



Vickerstown School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 112209
Local Authority Cumbria
Inspection number 289204
Inspection dates 14–15 November 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	Latona Street
School category	Community		Walney, Barrow-in-Furness
Age range of pupils	4–11		Cumbria, LA14 3QS
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01229 471350
Number on roll (school)	171	Fax number	01229 473220
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Graham Hempsall
		Headteacher	Mrs Michelle Phizacklea
Date of previous school inspection	1 June 2001		

Age group 4–11	Inspection dates 14–15 November 2006	Inspection number 289204
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This small school stands very near the coast on Walney Island. The proportion of pupils who receive a free school meal is about average, but the proportion who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is high. The school is designated as a resourced provision for pupils with a very wide range of severe learning, physical or medical difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders. These pupils are educated with their peers. There is a little more movement in and out of the school than is usual as pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are directed to the school at different times. There are a few children who are 'looked after' by the local authority. The headteacher has been in post for one year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory and improving school. Inspectors confirm the school's evaluation of how effective it is. It provides satisfactory value for money.

The headteacher's good leadership, energy, vision and very strong commitment has revitalised the school and created a sense of purpose shared by staff and governors. Parents made many positive comments about the school. One said her child enjoys school so much, 'He runs there every day from the other side of the island.' The high quality provision for all pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for the looked after children is a strength of the school. Parents of these pupils value the support and guidance their children receive, and the way they are included in every aspect of school life. Achievement is satisfactory throughout the school and while standards in recent years have been below average they are now improving. Standards in English, however, particularly those in writing and those attained by boys, are not as high as those in other subjects. The school is dealing with a history of well below average standards, particularly in mathematics. The headteacher has acted rigorously and swiftly to tackle this by putting strategies in place to raise attainment including:

These strategies had an immediate effect. Mathematics results rose to national levels in 2006 and more pupils reached the higher levels in both English and mathematics.

The school has real strengths in the way it promotes pupils' personal development and well-being and how it cares for them all. Consequently, pupils show high levels of care and concern for others and thoroughly enjoy everything the school provides. They behave well and there are happy relationships between everyone at the school. Pupils feel safe and clearly understand how to stay healthy.

Children make satisfactory progress in the Foundation Stage and enjoy the practical activities. Although staff performance management procedures are not yet in place, teaching is satisfactory overall, resulting in satisfactory progress throughout the school. Lessons are well organised, and links between subjects make learning more relevant. Occasionally, pupils are given work that is too difficult or too easy for them and this slows the rate of progress. Good knowledge and expertise in teaching pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities ensure their progress is good in relation to their starting points. The curriculum is enriched well by many opportunities described by one parent as 'educational as well as fun for the children'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English, particularly in writing and the attainment of boys.
- Fully implement performance management procedures for all staff in order to increase the proportion of good teaching.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Assessment information shows that levels of attainment on entry vary from year to year depending on pupils' starting points and the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The number of pupils admitted at different times also has some impact. Overall, children's attainment when they enter the school is below that typical for their age.

Achievement is satisfactory. Practical learning activities in the Foundation Stage, many of which are of a good quality, ensure children make satisfactory progress. Few meet all the goals expected at the end of Reception, and their skills are lowest in literacy and numeracy. Pupils make satisfactory progress throughout the school. The pupils in the resourced provision and the looked after children make satisfactory and often good progress because they are well supported through individual education programmes.

Standards in Key Stage 1 are broadly in line with national expectations but dipped in 2006. School data clearly show that this year group had a high proportion of pupils with learning and behavioural difficulties and/or disabilities. In Key Stage 2, standards in recent years have been well below average overall. In 2005 pupils did not meet their targets for English or mathematics. Again, school data show that this class had a high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties, and also pupils who did not start their education at the school. Science has improved since 2004 and is in line with national standards. Improvements were seen in 2006, particularly in mathematics, due to the rigorous strategies introduced to raise attainment, but standards in English are still an area for improvement. Girls outperform boys at Key Stage 2. Specific programmes, such as 'talk partners' introduced to boost boys' attainment, have yet to become fully effective. School information shows that pupils currently in Year 6 are on course to meet their targets for 2007.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. As one parent observed, teachers treat pupils with respect and in return pupils treat others well. Staff work hard to build up pupils' self-esteem so they have confidence in their own abilities. This is seen in pupils' mature attitudes and articulate expression of ideas. They are especially caring towards their peers who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and think this is one of the best things about the school because 'It gives us an appreciation of disability'. The curriculum helps them understand other cultures and beliefs. The residential visit to Bradford is valuable preparation for future life in a multicultural society.

Excitement in learning is often evident. Pupils enjoy school and behave well. When they received letters from pupils in Bangkok, Year 5 pupils reacted by saying 'Wow!' Pupils say there are no problems with bullying and know any incidents are quickly

sorted out so feel safe in school. Warm, friendly relationships mean pupils feel confident to seek help from any member of staff. Playground 'buddies' are proud of their roles. School councillors have raised money for the outdoor play equipment which has added further opportunities for physical activity and made playtimes more enjoyable for everyone. Organising charity fundraising and good information and communication technology (ICT) skills contribute positively to the pupils' future economic well-being, but literacy skills are not high enough. Attendance is satisfactory and the school runs an inter-class competition to improve attendance.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory throughout the school so pupils make satisfactory progress. Typical teaching features well planned and organised lessons that use a wide range of resources, including interactive whiteboards, to make learning interesting. Teachers ensure pupils know what they are going to learn. Where teaching was good, pupils made faster progress. For example, Year 5 pupils made rapid progress in their ability to skim texts for information when they were excited about writing to penfriends in Bangkok. Good relationships support all pupils well, especially those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Skilled teaching, often through individual support, ensures these pupils make good progress. Teaching assistants are usually deployed well and provide effective support. Occasionally, time is not used well and sometimes work is too hard for some pupils and too easy for others. This slows progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum meets the needs of all pupils and all statutory requirements satisfactorily. Literacy and numeracy are now taught each day. Pupils use their skills in other subjects, for example by writing reports in science and retelling Bible stories. Regular ICT lessons ensure pupils acquire good skills. Sometimes, subjects are linked creatively to make learning more relevant, as seen in a literacy lesson when Year 2 pupils wrote instructions for a future design activity. Pupils and parents appreciate the good range of enrichment opportunities and wide variety of clubs offered by the school. Residential visits and trips extend learning, and enhance personal, social and cultural development well. All pupils up to Year 5 have weekly swimming lessons, vital when living so close to the sea and further evidence of the school's high level of care. Children in the Foundation Stage experience a range of practical learning activities that include learning outside each day.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school is an inclusive, caring environment. Arrangements for safeguarding the security of pupils are firmly in place. All pupils, including the looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are well cared for. Parents and pupils really appreciate the way pupils with severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities are fully included because it adds an extra dimension to the school. Good transition arrangements ensure pupils transfer confidently to secondary school. These arrangements are particularly strong for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school has recently introduced good, thorough tracking systems. Staff use the information to monitor pupils' progress closely and direct support to those who are underachieving. The information provided is used to set targets for pupils so they know what they are expected to learn. These systems have yet to be firmly embedded and used consistently to improve the rate of progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher has demonstrated good leadership by quickly developing a shared culture of school improvement. She is well supported by the deputy headteacher and the assistant headteacher in developing the professional role of the senior leadership team, involving them in performance analysis and implementing improvement strategies. The provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well led and managed by the skilled inclusion manager. Governance is satisfactory. The governing body is led well and a new committee structure and training have equipped governors to hold the school to account.

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The school analyses its performance honestly and accurately and this has resulted in appropriate and rigorous actions taken to raise attainment. These include new systems to monitor the quality of teaching and learning; the systems are thorough and, although they are at an early stage of implementation, there are clear signs of their effectiveness. Performance management procedures are in use for the headteacher but not for other staff. The commitment to inclusion and equal opportunities for all pupils is strong, but some pockets of underachievement remain, particularly by boys.

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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?	3
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	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
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	3
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?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
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	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

Vickerstown School

Latona Street

Walney

Barrow-in-Furness

Cumbria

LA14 3QS

16 November 2006

Dear Children

You will remember that inspectors visited your school recently. We would like to say how much we enjoyed our visit and to thank you for making us so welcome. Everyone we met was polite, friendly, helpful and very proud of their school. It was good of so many of you to give up your free time to talk to us and tell us about your school.

These are some of the things we found out. You enjoy school and behave well. We were very impressed by how well you care for each other and really look after the children who find learning difficult or cannot move around easily. The adults at the school look after you all very well and make sure you are safe and busy in school.

You told us you enjoy all the after-school clubs, and going on trips and residential visits. We heard about the visit to Grizedale and how the teachers tricked you into getting up early by saying it was snowing outside!

You have a good headteacher. She works hard along with all the staff and the governors, and we have asked them to do some things to help make your school even better.

They are going to make sure you progress more quickly and to help you reach higher standards in your work, especially in writing. They will find ways to help the boys do better.

The staff will also do some learning themselves so they find out the best ways to support you all.

You can do a lot to help your teachers by making sure you work hard and always do your best.

Our very best wishes to you all

Mrs Kathleen McArthur

Lead Inspector