

# Castle Park School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	112189
<b>Local Authority</b>	Cumbria
<b>Inspection number</b>	310806
<b>Inspection dates</b>	15–16 January 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Steve Isherwood HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	317
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Austen Robinson
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Roger Shone
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 March 2004
<b>School address</b>	Sedbergh Drive Kendal Cumbria LA9 6BE
<b>Telephone number</b>	01539 773633
<b>Fax number</b>	01539 721812

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools and two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

This is an above average sized school, situated to the north east of Kendal in Cumbria. The area served by the school is of mixed housing and is socially and economically similar to the national picture. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage with a small number from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. When children start school their attainment is generally below that expected for their age.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to pupils' achievement and standards.

Since the previous inspection in 2004, the overall effectiveness of the school has declined; it is now inadequate. Standards have fallen significantly which means that the school has made inadequate progress since that time. The school judges its overall effectiveness to be satisfactory but, in doing so, it has not taken sufficient account of the acknowledged underachievement of pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2. Given that most children start school with knowledge and skills below that which is typical for their age, the school is adding good value in the Foundation Stage where children make good progress to reach expected levels by the beginning of Year 1. Nevertheless, they do not make enough progress in Years 1 and 2 as standards are below the national average in reading and mathematics and exceptionally low in writing at the end of Year 2. In addition, pupils leaving school at the end of Year 6, especially boys, are not achieving as well as they should be as standards have been below the national average in all core subjects for the past two years. This is because the school is not yet able to use consistently what it knows about pupils' attainment and progress to inform its teaching. For example, the school lags behind many other primaries in the quality and range of procedures to check how well pupils are achieving. Systems to pinpoint pupils who are underachieving and those requiring extra support are only just beginning to emerge across the school. The school has only recently begun to make best use of national programmes to boost the learning of those pupils who fall behind in reading writing and mathematics.

Although the overall quality of teaching is satisfactory with some strong and outstanding features, as yet, lessons are not consistently challenging and engaging to drive on learning and compensate for the background of underachievement and the gaps in the pupils' knowledge and skills. Nevertheless, new initiatives to improve teaching are helping teachers to increase their understanding of pupils' progress which in turn is strengthening their ability to plan more relevant activities. The curriculum is satisfactory and meets pupils' needs appropriately. However, across the school there are some inconsistencies in the way that activities are planned which means there is a variation in the challenge for pupils, particularly the highest attainers.

Personal development, including spiritual, moral and social development is good. Cultural development is satisfactory. Pupils say that they enjoy school and feel safe and secure. Parents' questionnaires overwhelmingly support this view. Pupils know about the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle and the school's work on this has earned an award. School councillors are proactive and are justifiably proud to have been actively involved in the recent appointment of the headteacher and in initiating their own fund raising activities. For the most part, pupils are well mannered and well behaved. Parents appreciate that the school is now ensuring greater consistency in how adults manage behaviour and as result there are higher expectations and clearer boundaries for pupils.

The school has a positive reputation within the community and has developed good partnerships with other schools and agencies.

Despite the current difficulties, leadership and management are satisfactory. The school has several elements that indicate strong potential for things to improve quickly. Not least are the commitment and drive of the new headteacher, the recently appointed chair of governors and the newly formed leadership team. Together they have achieved a lot in one term and are determined to get the school back on track. Expectations have been raised, morale is improving and staff are increasingly accountable for their work. As a result, the legacy of underachievement is being tackled more effectively and senior leaders have a clearer view of how well the school is performing. The stronger focus on raising achievement and developing a culture of learning means that pupils are beginning to make better progress than previously, particularly in mathematics and standards are set to rise. The school is well placed to improve further with the effective support of the local authority. The whole-school commitment to improving outcomes for pupils and the positive way the schools acts on advice has strengthened its capacity to improve.

The school has the strong support of parents who recognise the school's strengths in providing a caring and nurturing environment for all pupils. Many also appreciate that the school has been through a time of much change and disruption over the past three years without a permanent leader. "After a period of managerial change over several years, we are very pleased to see a sense of stability in the school now with the appointment of the new headteacher" was a typical comment from one parent.

## **Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 2**

Provision in the Foundation Stage is good and helps children to achieve well. Children enter the Nursery with a range of knowledge and skills. For many, this is the first experience of learning outside the home. Their levels of knowledge vary enormously but overall their skills are below expectations for children of their age. They get off to a good start in a structured and stimulating environment where teaching is good and where all children are well cared for and supported extremely well. Staff have high expectations and patiently teach the required social skills. This means that children settle quickly into routines and enjoy what they do because they feel safe and secure. They grow quickly in self esteem and progress well in all aspects of their work. Children enjoy a wide range of stimulating activities both in and out of doors. In the Reception year, they make mature choices about their activities and work well together. Free access to writing materials helps them to practice and develop their skills. Staff have a clear understanding of how young children learn best and provide a range of activities for children to learn independently and grow in confidence. For example, during the inspection children in the two Reception classes were busy travelling to many different places from their train station. These stimulating opportunities fire the children's imagination and mean that they make good progress in their language and social development. Staff continually assess how well children are achieving and use the information to plan further challenges. As a result by the time children are ready to enter Year 1 at five years of age, the vast majority have reached the levels expected nationally in all areas of learning.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- Raise standards and improve pupils' achievement in English, mathematics and science, in Years 1 to 6.
- Ensure that the quality of teaching is consistently good or better.

- Use information from tracking pupils' progress and from monitoring the quality of provision to ensure that pupils are always provided with suitably challenging and engaging work.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 4**

The schools test results and teacher assessments for 2007 show that standards and achievement are inadequate. Too many pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in Years 1 to 6, are not achieving as well as they should because of gaps in the teaching and inconsistencies in the provision. The progress pupils make in Key Stages 1 and 2 has not built effectively on what has been achieved in the Foundation Stage, so that standards at age seven and 11 are not high enough and are far lower than they should be.

When children enter the school their attainment is below that which is typical for their age, particularly in language and mathematical development. They achieve well and by the beginning of Year 1 many reach and exceed the expected levels. Progress in Years 1 and 2 slows. As a result, in the 2007 assessments, standards for Year 2 pupils were below the national average in reading and mathematics and well below in writing where no pupils reached the higher level 3.

The school's overall performance in the national tests at Year 6 has fallen since 2005. In the most recent tests for eleven year olds in 2007, standards in all core subjects were below average at Level 4, the standard expected for their age and at the higher Level 5. In addition, the school fell short of its targets for these pupils, especially in mathematics where, as in English and science, too many pupils did not reach their full potential.

In lessons seen during the inspection however, achievement was satisfactory. In no lessons was it inadequate. This is because the school has recently introduced several new strategies to improve pupils' achievement, which in turn are leading to improvements in classroom practice. Nevertheless, whilst improving, the achievement of the higher attaining pupils is not yet high enough. This is because the level of challenge in some lessons is still variable which means that some pupils do not always achieve as well or as rapidly as they should.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

The school has maintained its strength in this aspect of its work and has accurately judged its quality to be good. The pupils are self assured, display positive attitudes to learning and generally try hard. Behaviour is good and has improved recently in response to improvements in teaching and clearer expectations for pupils. Their spiritual, moral and social development is good. Although the pupils know about different faiths, festivals and aspects of other cultures, their cultural development is satisfactory. Good attendance mirrors their enjoyment of school and their enthusiasm to take part in sport and physical activities. Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles and know the importance of regular exercise and a healthy diet. Pupils feel safe and secure, confident in the knowledge that any cases of bullying will be dealt with effectively by staff. One boy explained "I can go to any member of staff and they will help me."

Pupils play an active role in decision making through the school council and feel that their views are taken into account. Older pupils take good care of younger ones and new pupils are supported by a 'buddy' system of helpers. Through the election of school councillors, organising

their own fund raising activities and the excellent opportunities provided in philosophy lessons, pupils develop a strong social conscience, are keen to take on responsibility and show initiative.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory with some good and outstanding features. Good teaching in the Nursery and Reception classes is well planned to meet the needs of all children, with a strong emphasis on active, enjoyable learning. Work is appropriately challenging, with good support from teachers and teaching assistants to ensure pupils are successful. In Years 1 to 6, teaching and learning are satisfactory overall with good and better teaching in some lessons. In the strongest lessons, relationships are good, pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning and activities are carefully planned. Teachers make good use of learning objectives to make sure the pupils know what they have to do. Lessons build well on prior knowledge and teachers are skilled in developing pupil's thinking through effective questioning that keeps pupils on their toes. When all these features come together, as observed in an outstanding philosophy lesson in Year 3, pupils thrive on the excitement and challenge that the lesson provides and, as a result, make good progress in their learning.

However, not all lessons are consistently good. Opportunities to involve pupils in their own learning and take responsibility are sometimes missed. In these lessons, pupils make too little progress because they are not effectively encouraged to work independently or in small groups. As a result some pupils find it difficult to work with others and to discuss their ideas with a partner. Whole-class sessions are often lively and interesting to start with but, if they last too long, the pupils' interest wanes. Consequently, the pace of learning slows and pupils are less engaged in the activities. In some lessons, the tasks given to pupils are not challenging enough, particularly for the more able.

The school's systems for assessing pupils' attainment and tracking their progress are satisfactory but have only recently been put in place and teachers are only just beginning to use the information to ensure work is best matched to pupils' needs.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 3**

The curriculum meets pupils' needs satisfactorily, although the development of pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy has not been good enough. In the past, there was too little attention paid to adapting the curriculum so that it provided sufficient challenge for pupils of all abilities. The recent, more rigorous approach to tailoring the curriculum to pupils' needs is now supporting their improving progress. Teachers make useful links between subjects, such as when pupils wrote diaries about their 'evacuation' during World War II. A good Foundation Stage curriculum, with a strong emphasis on practical activities, gives children a good start at school. The school provides an interesting and appropriate curriculum for the many pupils who have learning or emotional difficulties. For example, Nurture Group sessions teach key skills and give pupils added confidence to work with their classes. Pupils' personal development is supported by a good programme of lessons and as part and parcel of the daily life of the school. Pupils enjoy taking part in the good programme of clubs and activities outside lessons.

## Care, guidance and support

### Grade: 3

The school takes good care of the pupils, who say they feel safe and secure. The procedures to safeguard pupils' well-being, health and safety are appropriate and effectively managed. The school gives careful attention to the needs of all pupils and vulnerable groups. For example, the nurture class is very successful in encouraging pupils' social and emotional development and in raising their confidence and self esteem. Strong links with local schools and other agencies underpin the good arrangements to support pupil's transition to secondary school.

Nevertheless, the good quality of pastoral care is not balanced by the quality of academic guidance where gaps in pupils' knowledge have a significant impact on their progress and achievement. Systems to track the progress of individuals and groups are just beginning to inform teachers about where to increase support and intervene. The introduction of targets has given the pupils a sharper focus but teachers do not always refer to them well enough in lessons or when marking pupils' work. In addition, there are some inconsistencies in the way individual learning targets are set which means there is a variation in the challenge for pupils, particularly the highest attainers.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory and improving. The recently established leadership team, with the support of the local authority, has an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Together, with staff and governors, they are putting the concerns of the past behind them and are keen to move forward.

The new headteacher has a good understanding of what needs to be done and is well aware of the reasons for the school's current deficiencies. Since his appointment he has accelerated the pace of change and ensured that efforts have been clearly focused on raising achievement and improving the quality of teaching. The changes planned are correctly targeted on areas of weakness identified through improved data analysis and the tracking of pupils' progress. Expectations are being raised, weaknesses are being tackled systematically and senior leaders have a clearer view of how well the school is performing. In addition, the headteacher has been quick to broaden the base of the leadership team and to emphasise the responsibility of all staff in raising standards. Evidence suggests that staff are responding well, teamwork is improving and consequently, the school has sound capacity to make the necessary improvements. However, although the progress of pupils is now improving, much remains to be done to tackle the underachievement of the past two years.



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## Annex A

## 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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
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	3

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

### 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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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?	3

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
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?	Yes

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

17 January 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Castle Park School, Cumbria, LA9 6BE

As you know, Mrs Havard, Mr Crowther and I visited your school recently to find out how well you are learning. We enjoyed our two days with you, and thank you for being so polite and friendly. You were very keen to know our names and to introduce yourselves to us. Thank you for helping us and letting us see you at work and at play. It was also lovely to see how much you enjoy coming to school and taking part in all the different activities. In particular, thank you for those of you who talked to us and told us what you thought.

Some things about your school are good. For example, children get off to a good start in the Reception and Nursery classes. You work hard, get on well with each other and generally behave well. You feel safe, are well cared for and show concern for others less fortunate than yourselves through your fund raising. You have a good awareness of how to keep fit and healthy.

However, although many things about the school are getting better, you do not do as well as you should in your work. Therefore the school has been given a 'Notice to Improve' which means that another inspector will visit the school in six to eight months to check that it is improving quickly enough. Mr Shone and all the staff are working very hard to improve your school. With your help we are confident that Castle Park will continue to get better so that when you go on to your next schools you will have reached higher levels in your work.

We have asked Mr Shone and all the teachers to work together to help you learn better and make more progress. We have also asked them to ensure that more of your lessons are interesting and challenging and that your teachers look more closely at how well you are learning. We are sure that you will help them by telling them what makes lessons interesting and what helps you to learn.

We wish you well for the future

Yours sincerely

Steve Isherwood

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools