



Holm Cultram Abbey C of E School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 112249
Local Authority Cumbria
Inspection number 289217
Inspection dates 21–22 September 2006
Reporting inspector David Earley

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Abbey Town
School category	Voluntary controlled		Wigton, Cumbria
Age range of pupils	4–11		CA7 4RU
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01697 361261
Number on roll (school)	78	Fax number	01697 361309
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Terrence Gilroy
		Headteacher	Mrs Linda McDonald
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected		

Age group 4–11	Inspection dates 21–22 September 2006	Inspection number 289217
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average school which draws its pupils from a wide area, and is situated on the outskirts of Wigton in Cumbria. There are no pupils for whom English is a second language and all are from White British backgrounds. Eligibility for free school meals is low and attendance is above average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. Pupils are taught in three mixed age classes and one single age class. There were significant disruptions in staffing and leadership during the last year but with the appointment of a new headteacher and new teachers the situation is now stable.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Inspection findings agree with those of the school that this is a satisfactory and improving school with some good features. It gives satisfactory value for money. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Good leadership by the new headteacher, well supported by staff, many of whom are also new, gives a shared sense of purpose and stability focused on challenge and improvement. This is leading to a rise in standards. However, subject coordinators do not yet fulfil their role in checking progress. Teachers are well supported by governors. They share their vision and are beginning to develop their skills in checking and evaluating the work of the school.

Standards at the end of the Foundation Stage are in line with what would be expected for children this age and are improving. At the end of Key Stage 1 and 2, standards are broadly average and improving. Pupils of all abilities, including the large proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in some year groups, achieve satisfactorily. Improvements stem from the good teaching and the strategies adopted by the school. These have been significant features in halting the recent decline in standards at the end of Key Stage 2. However, there has been insufficient time for these to have full impact on standards, which need to be higher.

Personal development is a real strength of the school. Pupils come into the school willingly and cheerfully because work is interesting and relationships are very good. The school has a strong family ethos where all are valued and respected, whatever their abilities. Play leaders organise younger children in games in the playground and pupils eagerly help with the smooth running of the school. Pupils are polite and helpful and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good. They are well prepared for the world of work and contribute enthusiastically to the school and wider community. Pupils say that they feel safe and understand the importance of healthy lifestyles.

A significant cause of the improving standards is the good teaching. Teachers bring a dynamism and energy to their work, which helps to make learning exciting. They are ambitious for their pupils and ensure that work is suited to age and ability. As a result, pupils make good progress in lessons, which is helping to eradicate previous underachievement.

Visits, visitors, good use of the extensive grounds, garden and play equipment enhance a rich curriculum. It is well planned and cohesive so that where subjects are linked together they give a real purpose to learning. All pupils are well cared for and feel safe. Liaison with outside agencies is good and this helps to support pupils, particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are good links with parents and they often come into school to work with pupils. The system for tracking progress throughout the school is not efficient and this limits the effectiveness of the academic advice and support provided.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards in both key stages.

- Extend the role of subject leaders in monitoring and evaluating standards and achievement in order to make improvements.
- Improve the whole-school tracking system to check pupils' progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children come into school with broadly average standards. Achievement in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory and improving because the teaching is good and children have increased opportunities to extend their skills through the new outdoor curriculum. At the end of the Foundation Stage, standards are in line with what is expected for children this age.

Standards in reading, writing and mathematics are average at the end of Year 2. These are improving, as indicated by national test results in 2005 and 2006 and from evidence seen during the inspection.

Over the past five years, standards at the end of Key Stage 2 have declined year-on-year and pupils have underachieved. Results in the national tests in 2005 at the end of Year 6 were significantly below average in English, mathematics and science. Results were affected by the high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in this year group and high levels of mobility. Pupils' performance in the 2006 tests was better, reaching standards nearer to those expected for those Year 6 pupils. Continuing improvement is seen in the current Year 6, where pupils are making good progress in lessons and achieving satisfactorily in relation to their capabilities. The legacy of underachievement by the end of Year 6 is being steadily eroded.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being are good because the school puts into practice the principles proclaimed on the board outside the entrance: 'Our school is a community. Everyone in it is valued and everyone values each other.' Pupils say they feel safe in school and are confident to approach an adult should they have a problem. They are well behaved and go out of their way to help each other. They come into school with smiling faces, eager to meet their teachers and friends. Pupils know all about healthy lifestyles because they have a choice of healthy meals and opportunities for lots of exercise. The school council makes a strong contribution to the life of the school; for example, councillors helped to improve play equipment. Pupils learn about responsibility in their roles as play leaders and are encouraged to develop skills of collaboration and problem-solving, preparing them well for the world of work. They contribute well to the life of the community. When the local abbey burned down pupils spontaneously began raising money for its renovation. They often raise funds for charity. Pupils clearly understand the differences between right and wrong and develop good spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. The very positive attitudes to their work and life in

school are epitomised in the 'You can do it' assemblies where pupils celebrate the achievements of others and reinforce their sense of community.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Central to the improving standards and good progress in the school are the good teaching and learning. Teachers are committed, energetic and determined to make work interesting and challenging. They are well supported in this by teaching assistants. Relationships are very good and teachers manage pupils well so that pupils are confident to engage in dialogue and they generally behave well and sustain their concentration. Throughout the school, pupils are encouraged to become independent learners; for example, in the Foundation Stage children choose their outdoor activities. Teachers have good subject knowledge, which is used well in posing questions to challenge thinking. They make good use of assessments in order to plan work suited to the differing abilities and ages of pupils, very important in mixed age classes. Careful explanations are a strong feature of teaching so that pupils understand clearly what they are about. For example, in the younger Key Stage 2 class, the teacher made good use of an exciting story in order to illustrate different settings.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad, rich and well balanced. A newly implemented approach to planning is beginning to ensure that pupils see links between subjects and this helps to bring relevance to their learning. The curriculum is further brought to life by the wide range of visits and visitors and of out-of-school clubs. For example, as part of their residential visit to Robin Wood, pupils developed their social skills, independence and poetry writing. The curriculum is enriched by the school grounds, outdoor fixed apparatus and garden which provide an exciting range of opportunities to extend learning. In a similar way, the new Foundation Stage outdoor working area is helping children to extend their skills. There is good provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and this is enhanced by close liaison with outside agencies. The school has good links with its local feeder nursery and secondary schools so that transfer between phases is usually smooth.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Pastoral care, guidance and support for all pupils are good. The school's systems for academic support and guidance are satisfactory. This is a very caring school. Pupils and their families are well known to staff and there is a real family atmosphere where pupils feel safe. They say that they enjoy coming to school 'because everybody is happy and cheerful'. Child protection

and risk assessment are in place. Most parents are confident about approaching school and are happy with the care provided. There are good links with parents and they are kept informed about what is going on in school and about how to help their children. The school assesses pupils' work thoroughly but its systems for tracking progress as they progress through the school are not sufficiently efficient or accessible in providing ready information with which to guide and support their progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Although the headteacher has been in post for a relatively short period, her enthusiasm and conviction are instrumental in promoting a clear and purposeful vision for the improvement of the school. Along with staff and governors, this is leading to improvements in standards and provision. A high proportion of teachers are new to the school but already all staff are beginning to develop well as a team, setting challenging targets to raise standards. However, subject leaders do not have opportunities to monitor and evaluate standards in their subjects in order to make improvements. Work by the previous acting headteacher and the current headteacher has enabled a clear and realistic evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This has led to the inclusion of clearly identified priorities in the school improvement plan, which is proving to be effective. For example, the focus on assessment and standards is leading to higher standards.

The very enthusiastic governors are supportive. They are beginning to develop their contribution to the monitoring and evaluation of achievement and standards. New governors are receiving training in order to improve their skills. Parents have positive views of the school and have many opportunities for contributing to the life of the school. Resources are managed well and the school has made recent improvement since the last inspection. Strong leadership, the enthusiasm and commitment of staff and governors, and improvements already made give the school good capacity to improve.

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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	2
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?	3
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	2

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?	3

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	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	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

Holm Cultram Abbey CofE School

Abbey Town

Wigton

Cumbria

CA7 4RU

25 September 2006

Dear Pupils

Thank you very much for making me feel so welcome when I visited your school. I enjoyed seeing your smiling faces and was very impressed by the way you care for each other and by the way you do lots of jobs to help to look after the school. It is such a friendly place and you all work so hard. It is easy to see why your parents are pleased that you go there and that your attendance is good.

These are some of the things that your school does well:

- your headteacher leads the school well and with the teachers is working hard to help you to improve your work
- all of you, including the children who find learning difficult, are helped to make good progress with your learning
- you all try to be polite and well behaved
- the teaching in your school is good. Teachers make learning interesting for you and you go on visits and join different clubs and this helps you to learn better
- you know about the importance of a healthy diet and plenty of exercise
- your school is a very caring and happy place.

These are some of the things we think could be better:

- improve your reading, writing, mathematics and science
- I have talked to your headteacher about improving the way your progress is checked
- teachers need more opportunities to check how well you learn in all the different subjects so that they can make improvements.

Thank you once again for being so friendly and helpful.

David Earley

Lead Inspector