

Blackford CE (Aided) Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112300
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	310843
Inspection date	18 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Rosemary Rodger

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	35
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Dorothea MacKay
Headteacher	Mr Philip Bunner
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Blackford Carlisle Cumbria CA6 4ES
Telephone number	01228 674614
Fax number	01228 74614

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a very small primary school situated in a mixed rural area. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. There are very few pupils entitled to a free school meal. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. Pupils attend the school from a wide area. Attainment on entry to the school is broadly average.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the level of challenge for pupils in Years 1 and 2, the curriculum, and leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from discussions with the headteacher and pupils, observations of teaching and learning, checking pupils' work and school documentation. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessment, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Blackford Primary School is a good school and fully reflects its mission statement, 'To care for our children and teach them well in a place that is at the heart of the community'. Behaviour is good and pupils enjoy school, particularly the outstanding curriculum and enrichment through visits and daily after school clubs. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the caring, family atmosphere and the progress their children make. This is very marked in those parents who have moved into the area or transferred their children from other schools.

A key strength of the school is its excellent curriculum. The palpable enjoyment demonstrated by pupils as they proudly described their film making talents at the end of the summer term was impressive. Parental comments echo their enjoyment; for example, several praised the creative environment in Key Stage 1. Pupils have benefited from attending various art and environmental centres, historical sites and sporting events. This is equipping them well to be responsible and to develop their confidence in preparation for later life. The daily after school clubs effectively enrich learning by covering information and communication technology (ICT), art and craft, drama and gymnastics. Indeed, many pupils spoke of these activities with tremendous enthusiasm. Recently acquired laptops and the use of whiteboard technology by staff are all valued by the pupils and contribute to their enjoyment of learning. Basic literacy and numeracy skills are given a very high priority, and this has a positive impact; for example, pupils know their multiplication tables by heart.

Pupils feel safe and well cared for in school. They demonstrate a sound understanding of the need to keep fit and to eat healthily because of the attention given to this in science lessons. Relationships are good. Assemblies are used to emphasise caring for each other. The small number of pupils means they are known well to the staff and thrive in school personally and academically.

That the school is 'at the heart of the community' is well illustrated in the number of events planned to include the widespread residents. For example, the yearly harvest festival, planned and led by the school in the church next door is widely supported, as are Christmas productions. Pupils raise considerable amounts of money for local and national charities and use these opportunities to develop their understanding of cultures beyond their own. The African Christmas production is a good example, cited by the pupils.

Standards in the school tend to be average by Years 2 and 6 but vary because of the small year groups. In 2007, performance in the Year 6 national tests was high and the school met its challenging targets. This good achievement was confirmed in lessons. Achievement throughout Years 1 and 2 is also good. Actions to improve writing are beginning to have a good impact on pupils' learning; for example, Year 2 pupils skilfully mastered the key features of instructional writing. Improvements are rightly attributed to the strong leadership and effective teamwork of the headteacher, governors and the hardworking staff.

The school's strong reputation for integrating pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, especially those with emotional and behavioural issues is justly deserved. These pupils build up their self-esteem and confidence due to the dedication and understanding shown by all staff. They are fully included in lessons and have their individual needs met well, as do all pupils, particularly in Key Stage 2. Teaching is good overall. It is calm and supportive in a secure and friendly environment. Good attention is paid to the wide age range in both classes by the carefully matched work to each year group in English and mathematics. Lessons are well planned,

particularly in Key Stage 1. Pupils' work is assessed diligently and the school is in the early stages of involving pupils in knowing what they need to do to improve their work. However, systems to track the progress pupils make are not used with sufficient rigour to ensure they are making expected progress throughout the year, particularly in writing.

Leadership and management are good, although the school has been too modest in evaluating this aspect of its work. The headteacher leads by example in calmly nurturing and encouraging pupils to achieve as well as they are capable. Teamwork is a strong feature and new staff have provided a clear impetus for change. The school improvement plan is comprehensive, but does not always prioritise issues clearly and includes items that are unnecessary. Governors are supportive and discharge their responsibilities effectively through their programmed visits into school and their efficiency in dealing with health and safety. The school meets national requirements for safeguarding pupils. A key priority has been given to maintaining continuity of teaching in Key Stage 2 which has resulted in good progress in recent years. 'To provide a happy, caring and positive environment where children can learn effectively' is an admirable example of the school's vision and values statement. The school has a good capacity to improve and has made good progress in raising achievement for more able pupils and making greater use of ICT in the Year 1 and 2 class since the previous inspection.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The very few children in the Foundation Stage work alongside the Year 1 and 2 pupils in a bright, vibrant classroom. Parents are delighted at the way their children settle when they start school. The transition to school is smooth because of the effective links with the pre-school group. Children are well cared for and provision is good. Effective planning achieves a successful balance between free choice play activities and whole class sessions. A high priority is given to developing speaking and listening skills linked to the individual needs of the children. Teaching, including the contribution of the teaching assistant, is good and children achieve well. Standards at the end of the Reception year are typical for children of this age, although there is variation year by year.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the use of tracking systems, so that the progress pupils make throughout the year can be closely checked, particularly in writing.

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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?	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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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	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?	1
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

20 September 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Blackford CofE Primary School, Cumbria, CA6 4ES

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave me when visiting your school recently. I enjoyed talking to you all and especially watching the short films you made last term. I really enjoyed the Spotty Dog and Bank Robber films, as they all showed how talented you are in Blackford Primary School. You attend a good school in which you are well cared for and encouraged to take part in many activities in and out of school. Your teachers are very hardworking and make sure you work as hard as you can so you achieve well in the tests you take in Year 6. You behave well and are very responsible around school. Your super climbing frames keep you all fit at playtimes and lunchtimes.

I have asked the staff to make sure they check how well you make progress through the year, especially in writing. You can help by working extra hard to improve your writing skills.

Good luck in school and enjoy all the exciting visits that are planned for you throughout the year.

Best wishes,

Rosemary Rodger

Lead inspector