenged in these activities.

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers respond well to the demanding task of providing for the different age groups in their class and they motivate pupils with interesting learning activities. Consequently, pupils try hard and achieve well. Good assessment systems enable teachers to monitor each pupil's academic progress and show them just where to provide extra help. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported and make good progress. One parent rightly commented, 'Special needs provision is particularly well organised'. Personal development is good. Pupils are polite and behave well because they know that the system of consequences and rewards is very fair. Pupils are well cared for, feel safe in school and show lots of care and concern for others. School councillors relish their responsibilities and pupils are well prepared for life in the wider community.

The curriculum is good. Pupils think lessons are fun and say, 'We learn while we play games', so they work hard and progress well. Interesting activities including French, successfully enrich the curriculum.

Honest self-evaluation procedures have led to better results and recent action taken to raise standards in writing and mathematics is beginning to improve standards. Weaknesses identified at the previous inspection have been successfully overcome. Good strategic plans focus on improving provision and standards. The capacity for further improvement is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing, particularly for boys, and in mathematics for younger pupils.
- Ensure that learning activities for pupils in the Foundation Stage provide challenge for every pupil and increase the rate of progress in writing and numeracy especially.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are broadly average and pupils achieve well. Standards can vary from year to year due to the small number of pupils in each year group and the varying proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most children start school in the Nursery with below average levels of development, particularly in personal, social and language skills. In the Foundation Stage, they make satisfactory progress and by the end of Reception most children are just below the expected goals for their age. Their language and calculation skills are weaker.

Pupils make good progress throughout Key Stages 1 and 2 because they are taught well and enjoy learning. In 2005, standards at the end of Key Stage 1 were average and the national assessments in 2006 were similar. Information on standards provided by the school shows a slight downward trend in mathematics. This reflects pupils' weaker starting points in this area and there are some lessons where teaching does not challenge all pupils to do their very best.

In 2005, results in Key Stage 2 national tests were above average overall because of improved results in science. These reflected pupils' positive response to challenging practical investigations. Standards in English and mathematics were broadly average. Results in 2006 have dipped a little because there was a higher than average proportion of boys with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in this group and very few boys reached higher levels, especially in writing.

The performance of boys and girls varies, with girls tending to make better progress and reach higher standards than boys. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good guidance that supports their learning so they make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The inspection confirmed the school's evaluation of personal development as good. Rates of pupils' attendance are above average. Pupils enjoy their lessons and try hard so they progress well. Consistent use of the school's behaviour management systems results in good behaviour at play and in lessons. Good relationships are a strength of the school. Pupils are sure that bullying is not a problem and feel safe because they can turn to any adult for help. Lots of playground games, sports, weekly swimming lessons and healthy school meals ensure that pupils understand how to stay healthy. School councillors are proud of their roles in the community and report their discussions

to the school governors. Pupils' development of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills, and their understanding of the world of work, prepare pupils satisfactorily for their future economic well-being.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils have a strong sense of right and wrong and are well prepared for life in a multicultural society through global links with schools in other locations including Japan and India.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Parents are right to consider that teaching is good. Consequently, pupils achieve well. There is some outstanding teaching for older pupils. Lessons are well planned and most include practical investigations that stimulate pupils' enthusiasm and interest. Many pupils commented, 'All the teachers are fun and they encourage us to work hard.' Work is carefully matched to different abilities in most lessons, though in some numeracy teaching in Key Stage 1 not all pupils are fully challenged to do their very best. Classroom assistants provide skilled support, particularly for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly. Their comments help pupils to understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to take the next steps in their learning. Actions taken to improve writing and raise boys' attainment include more opportunities for structured speaking, listening and drama activities. These are beginning to improve standards but are not yet affecting results in national tests and assessments.

Teaching in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory. Learning outdoors is well planned but some learning activities in literacy and numeracy are not always challenging enough.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The inspection confirmed the school's evaluation that the curriculum is good. It meets all statutory requirements and provides a broad range of exciting learning activities. Subjects are linked imaginatively; for example, pupils develop their literacy skills through work based on the Victorians and they use mathematical skills to draw pie charts in science. Anti-bullying and health weeks effectively raise pupils' awareness of these important issues. Pupils benefit from good enrichment activities that include outside speakers, visits, and residential visits for older pupils. All pupils in Key Stage 2 are taught French, providing a valuable link with the local high school. There are several popular clubs outside lessons. Foundation Stage children experience the full range of learning activities and enjoy working outdoors every day.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school makes good provision for pupils' care, guidance and support, and this helps them achieve well. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are fully in place. Staff know pupils and their families very well. A good system of home visits helps children to settle quickly when they start in the Nursery. Productive links with the local high school, including specialist French teaching ensure that pupils move confidently to the next stage of their education.

The school is strongly committed to the new Children's Centre which is supportive of the school's vision of enabling all parents to be fully involved in their child's education. It will bring education, medical and welfare services for the whole community together on the school site. Partnerships with the different services are in the very early stages of development.

Staff make effective use of good assessment systems to monitor progress and direct extra help where it is most needed. They set targets that challenge their pupils to try harder. This has contributed to the better results seen in recent years.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The inspection found that leadership and management are good, better than the school's cautious judgement. Strong, committed leadership from the headteacher successfully led the school through the long period of staffing difficulties so weaknesses found at the previous inspection have been fully resolved. The quality of teaching has improved and results have gradually risen. Recent action taken to improve standards in writing and for boys is having a positive effect but has not yet affected results in national tests. The headteacher, capable senior leadership team, governors, and all staff have worked hard to shape the future direction of the school. Teachers lead and manage subjects and provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities well. Good governance has been effective in implementing rigorous strategies to overcome the legacy of a budget deficit caused by unavoidable staff absence which has now been resolved.

Plans for further improvement are supported well by performance management and professional development arrangements. Based on honest self-evaluation, plans are focused appropriately on raising standards and building partnerships with all parents. The school is an inclusive environment with equal opportunities for every pupil.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

Milnthorpe Primary School

Firs Road

Milnthorpe

Cumbria

LA7 7QF

12 October 2006

Dear Children

As you know I spent two days at your school recently. I am writing to let you know what I found out. First of all, I would like to say thank you for the very warm welcome you gave me. Everyone I met was very friendly, polite and really helpful so I enjoyed the time I spent with you.

You belong to a good school with good staff. I could see how much you enjoy coming to school each day and that you find your lessons very interesting. You work hard so you make good progress in lessons. All of you, especially the boys, now need to work harder with your teachers to improve your writing skills. The teachers are going to find ways to help the younger pupils to do better in numeracy.

You are well cared for and feel safe in school and you behave well. I was very impressed by how you work and play happily together and by the concern you show for each other.

Your headteacher is working very hard to establish the Children's Centre so all the services you and your families need are together on the school site. You have all carried on working hard in spite of all the building work. The school is working with your parents to help them to give you more help with your learning at home.

I am sure you will continue to work hard, and I wish you every success for the future.

Best Wishes

Mrs Kathleen McArthur

Lead inspector