

Castle Park School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112189
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	325552
Inspection dates	17–18 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Gordon Alston

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	312
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Austen Robinson
Headteacher	Mr Roger Shone
Date of previous school inspection	15 January 2008
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Sedbergh Drive Kendal Cumbria LA9 6BE
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is above average in size and nearly all its pupils are from White British families. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The number of pupils who join or leave the school at other than the usual times is much higher than typically seen. The Early Years Foundation Stage provision consists of the Nursery and Reception classes for children aged from three to five. The school has recently achieved Healthy Schools and Activemark Awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school's effectiveness and value for money are now good. In accordance with section 13 (5) of the education act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

A group of enthusiastic pupils chorused 'Our school is much better now, we are given targets to achieve that make us work hard and our lessons are much more interesting.' They were right! The headteacher and staff have worked tirelessly and determinedly to remedy former weaknesses. Substantial improvements to the quality of teaching and rigorous systems to check on pupil progress have raised achievement markedly. Standards in Years 2 and 6 are significantly higher now than at the time of the previous inspection.

Pupils' achievement is good across all Key Stages. Children start Year 1 with average standards. Most recent national test results indicate standards are broadly average by Year 2. Standards in Year 6 are above average. Pupils are achieving well in reading, mathematics and science. Their achievement in writing, although improving, remains satisfactory. The school is tackling this by providing longer periods for pupils to write in lessons and a stronger focus on teaching basic language skills.

Pupils enjoy school; they are very friendly and polite, and their behaviour is good. A positive feature is the respect and care pupils show for their peers and adults alike, reflecting the school's successful promotion of pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. They are keen to learn because good teaching provides them with interesting tasks and activities to challenge them. Pupils have the confidence to ask and answer questions because teachers are skilled both in managing pupils' behaviour and in encouraging them to participate fully in lessons. The clarity of pupils' targets and teachers' comments after marking their work are effective, and, as a result, pupils are clear on how to improve their work. The enjoyment of pupils is also partly due to the good curriculum. They learn through many first-hand experiences and topics are enriched with a number of exciting visits and visitors.

Strong pastoral care pervades the school and care, guidance and support are good. There is good support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Systems to track pupils' progress are now rigorous and effectively used to get good achievement. Pupils' good grasp of the basic skills, of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) supplemented by their superb attitudes to work, prepare them well for their future. However, the school is aware that it needs to make pupils more aware of the multi-cultural world in which they live.

The headteacher's leadership qualities are at the root of the school's recovery. Other leaders follow this good example and make a valuable contribution by checking the work of the school to ensure that teaching is consistently good and all pupils are making as much progress as possible. A lot has been achieved in a short time, particularly in English and mathematics. Every element of the school's work has been examined and re-examined many times. There is little senior leaders do not know about the school's strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, the school's self-evaluation is very accurate and matches the findings of the inspection in every area. The school's notable improvements since the previous inspection, illustrates its good capacity for further improvement. Parents' comments support this view 'We now have a good school where parents and pupils are much happier, congratulations to everyone at the school for all their hard work in bringing this about.'

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Although children start school with levels of ability below those that are typical for their age, particularly in language, many reach expected levels by the end of Reception. An enthusiastic, knowledgeable manager provides outstanding leadership ensuring that children's individual needs are well met. Equally she ensures the Nursery and Reception classes are happy, caring places where children enjoy their learning and achieve well. Parents say their children settle quickly because good induction arrangements, including a home visit, help children to feel secure. Outstanding relationships create a supportive environment in which children can thrive. Staff strike a good balance between leading the learning and providing opportunities for children to make choices. For example, the teaching assistant helped children fill a bird feeder while others enjoyed a variety of activities in the outdoor area. Children have time to explore things that interest them and to develop the independence to be confident learners. The staff keep a close track on each child's progress and use this information well to plan what children need to learn next. The school's data and observations of lessons show that children make good progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise pupils' standards in writing.
- Help pupils become more aware of the multi-cultural society that exists in Britain.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' good achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage is now being extended throughout the school. In Key Stage 1, trends have gradually improved over recent years and, standards by the end of Year 2 are average in reading and mathematics but below average in writing. Pupils' achievement in Key Stage 2 has been transformed and is now good. Consequently, results improved in all subjects in 2008 and standards in Key Stage 2 are now above average. Achievement in reading and mathematics is consistently good, largely because of the attention given to developing pupils' mathematical and reading comprehension skills. Achievement is also good in science because pupils' investigation skills keep pace with their knowledge and understanding. Pupils' achievement in writing is hampered by the difficulties they meet in expressing their ideas, particularly involving the use of a rich vocabulary. Initiatives are in place to deal with these weaknesses. The progress of different groups of pupils, including boys and girls, more able pupils and those who require additional support, is equally good because the curriculum and support provided are sensitively adapted to cater for their different learning needs.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Pupils remember school rules such as 'be kind, considerate and helpful' and they respect the environment. In school assemblies, they reflect on personal success singing enthusiastically 'It's good to be me!' Pupils' value being healthy and staying fit. They know that it is important to have a balanced diet; a discussion with them confirmed they know some appealing snacks and treats should be consumed with caution. Through their efforts the school has gained

accreditation as a Healthy School. Pupils say school is a place where they feel safe; knowing that there is a friendly adult who will respond should they feel troubled. Most pupils enjoy school and the activities provided. Behaviour and attendance are good. Pupils' contribution to their school and wider communities is good. School councillors represent pupils' views well and help to organise events. Pupils have a good track record of fundraising for worthy causes.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. A particularly strong feature is the good relationships firmly established between staff and pupils that promote learners' willingness to try hard. Teachers' knowledge of their pupils is good and as a result, the work provided is well suited to the needs of all abilities. Pupils who have additional needs are supported by all staff. In good lessons, teachers expect and ensure that pupils work hard and learn at a brisk rate so that they make good progress. However, in a small number of lessons this is not the case. Teachers' classroom management is very good and pupils display good behaviour and attitudes to work. They are encouraged to work independently, and also cooperatively, occasionally with pupils from other classes. Challenging literacy and numeracy targets have made pupils and teachers aware of what individuals should try to achieve, thereby raising expectations and the quality of teaching and learning. Work is regularly marked and, particularly in English, effectively helps pupils know what to do next to improve or whether they achieved their learning targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. Pupils access a good range of learning experiences and statutory requirements are met. The high profile given to literacy and numeracy has been an appropriate response to the school's priority to raise standards. Leaders are ambitious now to promote further creativity. Topics are used well to link learning across subjects, for example, using a history topic to develop research and information gathering skills. School displays feature the range of learning experiences well although pupils' contribution to these is patchy. The curriculum is enriched well through visits and extra curricular activities. The adoption of a local allotment provides very good enhancement of pupils' scientific knowledge of life and living things. In addition, it significantly adds to their personal development. Pupils speak enthusiastically about the residential experience and a recent visit to a Viking museum. A popular range of school clubs helps pupils to improve their sporting, creative and musical skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, support and guidance are good. Practices for safeguarding, child protection and risk assessments meet requirements. Daily routines for the supervision of pupils are efficiently managed. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from intervention strategies confidently and sensitively delivered by experienced assistants. The pupils' needs are very varied and provision is well matched to their personal circumstances. Staff draw on external expertise through good links with a wide range of external agencies. Academic guidance is good. The setting of targets has a high profile throughout the school. Pupils receive good guidance on how to improve their writing and helpful questions are posed through the marking

of science. Good progress has been made in starting to encourage pupils to contribute to their own assessment of their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has led the school skilfully and sensitively through a difficult period. This has been achieved by providing very clear vision, purpose and direction and uniting staff in common purpose to drive up standards. The headteacher is ably assisted by equally committed colleagues who carry out their roles, as senior leaders and subject managers, with integrity and determination. The work of the school is meticulously checked. Lessons are observed, pupils' work is examined and assessments of their learning are rigorously analysed. This places the school in a strong position to know where provision is good and where improvements can be made. This has led to greater consistency in the quality of teaching and significant improvements' particularly in reading and mathematics. Challenging targets are set and pupils' progress towards them is rigorously tracked to ensure good achievement is maintained. Governors are fully involved and an integral part of the process of improvement. The school is making a satisfactory contribution to community cohesion. It is successful in reaching out to involve pupils in the school and local community but less so in introducing pupils to very different communities. Despite the many improvements in school performance, there is still more to do to raise achievement in writing and make pupils more aware of the multi-cultural society that exists.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

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/or disabilities make progress	2

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	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 learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
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?	2
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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

19 March 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Castle Park School, Cumbria, LA9 6BE

Many thanks for the friendly welcome you gave me when I inspected your school. I had a wonderful time and greatly appreciated the way you chatted to me. You are correct to be so proud of your school. It is a good school! I was very impressed by how well you are doing in your reading and mathematics and science. You play a large part in this by your good behaviour, hard work and eagerness to please your teachers. I agree that your lessons are exciting and you are lucky to be taught by such good, caring teachers. The staff take good care of you and it is pleasing to hear that you feel safe and secure. It is very clear that you enjoy all of the sporting activities and know how to keep healthy.

Your school is led well by the headteacher and you benefit from a wonderful variety of activities. I saw how hard you work to reach your targets and how much you enjoy challenging work which makes you do your best.

I'm sure your teachers always say 'This is good but you could make it even better if you...'
Well, this is what I am telling your school. To be even better, it needs to make sure that you all do as well as you can with your writing. I have also asked the school to make you all more aware of the multi-cultural society in which we all live.

I am sure you will all continue to enjoy your time in school.

Congratulations to you all and best wishes for the future!

Gordon Alston

Lead inspector