

Valley Primary School and Nursery

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134214
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	328855
Inspection dates	6–7 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Andrew Saunders

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)	280
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 Mark Yearsley
Headteacher	Mrs Hilary Reay
Date of previous school inspection	1 April 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Whinlatter Road Whitehaven Cumbria CA28 8DA
Telephone number	01946 852668
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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

This is a slightly larger-than-average sized primary school in an urban area of Whitehaven. It was formed five years ago through combining the infant and junior schools on the same site. A higher than usual proportion of pupils is eligible for free school meals. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average as is the number of those with statements of special educational needs. The school includes pupils with a wide range of other needs, including physical, behavioural, social and emotional, and communication difficulties. Pupils are very largely of White British origin. There is a breakfast club, and the school includes Nursery and Reception classes in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The school has achieved the Activemark, the Kite Mark for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and the Margaret Boxall Kite Mark in the nurture group.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school, where the considerate care of dedicated staff ensures that the personal development and well-being of pupils is good. The headteacher, along with her senior leaders, has provided strong, sensitive leadership during a time of considerable change for the school, to ensure behaviour is good, teaching is effective, and that positive attitudes to learning are established. This has had a good impact on raising standards. Provision for children in the Foundation Stage is good.

The school provides a purposeful and calm learning environment. A great deal is done to help pupils to feel secure in school and to be ready to learn, particularly those facing difficulties in their lives. For example, the nurture group provides a high level of support for those who need it, which has been recognised through achieving the Margaret Boxall Kite Mark. Many pupils enjoy taking on responsibilities and most learn to work well together, helping to prepare them for their futures. The good range of extra-curricular clubs and activities gives pupils many chances to develop their interests. Pupils know how to stay healthy and safe. Parents feel that pupils enjoy the breakfast club which provides a good start to the day. They also indicate that they feel well informed about their children's progress. As a parent put it, 'The children are stimulated, engaged and eager to learn. I also know they feel safe and are happy in school.' Most parents responding to the questionnaire are supportive of the school and many appreciate the support and help their children receive.

Good teaching, with a strong focus on improving pupils' basic skills in literacy and numeracy, helps pupils to make good progress and achieve well. By the end of Year 6, pupils have made up considerable ground from their starting points. While standards have been below average in national tests in recent years, improvements have raised standards, and pupils are now reaching standards which are broadly average. However, more able pupils are not always given enough opportunity to make decisions about how they learn for themselves or to think of different ways to tackle their work. The use of targets has been developed well, but pupils do not have opportunities often enough to respond to teachers' comments about how to improve what they have done.

Over the past few years the school has successfully improved important parts of its work. There is a strong team approach among staff and a shared commitment to supporting every child and helping them to achieve their best. Senior leaders are well supported by governors and leadership and management are good. Rigorous monitoring of the school's work by governors and senior leaders has led to accurate self-evaluation and a focus on the right priorities. Middle leaders are taking greater responsibility for raising standards and are leading developments towards this goal. Leadership demonstrates a good capacity to improve the school further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children receive a good start to their education. Good leadership ensures that provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is well focused and helps the children to achieve well. Children enter school with exceptionally low knowledge and skills compared with those typical for their age, particularly in speaking and listening and personal development. Staff have high expectations and patiently teach the required skills, so that children settle quickly in the Nursery and enjoy what they do because they feel safe and secure. Children enjoy a wide range of

stimulating activities such as exploring the jungle. These exciting opportunities fire the children's imagination and mean they make good progress in their social and language skills, which continues in the Reception class. All areas of learning are covered effectively and are well resourced, with an appropriate balance of child- and adult-led activities. Reading and writing skills are also developing well. Relationships are very good; the teachers and learning support assistants working very closely together, on planning and assessment. This means they are able to engage, support and encourage each child appropriately. As recognised by achieving the Kite Mark for the Early Years Foundation Stage, children are making good progress and their personal development and welfare are good. By the time they reach Year 1 most children have caught up significantly, although they are still reaching below average levels in all areas of their learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide opportunities for pupils to respond to teachers' comments about how to improve their work to move their learning forward.
- Increase the level of challenging work for pupils, particularly the more able, so that they become more independent in their learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good. Standards in national tests have been below average, but are rising. From exceptionally low starting points, pupils make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage to reach standards which, while below average, shows they have made up ground. Progress during Key Stage 1 is satisfactory, but is more rapid during Key Stage 2, and by the end of Year 6, pupils are now reaching standards which are broadly average. Work in lessons and sample assessments show that most pupils have already reached or exceeded the levels predicted for them. For the vast majority of pupils, this constitutes good progress, and for some, progress is exceptional. The number of pupils reaching the higher levels has improved, although there is too little challenging work to enable more to do so. The improvement in mathematics has been considerable, and particularly so for the girls. In recent national tests, boys did not perform as well as the girls. However, the school has introduced strategies to address this and the gap has narrowed. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported and make good progress, some to the point where they no longer need support.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including the social, moral, spiritual and cultural aspects, is a strength of the school. Pupils flourish in the secure and supportive environment and enjoy the many opportunities on offer. Behaviour is good throughout the school, because of clear expectations and a consistent approach. The challenging behaviour of a very small minority is well managed. Pupils feel safe in school and they are clear that there is very little bullying; parents agree. Although the pupils are aware of other cultures, through opportunities to experience foods and music, this area is not well developed. Attendance has improved in response to the school's efforts, and is satisfactory. However, there remains a very small minority of parents who do not ensure their children attend on a regular basis. Pupils take their responsibilities as school councillors and playground leaders very seriously. They make a good contribution to the wider community and raise money for various charities. Pupils have a good

understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles and are aware of the need for regular exercise and a healthy diet. As a result of the emphasis on learning basic skills throughout the curriculum, the pupils are gaining in confidence and have high aspirations, preparing them well for the next stage of learning and the world beyond.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The teachers' good subject knowledge and enthusiasm means that almost all lessons are effective and the pupils enjoy learning. Lessons include a good range of techniques, such as paired discussions and practical activities, to help pupils to remain focused. Teaching assistants support groups and individuals effectively. Consistent management of any poor behaviour and clear planning mean that lessons proceed at a good pace. Pupils are well engaged and are beginning to take on some of the responsibility for their learning. Pupils usually receive positive feedback about their work, but often do not have enough opportunities to respond to feedback to improve their work. There are good systems for keeping track of how well pupils are learning and these are being used well to identify pupils who need support. Targets and successes are shared with pupils and parents regularly and the school works hard to encourage them to be part of the 'learning journey'.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is broad, balanced, and relevant to local circumstances. It meets national requirements in literacy, numeracy, science, and information and communication technology (ICT). Writing skills have been enhanced through projects such as 'Write from the Start' and the school is refining a whole-school approach. The support programme in mathematics has had a positive impact on standards. There is good curricular provision for pupils who find learning more difficult, or need help to access the curriculum. However, teachers do not always prepare work that is sufficiently demanding for more able pupils. The curriculum is currently being reviewed to provide more creative links across all subjects, making learning more meaningful for pupils. Pupils enjoy the wide range of clubs and educational visits or visitors, including working with an animator to make short video clips. These activities widen their experience and contribute positively to their personal and social development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good overall and the pastoral care is excellent. Vulnerable pupils, in particular, are supported very effectively. Those who find school difficult are helped to manage their emotions through the exceptional work of the nurture group and through the availability of a learning mentor, both of which enable pupils to learn alongside their peers. Pupils with specific needs, including physical needs, are well supported through good partnerships outside the school. The school has robust systems in place to ensure pupils safety; safeguarding procedures are fully in place. The school provides clear guidance to pupils as to how they should behave and how to live healthy lifestyles and this makes a very good contribution to their personal development. Robust systems to track pupils' progress have been

established since the last inspection. Where marking is good it gives clear guidance to help pupils to improve, although this is not consistent across the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has brought about considerable changes in the school since the previous inspection and these are now leading to rising standards. Together with her senior leaders, she has identified the key issues that need to be tackled through good self-evaluation. The good leadership and management has improved the behaviour of the pupils, raised expectations and ensured that teaching is effective. Governance is good. Governors have an accurate picture of the school, and provide challenge as well as their loyal support. The school works hard to develop good links with parents to support learning at home, and they are exploring ways of developing this further. Equal opportunities are promoted well, so that all pupils are included fully in what the school offers. The school is beginning to develop links with schools in other communities, to explore the multicultural aspects of Britain. The school makes a significant contribution towards enhancing local community cohesion, through involvement and links with a variety of groups. For example, learning exchanges with a local residential home were well received on both sides. The school is working towards developing pupils' understanding of their role in the wider, national and global communities. Through astute, careful management, a considerable deficit in the budget has been turned around and the school provides good value for money.

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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?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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	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	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?	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?	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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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**

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Valley Primary and Nursery School, Whitehaven, CA28 8DA

Thank you for welcoming the inspectors to your school last week. We thoroughly enjoyed meeting so many of you and hearing what you think about your school. You told us you think it is a good school and we agree with you.

Many of you said you feel so well looked after and we think your teachers are doing a great job of caring and supporting you. This means that you develop into mature, thoughtful young people; this showed in the way you chatted to us so confidently. We were also impressed with the things you do as part of your community, and how you show your care for one another and others. Almost all of you behave very well, and those who find this more difficult are helped by the teachers, the learning mentor and the nurture group.

You work hard in your lessons and now reach average standards by the end of Year 6, which shows you have made good progress from when you started at the school. Those of you who find learning more difficult also make the progress you should because you get good support. The teachers make sure that they know who needs some extra help, and they find ways of providing this.

Even though you are doing so well, there are some things your school can do to make sure things get even better. These are the things the inspectors have asked the school to do.

- Make sure that marking in your books helps you to do even better work; you need to make sure you respond to their ideas about how to improve.
- Ensure those of you who find learning easy have harder work to do, so you will have to stretch yourselves a bit more.

Most importantly of all, continue to enjoy learning and make sure your school is a great place for everyone to be.

Yours faithfully

Andrew Saunders

Lead inspector