

Lorton School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112133
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	310794
Inspection dates	12–13 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Pat Kime HMI

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	74
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Helen Humphreys
Headteacher	Mrs Olivia Harrison (acting)
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2004
School address	High Lorton Cockermouth Cumbria CA13 9UL
Telephone number	01900 325700
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Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

Lorton School is a small school which serves a socially and economically advantaged area. This includes the village of Lorton and an extensive rural community with some isolated farms. About a fifth of the pupils are from beyond the school's normal admissions area. A significant minority of pupils join the school part way through their primary education. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is low compared with the national average. Very few pupils are from minority ethnic groups and none has English as an additional language. The pupils are taught in three mixed-age classes; Reception and Years 1 and 2 are in one class and the Key Stage 2 classes each cater for two year groups.

At the time of inspection, an acting headteacher drawn from the school's staff was in her second week in charge, following the retirement of the previous headteacher who had held the post for 17 years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Lorton is a good school. Within a family atmosphere, it provides a good academic education and high quality pastoral care. The school's ethos is valued highly by parents and enjoyed by pupils. All pupils make good progress in their learning and their personal development is outstanding. The staff work together well. They are committed to doing the best for pupils and maintaining the school's ethos. They, with governors, have the capacity to improve the school further.

The vast majority of parents have a very positive view of the school. Many wrote to the inspector praising the family-oriented, nurturing atmosphere, the personalised approach and the emphasis on building pupils' well-being, confidence and self-esteem. The positive impact of this ethos is most evident in the quality of pastoral care and in pupils' personal development. Staff know the pupils and their families very well and provide very good care and support. Pupils have lots of opportunities to take responsibility, develop independence and contribute to the life of the school and the wider community. These opportunities, and the school's ethos, make a big contribution to pupils' excellent behaviour and their development of the personal attributes that enable them to benefit fully from lessons.

Teaching is good. The staff clearly enjoy being with their pupils and the pupils respond very well, working hard in lessons. Teachers match work to the needs of all pupils in the mixed-age classes and the curriculum is planned to ensure that pupils tackle harder work each year as they move up the school. The school has a superb setting within the Lake District National Park. It uses the resources of the locality and visits and visitor well to enrich the curriculum. The knowledge of staff is augmented by the use of part-time and specialist teachers as well as some teaching across age groups, for instance in physical education.

Pupils make good overall progress in Key Stages 1 and 2, though in general, progress is slower in English, especially writing, than in mathematics and science. By Year 6, standards are usually securely above the national average.

Governance is good in most regards but the governing body has not ensured that the school meets the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship. However, it has ensured a good degree of continuity at an unsettled time for the school. The staff share a common purpose and commitment to the school; they have a track record of working together to improve what the school offers and pupils' achievement. The issues raised at the previous inspection have, for the most part, been tackled effectively. Nonetheless, the school's approach to self-evaluation lacks the rigour to underpin planning for improvement as well as it could. The acting headteacher has a good grasp of the school's performance and sensible plans to build on the existing plans for improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children get a good start in the Reception (Foundation Stage). They settle in quickly and, by the end of the year, many reach standards that exceed the national expectation for children of their age. The teaching is good. The curriculum covers all the required areas and a good range of purposeful activities are planned for the children. Children enjoy learning, often through first-hand experiences and practical work, both indoors and out. Good teamwork between the teacher and teaching assistant ensures that children in Reception benefit from a

good level of support and individual attention as well as opportunities to join pupils in Years 1 and 2 for some of their activities. They make particularly good progress in personal, social and emotional development. Children's achievements and their rate of progress are monitored carefully and the information is used well to influence the planning of future lessons.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' achievement in English, particularly writing.
- Sharpen its self-evaluation so it fully informs planning for improvement.
- Meet the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

All groups of pupils achieve well overall. Those who have particular difficulty learning get the extra help they need and the more able are pushed on in their learning.

Children's attainment when they start school in Reception varies from year to year. Taken overall it is typical of what children of their age can do, though with early language skills it is sometimes a little below average. The school's records show that, whatever their starting point, children make good progress in Reception. By the end of the year, they reach standards that are usually above the expectation for their age overall, but they do not fully catch up in early reading and writing.

In Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils continue to make good progress. Standards reached in the national tests and assessments at age 7 and 11 fluctuate because year groups are small and the abilities of pupils vary from year to year. From 2002 to 2006 standards were generally above the national average in both key stages. National comparisons are not available for 2007 but the results show that pupils in both key stages met the school's targets, which were challenging. Nonetheless, it is evident that, in Key Stage 1, pupils achieve better in mathematics and science than in English and, in Key Stage 2, standards in writing lag behind those in reading and mathematics.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development and well-being are outstanding. In the school's very caring atmosphere, where each is treated as a valued individual member of the school community, pupils make good progress in their personal development.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, particularly so in the social and moral aspects. From their earliest days at school, pupils learn independence and responsibility and contribute to the life of the school as a community. By upper Key Stage 2, pupils take full responsibility for organising fund-raising events, they run the loan system for playground equipment at break times, and they help each other resolve any minor problems that arise. Cultural development is good because pupils have a wealth of opportunities to learn about the local culture and the school provides a good range of activities to help pupils learn about the diversity of cultural and religious traditions in Britain and the wider world.

Pupils enjoy school greatly. They say it is 'really unique' and 'brilliant' and they appreciate what the staff do for them, especially the support they get if they find any learning difficult. They struggle to think of anything they would want to see changed but, when they do, their

suggestions are sensible and constructive. Pupils' very positive attitudes to learning and their excellent behaviour contribute significantly to their learning. They result in very well-ordered lessons in which everyone tries hard.

Pupils know very well how to keep themselves healthy and safe in and out of school. They understand what constitutes a healthy diet and take up of the healthy meals cooked at the school is high. Despite the limitations of the building, pupils are physically active.

As well as contributing much to the school community, pupils add to the life of the local community in several ways. For example, they compete in the annual Loweswater Show, participate in local historical society events, and invite members of the community to school events.

Pupils generally reach above average standards in basic skills; they develop the personal attributes needed for learning and successful relationships; and they develop economic awareness. Thus they are very well-prepared to benefit from the next stage of their education and for their future economic well-being.

Attendance rates have picked up recently and are in line with the national average.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Throughout the school teaching is good and the staff clearly enjoy their work. They have extremely good relationships with their pupils and create a positive atmosphere for learning. Consequently pupils are confident to ask for help when they need it. They say that staff help them if they do not understand something. Teachers take trouble to ensure that work is sufficiently closely matched to the needs of all pupils in mixed-age classes. For example, they organise lessons so they can focus on introducing new work to particular groups of pupils. However, occasionally this means that some other pupils spend too long without the teacher checking on their work. The match of work is confirmed by pupils who said that their work is 'quite hard' and that the teachers are kind but make them work hard. In lessons it was clear that pupils had to make an effort to complete the work set. In sessions with the full class, teachers are skilled at matching questions to individual pupils but sometimes they do not make the most of opportunities to reinforce new learning in a variety of ways. Additional support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, within and outside of class lessons, is usually of a good quality and ensures that, in relation to capability, they achieve as well as their classmates. Occasionally, in class lessons, these pupils spend too little time practising or extending their basic skills.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good curriculum. It is carefully planned to ensure that pupils cover all that they should. Work becomes more demanding as pupils move up the school and in the core subjects, this progression is planned well. In subjects other than English and mathematics, teachers use nationally recommended plans of work to pitch lessons for the age of their pupils. However, year on year progression in knowledge, understanding and skills is not always as sharply planned as in English and mathematics. There are some good examples of work that links several subjects. Nonetheless, staff acknowledge that more opportunities could be created

for pupils to use the key skills of literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum. The provision to promote pupils personal development is outstanding.

The curriculum is enriched well with a good range of visits and visitors which broaden pupils' horizons and capitalise on the resources of the local area.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral care is excellent and as a result, pupils feel safe at school and supported by the staff. Pupils are quite definite that there is no bullying at their school. All requirements regarding health and safety are in place and safe day to day routines are very well-established and understood by pupils. Some pupils face considerable difficulties in their personal lives; the school supports them very well.

Academic guidance and support is satisfactory. The standards pupils have reached are checked regularly. Challenging targets are set for pupils' results in the tests and assessments at the end of each key stage. Underachievement is identified and additional help is given to the pupils. However, when pupils' rate of progress is simply satisfactory, action is not taken to raise their achievement before setting the next target. This in part accounts for the disparity between pupils' achievement in mathematics and English.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The acting headteacher has made a smooth transition into the role, providing stability and continuity for pupils and staff and maintaining the school's ethos. She has a good grasp of the school's effectiveness and recognises where improvements can be made. She has already begun to formulate plans to tackle some of these by building on the existing plans for improvement. For example, she intends to introduce a more rigorous approach to checking the quality of teaching and learning and assessing pupils' progress. At present, the links between setting targets, tracking pupils' progress towards them, identifying barriers to better achievement and planning for improvement are not as strong as they might be. The schools self-evaluation accurately evaluates as good pupils' achievement, the quality of teaching and learning, and quality and standards in the Foundation Stage, and pupils' personal development and well-being as outstanding. In other respects it was generous.

The acting headteacher is supported well by a cohesive and committed staff team who work closely together and contribute fully to identifying areas for development. Governors are well-informed and involved in school life and planning for the future. The school is well-placed to continue 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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	1
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?	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.

Annex A

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

17 September 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Lorton School, Cumbria, CA13 9UL

I expect you remember that I visited your school recently. I came to see how well all the children are learning. Thank you for making me feel welcome and for talking to me about your work and what it's like being a pupil at your school. This letter is to tell you what I found out.

Lorton is a good school. It has a lovely family atmosphere. One of the best things about your school is the way the adults help you all to grow up well. I was particularly impressed by four things:

- your excellent behaviour
- how hard you all work in lessons
- the way you get along together so well and help each other
- what sensible, responsible and independent young people you are by Year 6.

You are taught well. All of you make good progress in your learning but you don't do quite as well in English as in mathematics and science. You have some good opportunities for activities beyond lessons, like the annual fell walk and the residential trips to Barcaple and Buttermere. It was also good to see that you get involved in organising events at school and thinking of ways to make it the school even better. Your 'suggestions box' has had lots of good ideas in it.

I have suggested that the staff and governors should:

- help you to do better in English, particularly writing
- sharpen up the way they decide what's most important to do to make your school even better
- make sure that you have an assembly every day, because all schools should do that.

I'm sure that you will be able to help them with good ideas of your own.

Each and every one of you has my very best wishes for your future.

Yours sincerely

Pat Kime

Her Majesty's Inspector