

Victoria Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112145
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	325540
Inspection dates	25–26 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Nigel Cromeey-Hawke

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)	267
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Keith Rollason
Headteacher	Mr Gary Postlethwaite
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2005
School address	Victoria Road Workington Cumbria CA14 2RE
Telephone number	01900 325242
Fax number	01900 325243

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a slightly larger than average junior school in an area of social deprivation. Almost all pupils are of White British origin, with none whose first language is not English. The proportion of pupils able to claim free school meals is above average and there are twice the national level of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school has suffered significant staffing problems over the last few years and has had three acting/temporary headteachers in the last three years. The current postholder has been in place on an acting basis since January 2008 and permanently since September.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school that has recently gone through a period of significant upheaval, including the lack of permanent leadership for three years. It has been stabilised by the new headteacher, there are many new staff in place and parents are almost universal in their praise of the progress that has been brought about in a short period of time. One typically commented that, 'There has been a dramatic improvement this year.'

Pupils enter the school with knowledge, understanding and skills that are typical for their age and, up to last year, have left with average standards. Progress has been satisfactory. Last year's Year 6 suffered significantly throughout their time in school from the lack of continuity in their learning and because of some behaviour issues. This was reflected in their standards which, on leaving, fell to well below average. Significant work has been undertaken under the new leadership and with local authority support to recover behaviour and improve the quality of teaching and learning. This has been successful and current pupils are on track to meet and, in the case of mathematics, to exceed targets for similar schools. Progress is now satisfactory and standards broadly average, although too few pupils reach higher levels across all subjects. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good support, especially from the many skilled teaching assistants and they make progress in line with expectations.

Personal development is satisfactory and pupils say they feel safe in school, they know what it means to lead a healthy lifestyle and they enjoy their learning. Pupils' moral, social and spiritual development is satisfactory but their awareness of cultural diversity is underdeveloped. Pastoral care is good and staff support pupils well, increasingly working with parents and the community to support their needs.

Teaching is satisfactory, with some good and outstanding practice seen. In these cases, teachers challenge pupils well, provide interesting activities to extend their learning and good progress is made. In too many cases, however, teaching remains satisfactory. There is not a good match of work to the capabilities and needs of all pupils. As a result, progress is slower, especially for the more able. The use of assessment data and academic guidance across the school does not provide pupils with a clear enough understanding of what they need to do to improve their work.

The curriculum is satisfactory. It is being developed to provide a wider range of learning opportunities, make better use of information and communication technology (ICT) and encourage more creative approaches through music, the arts and cross-curricular topic work. These impact well upon pupils' attitudes to school. Essential life skills, such as literacy, are being promoted but the school recognises more needs to be done in this area.

Leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. The new headteacher has been particularly successful in stabilising the staffing situation and raising expectations. There is a clear vision for the future shared by all. The school knows what it has to do to improve further as a result of robust self-evaluation. Its capacity to bring this improvement about is satisfactory. It is recognised that recent improvements mark the start of the journey and much still remains to be done. The governors have undertaken training and are both aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and are challenging it satisfactorily in its drive for improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards across the school, especially improving the progress of the more able pupils.

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning to that of the best, especially in the match of work to the capabilities and needs of more able pupils.
- Ensure that the results of assessments and academic guidance are used in lessons to help pupils understand how well they are doing and how to improve their work.
- Improve pupils' awareness of cultural diversity.

A small proportion of the 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

Standards are broadly average and achievement is satisfactory. Pupils enter the school with broadly average standards and in the past have left with standards in line with the national average. In the provisional 2008 tests, standards dropped to well below national levels. This was because of the continued disruption of learning within the Year 6 group since joining the school, as a result of repeated staffing upheaval and some pupil behaviour issues. An improvement programme was put in place by the local authority and has begun to show significant impact, dramatically helped by the now stable staffing and new leadership of the school. Standards across the school are now broadly average. The robust tracking of progress in English and mathematics indicates that current pupils across the school are likely to meet, and in the case of mathematics, exceed national averages for schools of similar types. Learners with difficulties and/or disabilities make progress in line with others. Too few higher levels are being gained by more able pupils in all subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development is satisfactory. Attendance has significantly improved over the last year and is now average. Attitudes have also improved and the school is a calm place for learning. Relationships are good and pupils behave satisfactorily so that there are few interruptions to lessons. There is a willingness to work together and thoughtfulness for others, especially amongst the older pupils. Pupils understand how to lead healthy lives and stay safe. They take part in a wide range of physical activities and know how to stay fit through participation in a wide range of sporting activities. Spiritual, moral and social development is satisfactory and improving. Pupils are aware that they have a more limited understanding of the range of cultural traditions and beliefs that exist in our ethnically diverse society. Representatives on the school council take their responsibilities seriously and show good understanding of how they can help the school improve. Pupils show concern for more vulnerable members of their own community, for the environment and, through charitable works, for the wider community. They work well together in groups and pairs, sharing information and discussing ideas sensibly, thus developing teamwork skills which will serve them well later in life. Pupils are satisfactorily prepared for their future education, although some still have weaknesses in basic literacy skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning across the school are satisfactory with some teaching that is good and some outstanding. In the best lessons, pace and a wide range of activities stimulate and maintain pupils' interests. Repeated questioning by teachers challenges them to extend their learning. In one outstanding modern foreign languages lesson, careful planning identified all pupils' needs and structured tasks extended their language and numeracy skills through game situations and calculations. Pupils were fired with enthusiasm for their learning and took pride in their own good achievement. Other satisfactory lessons lack this pace and variety. Planning is weaker and there is a lack of challenge and suitable activities to meet the needs and capabilities of more able pupils. Too much 'teacher talk' means pupils' interest and enjoyment suffers and progress often slows. The needs of learners with difficulties and/or disabilities are, however, met satisfactorily across the school because of the extensive use of skilled teaching assistants within classrooms.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and provides a secure framework for teachers' planning. A clear focus upon literacy and numeracy across all subjects has resulted in improvements in standards over the last year. Science has focused upon practical investigations which have begun to develop pupils' abilities to work independently, helped by the growing use of ICT. Opportunities to develop key life skills through the good personal and social education programme impact well upon pupils' personal development. A topic approach has been introduced across the curriculum, with themes, such as healthy lifestyles, providing opportunities for linking subjects together. Work is in progress to extend pupils' understanding of different cultures through this approach. Creativity is being promoted across the curriculum, with music becoming increasingly popular. The curriculum is enriched by extra activities, including visits to places of interest, visitors to school, and clubs ranging from recorder groups to football and computing. The school has made its buildings available for community use, linking with the local infant schools' work in the community. This has helped build positive attitudes to learning and stronger relations with parents.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The quality of care, guidance and support is satisfactory overall, with some significant strengths. Pastoral care is good and staff know pupils well and are highly aware of their personal needs. The school provides structure and stability which are not always a feature in pupils' lives. Good links with feeder primaries smooth the transfer of pupils into the school. Occasional bullying has occurred but pupils confirm that staff deal with incidents swiftly and effectively. Procedures for safeguarding and child protection meet the current national requirements and necessary risk assessments are in place. Academic guidance is satisfactory. Short and long term targets are not specific to each child's needs and not used across all subjects for every year group. Marking is regular and up-to-date. However, the results of assessment are not always used sufficiently well in lessons with pupils to help them understand how well they are doing and guidance on how to improve their work is underdeveloped.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Since his arrival, the new headteacher has brought stability to the school and significantly changed staffing responsibilities. Nearly a half of the staff are new in post and there is an energy and commitment to improvement shared by all. A new senior leadership team has been created and through robust self-evaluation has a growing understanding of the strengths and needs of the school. Weaknesses are already being tackled as can be seen in the significant improvement in behaviour. Subject leaders are starting to taking more responsibility for managing their areas and have brought in changes to make lessons more creative and interesting. As a result, pupils' attitudes to learning have improved. The dip in standards last year has been recovered and satisfactory progress is now being made across the school. The school is beginning to work with local partners to serve the needs of the local community and with parents, who are highly supportive of the developments put in place. The school's contribution to the promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory but growing rapidly. Governors have benefited from local authority training and both know the school well and carry out their challenge and support functions satisfactorily.

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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?	3
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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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?	3

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?	3
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

27 November 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Victoria Junior School, Cumbria, CA14 2RE

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave me and my team when we visited your school. You were very friendly, polite and enthusiastic about what you do. You told us a lot of interesting things about your school and you are clearly very proud of it. Victoria Junior School is a satisfactory school. These are the main things we found that are good about your school.

Your school cares for you and looks after you well.

You enjoy school, say you feel safe and, most importantly, behaviour and attendance have improved. Well done.

Those of you who find learning difficult are well supported by the school.

The headteacher and staff have brought about improvements recently, especially in the quality of teaching and in your learning. There is some good and some outstanding teaching in the school.

These are the things that we have suggested to the school to make it an even better place to learn.

Help you reach better standards in your work, especially those of you who are capable of getting higher levels.

Improve the overall quality of teaching to match that of the best. All teachers will be trying to match work to your level of ability, especially those of you who find learning easier.

Use the information provided by tests to let you know what progress you are making and give you clearer guidance in lessons on what you have to do to improve your work.

Improve your understanding of people who have different beliefs and backgrounds to your own.

You can help by telling your teachers how you learn best and if you have any difficulties. You can also help by continuing to attend school, behaving well and working hard, as you are now doing.

Yours sincerely

Nigel Cromey-Hawke

Lead inspector