

North Lakes School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112118
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	325532
Inspection dates	19–20 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Andrew Scott

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	194
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Lynne Reside
Headteacher	Mr Mike Pincombe
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2006
School address	Huntley Avenue Penrith Cumbria CA11 8NU
Telephone number	01768 242150
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Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This school, on the southern edge of Penrith, serves a mixed catchment area with some elements of socio-economic disadvantage. It has a fairly stable pupil population with appreciably more boys than girls. Almost all pupils are from White British families. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is slightly higher than average. The number of pupils with a statement of special educational need is considerably higher than other schools owing to the school's strategic facility for pupils with severe or complex special needs. Currently, this facility has six pupils. The headteacher has been in post since January 2009.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. It has several good features, notably the quality of care provided by all staff and the good personal development of pupils. The school is a welcoming, harmonious environment where everyone is valued and everyone's opinion matters. Pupils enjoy school, in particular the wide range of extra activities, which offers an increasing variety of sport and singing; the school is proud of its 'Sing Up' Platinum Award. The headteacher has started to build on the school's strengths and has highlighted important areas in which the school can develop. Parents are generally happy with the provision for their children. 'My child loves it here and has continued to grow in confidence and knowledge while enjoying herself,' one wrote, reflecting others' views.

Pupils enter school with attainment that is broadly average. They make satisfactory progress and, by the end of Year 6, standards usually remain average; they are likely to be much the same this year. There has been some improvement since the last inspection in writing and in the progress of more able pupils. Pupils' achievement is linked directly to the quality of teaching which is broadly satisfactory but with some that is good. Effective lessons are typically brisk, well focused and challenging for pupils of all abilities; the subject matter is interesting and motivates pupils. As a result, learning is usually good. Other lessons are less challenging and rely on routine activity without sufficient regard for individual pupils' needs. In these instances, the pace of learning tends to slow and so pupils lose interest.

Pupils develop well to become responsible individuals. Behaviour is mostly good, with only occasional issues that are managed promptly and efficiently by the school. Pupils take on duties willingly and are keen to do even more. They are considerate around school and excellent in their interaction with one another. They are sensible about their choice of diet and know their involvement in sport benefits their health and social development. Pupils have a good sense of community through the work of the school council and links with the town. They feel safe because the school's systems for safeguarding are thorough and staff take considerable interest in their individual circumstances. A recent initiative has been to involve parents more in their children's education.

The highly effective strategic facility is an integral part of the school. All pupils here have pronounced learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The expertise of staff enables them to have a full understanding of the very different and specific needs of each pupil and address these with considerable care and patience. Teachers make good use of praise to individuals who achieve success at their own level, particularly when they have worked independently. Scrupulous records of progress indicate that for these pupils achievement is very good.

The good leadership of the headteacher is ensuring a thoughtful and inclusive approach to school development. He has suitable ideas to improve the school and the determination to carry them out. Senior staff have been able to take more of a lead in their areas of responsibility. The headteacher is beginning to develop their monitoring and evaluating roles and those of governors. However, the quality of monitoring and evaluation by senior staff and governors needs to be further developed to ensure that the school's improvement is sustained. At present, self-evaluation is satisfactory. The school's strengths and weaknesses are recognised, but the action plans for improvement have not been sufficiently robust to ensure good progress in all areas, especially in raising standards. The school demonstrates satisfactory capacity to improve and provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teaching consistently provides good challenge for all pupils and work that inspires them.
- Develop the quality of monitoring and evaluation by senior staff and governors so that the school's improvement is more effective and sustained.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. They usually enter school with attainment that is broadly average and, by the end of Year 6, standards remain average in English, mathematics and science. Standards have risen slightly but steadily since the last inspection, especially in mathematics. Although standards in English overall have not changed significantly, the quality of writing has improved as a result of a whole-school emphasis. Similarly, more pupils have reached the higher levels in mathematics and science than is expected nationally. The school has done well to narrow the previous gap in standards between boys and girls. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities mostly achieve satisfactorily, although those in the strategic facility do particularly well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Pupils are friendly, behave well and generally have positive attitudes towards their work. The family atmosphere in school helps pupils to understand the importance of respect and appreciation towards others; pupils get on with each other very well. Pupils find that assemblies are exciting occasions and they certainly sing heartily. They say that they enjoy lessons and particularly like art, drama and information and communication technology (ICT). However, teaching is sometimes less engaging and so they lose interest. Their attendance is satisfactory and improving.

Pupils clearly have a responsible approach to healthy eating and relish exercise through the many additional sporting activities available. Most pupils happily eat fruit from the healthy tuck shop during break times. Opportunities for pupils to take on responsibility are good, such as being a school councillor or acting as a 'buddy' for the younger pupils during playtimes. They take these responsibilities seriously and would like more. They raise money for charity and readily join in the many events involving the local community. Links such as the long established relationship with a school in Tanzania have helped them to appreciate the wider world. Their skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT provide a sound basis for the next phase of their life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory overall, with some that is good. Common strengths include clear learning objectives, good rapport between staff and pupils, and effective use of resources, especially the interactive whiteboards, which clarify learning and engage pupils. Learning is more effective where teachers use assessment skilfully to set work that challenges pupils fully and use tight deadlines to insist on a good pace of work. Lessons that teach basic skills through imaginative activities are particularly successful. For example, an analysis of the poem 'The Lion and Albert' by pupils in Year 6 was demanding, but sparked their interest. Pupils then worked hard to explain its style of humour.

Sometimes, learning lacks excitement and teachers' expectations are not finely tuned to individual needs. As a result, pupils tend to lose interest and the pace of learning wanes. Teachers have embraced the new initiative to improve marking and give pupils clear ideas for improvement. Not all teachers, though, are rigorous enough in checking that pupils respond to their guidance. Teaching assistants provide effective support to pupils doing group work, especially for those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, but they do not play an active enough role in whole-class sessions.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. It is broad and balanced, and is enriched by a variety of sport, as well as musical instrument tuition and opportunities to learn French. Visits to museums and other places of interest help to improve knowledge across a range of subjects. The tradition of singing in the school brings considerable enjoyment to pupils and develops their musical skills well. The curriculum is well focused on the core subjects yet lessons do not routinely reflect the enrichment seen outside lessons. Teachers are beginning to be more creative in linking subjects in order to boost basic skills, but there is still some way to go. The new programme to promote creativity throughout the curriculum is providing a valuable stimulus. Good links with local schools include the effective use of sports leaders to introduce new ideas into games lessons, and specialist teaching for the most able pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support is good. This is typified by the efficient arrangements for transition into the school and on to the next stage of pupils' education. Relationships between staff and pupils are strong throughout the school. Good awareness by staff of pupils' social and emotional needs is beneficial for pupils' personal development. The school makes good use of outside agencies, such as the speech and language service, to support vulnerable pupils. The personal needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are generally well supported by teachers and teaching assistants. Robust procedures are in place for child protection, health and safety and safe staff recruitment. The school tracks pupils' academic progress carefully and acts promptly to address any underachievement identified. There is a good system of target-setting to support pupils' progress, but targets are not explained consistently to pupils so that they all know how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The enlightened leadership of the headteacher is enabling the school to move forward smoothly and purposefully. He has wisely sought the views of pupils, staff, governors and families to establish a consensus for future improvement. The overarching aims are pertinent and well structured. He has begun to strengthen the school's existing provision, for example, by clarifying and extending systems for marking and feedback. However, it is too soon to be able to judge the effectiveness of such actions.

The school's self-evaluation is satisfactory. The headteacher understands the school's strengths and weaknesses well, but senior staff and governors do not play a full enough part in monitoring the school to be able to draw wholly accurate conclusions. Assessment of the impact of any actions taken, such as the influence of the curriculum on pupils' achievement, is insufficient.

Governors are very supportive of the school and are eager to become more involved on a regular basis. They play their part in the development planning process, but their ability to evaluate the school at first-hand is underdeveloped. The promotion of community cohesion is good. The school has analysed its existing work and devised a plan of action to strengthen it further. In school, pupils learn to be responsible citizens, and they interact well with the local community. Pupils' understanding of other cultures and communities are strengthened by the school's good links with an African school. The school is keen to develop further its links with the wider world.

Since the last inspection, the school has made satisfactory progress. In particular, it has addressed the key issues of writing and the achievement of more able pupils.

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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?	3
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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
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 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?	2

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	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 eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

21 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of North Lakes School, Cumbria, CA11 8NU

I am writing to thank you for the part you played in the recent inspection of your school and to tell you what Mr Stafford and I thought about your school. We very much appreciated your comments and opinions, and those of your parents. These were very useful in helping us to get to know your school.

North Lakes provides you with a satisfactory education. Some aspects are good, especially the care all staff take of you and your own personal development. You clearly enjoy learning and all the extra activities, and you are responsible around school. You are adopting a healthy lifestyle and we are glad there is more sport for you now. You behave well, and you know staff deal quickly with any problems so that you feel safe in school. You are well involved in the life of the school and carry out your jobs very efficiently. You also learn about the wider world, although the school is keen for you to know more.

Your progress in work is satisfactory. We are pleased that you have improved your writing and that more of you have improved your attainment in mathematics and science. Standards overall are average, as they have been in recent years. They are not rising as fast as they might because teaching is inconsistent. You learn best when lessons are pacy, interesting and have the right level of challenge for you. We would like the school to ensure that all lessons demand the best from you and have really exciting topics that will help you raise standards.

Your headteacher has some exciting ideas for the future and has already begun interesting projects, such as the link with the school in Lewisham. He has involved you and your parents in improving the school. Your joint ideas look very promising. Although all senior members of staff and governors work hard and want the best for the school, we feel that their understanding of how to improve it could be developed further. Therefore we would like the school to make sure that it has clear reasons for its action plans and assesses the progress of these plans rigorously.

We are confident that you will play your part in improving the school, not least by working hard every day in lessons. I wish you every success for the future.

Yours faithfully

Andrew Scott

Lead inspector