

Stanwix Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112221
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	310819
Inspection date	22 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Alastair Younger

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	413
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Miss Elaine Frecknall
Headteacher	Mr William Johnston
Date of previous school inspection	1 June 2005
School address	Mulcaster Crescent Carlisle Cumbria CA3 9DW
Telephone number	01228 607566
Fax number	01228 607567

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues in depth:

- the progress of pupils, especially the minority with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- the quality of teaching and learning across the school
- the accuracy of self-evaluation.

Evidence was gathered through the observation of lessons, discussions with staff and pupils, the examination of examples of pupils' work, school assessment data and documentation detailing the school's work. The views of parents, as expressed in questionnaires, were taken into account. Apart from checking safeguarding procedures, other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspector found no reason to suggest that the school's assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified. These have been included, where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This is a large primary school serving a relatively advantaged area. Nearly all pupils are White British; none is looked after by the local authority and the numbers of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is much lower than the national average. Most pupils start and finish their primary education in this school. The population of the school is slowly changing as a result of the reorganisation of primary education in the area, with increasing numbers of pupils being drawn from less advantaged areas of the locality.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Stanwix School provides an outstanding example to other schools. It clearly demonstrates how pupils can achieve exceptionally well and attain the highest standards in academic and personal development whilst thoroughly enjoying their education. Pupils are articulate, friendly, charming and inquisitive. Their excellent behaviour and the outstanding level of care provided by the school means that they need have no worries about staying safe and can concentrate on working and playing hard to achieve their full potential before moving on, with exceptionally bright prospects, to other schools.

There is no complacency. Staff fully appreciate the needs of all pupils, including the many very able and talented pupils who are part of each year group, and they respond outstandingly well to this by ensuring that tasks in lessons are always challenging, interesting and fun. Teachers keep a very close eye on the progress each pupil is making. As one parent points out, 'If a child excels in a subject, they are encouraged; if they struggle in another, they are given extra help.' Those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very well supported, and are often helped through skilled tuition in booster classes. Those who are identified as particularly gifted or talented are also given the extra push to help them excel. The timetable is filled with abundant opportunities for pupils to visit places of interest and to enjoy the many contributions of people from all walks of life who visit the school to share their experiences and skills. These additions to the curriculum are much enjoyed by pupils, appreciated by parents and often contribute enormously to cementing the school's position at the heart of the community.

The school enjoys the overwhelming support of parents. This is the school of choice for most and there are rarely vacant places, such are its reputation and standing in the community. A few parents feel that communication between themselves and the school could be improved. Whilst the school already goes further than most in this regard, managers are looking for ways to achieve greater parental satisfaction on this count.

Since the last inspection, standards have significantly exceeded the national average. By the end of Year 2, the number of pupils exceeding national expectations is exceptionally high, with almost three quarters exceeding the expectation for their age. A three-year average of Year 6 test results in English, mathematics and science puts the school comfortably in the top 10% of all schools nationally. It is very rare for any pupil not to reach the National Curriculum level appropriate to their age. Pupils' achievements in science are exceptional, with almost three quarters exceeding national expectations. Mathematics is rapidly developing similar success. This is the result of excellent management initiatives to improve provision, by ensuring that all aspects of the subject are taught thoroughly and by teaching pupils to apply their learning to real life problems. English results dipped slightly last year but standards remain significantly higher than in most other schools. The dip was quickly and perceptively traced to the slight underachievement of a very small group of pupils. Excellent management has rapidly, and effectively, put in place good measures to remedy this situation. It is particularly heartening to see that the quality of boys' writing matches that of girls, reflecting the importance the school places on promoting writing in all subjects and for a wide range of purposes. Pupils at both key stages are currently on course to reach the challenging targets set for this year's tests. Many fine examples of pupils' writing, and their excellent artwork, contribute enormously to creating a learning environment which is richly stimulating, informative and impeccably maintained.

The key to all of this success for pupils is the consistently high quality teaching, which is regularly monitored and accurately evaluated. In recent years, there is no record of any teaching considered less than good, whilst much of it has been outstanding. One of the strengths of this high quality teaching is the precision with which teachers identify exactly what they expect pupils to learn in each lesson, how this learning relates to what pupils have learned in the past and how it can contribute to future learning. Pupils know that every time they enter a classroom they are going to be faced with new and exciting challenges and will enjoy the glow of success if they work hard. They invariably do so, free from distraction because behaviour is so good. A strong feature of many lessons is the encouragement that pupils are given to work with each other, share ideas and help one another. This approach creates a lively buzz in classrooms as pupils chatter about their work and get excited about the new things they are finding out. School monitoring records indicate that the main difference between good and outstanding teaching often relates to the pace of lessons and the allocation of time for different activities. These perceived weaknesses were not in evidence during the inspection, but indicate the desire of leaders and managers to keep raising the bar in their drive for better and better teaching.

Central to the success of the school is an excellent headteacher, who provides outstanding leadership, and a dedicated, highly effective governing body. The senior leadership team and subject leaders make an enormous contribution to the development of the school. Every aspect of provision is carefully monitored, evaluated and matched to the progress that pupils are making and, as a result, there has been considerable improvement since the previous inspection and the school is very well placed to maintain its excellent standards. One of the great strengths of leadership and management is that every new initiative has a clear, unambiguous purpose. Everything is kept as simple as possible, allowing staff to concentrate their time and energy on helping pupils and raising standards without being burdened by cumbersome administrative tasks.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Most children enter the Foundation Stage in the Reception class with skills above those typical for their age. Through excellent teaching and exceptionally high levels of care, support and management, children are very well supported to make rapid progress. By the end of Reception most children exceed the national expectations in all areas of learning and are very well prepared for the challenges of Year 1. The curriculum serves the needs of all children and strongly reflects the wishes of parents, who recognise that their children have already mastered many early learning skills and are ready to move on to more formal learning. The school recognises that a few of the very youngest children are not best served by this approach, because they have too few opportunities to learn through experiment and play in an outdoor setting. These minor weaknesses in outdoor provision are already being addressed by the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Push ahead with plans to strengthen the Foundation Stage curriculum.

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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?	1
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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

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	2
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?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

23 April 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Stanwix Primary School, Cumbria, CA3 9DW

What a joy it was to visit your school the other day. Thank you for being so nice to me and making me feel welcome. You are a credit to the school and are contributing enormously to its success through your excellent behaviour and your hard work.

I have been inspecting schools for many years but have rarely had the privilege to visit one as outstanding as yours. My job is to find out what schools are doing well and to make suggestions as to how they could do any better. In the case of Stanwix, there is not a lot that could be done to make it better, but I know that your teachers will keep trying. The teaching is already excellent and I know that you love coming to school. I can see why, because the school day is packed with interesting activities that bring you success and you all get along with each other so well. I've made only one suggestion as to how I think the school could get even better. Most of you will not even notice it because it's to do with looking at the different ways very young children learn.

The people who run your school are doing a wonderful job. Apart from ensuring you make excellent progress, they have created a popular and happy school. Many of you and your parents told me what a great place it is. I agree. So do the staff, who seem to enjoy their work as much as you enjoy your learning.

Before I close, I'm sorry if I disappointed some of you by only being an inspector. I know a few of you were hoping that I was the man bringing the caterpillars for you to nurture, so that later this summer you can release butterflies into the churchyard. Now that's another job I really fancy. I hope the butterflies are as beautiful as you expect them to be.

Good luck, work hard and have fun.

All the best

Alastair Younger

Lead Inspector