

Millom School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 112388 |
| Local Authority | Cumbria |
| Inspection number | 331090 |
| Inspection dates | 6–7 May 2009 |
| Reporting inspector | Pat Kime HMI |

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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|---|--------------------------------------|
| Type of school | Secondary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 11–18 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 698 |
| Sixth form | 57 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Prof C Richards |
| Headteacher | Mr I P Smith |
| Date of previous school inspection | 1 November 2007 |
| School address | Salthouse Road Millom LA18 5AB |
| Telephone number | 01229 772300 |
| Fax number | 01229 772883 |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector.

Description of the school

Millom School is situated on the isolated south west Cumbrian coast, an area of some social and economic disadvantage. The school has specialist status as a technology college. Students come from the town and its rural hinterland. An average number of students receive free school meals. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is in line with the national average. Most these students have behavioural and/or emotional difficulties. The vast majority of the students are of White British heritage and none are learning English as additional language. A very small number of students are looked after by the local authority.

When the school was inspected in November 2007, it was found to require special measures because it was failing to provide an acceptable standard of education. Since then inspectors have visited the school regularly to check on its progress.

Since November 2007 there have been several changes to the school's staffing, including several that strengthen previously weak areas. The school has National Healthy School status and the Football Association chartered status. It holds several awards, including Artsmark silver award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Millom School has improved a great deal in the last year and a half. It now provides a satisfactory education and has some good features. The senior team, with support from the local authority and the governing body, has worked tirelessly to improve the school. Key factors in the improvement have been a strong emphasis on training and development for all staff, closer checks on students' progress and an increased emphasis on teachers' responsibility for that progress. The result is more effective teaching and learning and better leadership and management at all levels. Morale is good. Students speak of improvements in many aspects of the school's work. They also say that they have a stake in the school and their views are heard. Staff show ambition for the school and keenness to play their part in further improving it.

Achievement is now satisfactory throughout the school. Students are making sound progress and, taken overall, their work is at a broadly average standard for their age. Standards in the sixth form have risen. Standards at GCSE were not high enough in 2008 but early indications are that the results are likely to be considerably higher this year. The standards reached by the end of Year 9 have also risen.

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory overall. Students make sound progress in spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They have a good understanding of how to keep healthy and safe. Their academic standards and personal qualities prepare them effectively for the future. Behaviour is now satisfactory. The attendance rate is above average. The school is an orderly community and lessons are no longer hindered by the poor behaviour seen at the previous inspection. That said, in some lessons that are satisfactory overall, there are occasional instances of unacceptable behaviour and, in a minority of lessons, the pace of learning is slowed somewhat by a lack of urgency on the part of a few students.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory. There has been an increase in the proportion of good lessons. Teachers have responded positively to higher expectations, supported by additional training and, in some cases, individual coaching. Whole-school procedures are in place, for instance for planning lessons, managing behaviour, marking students' work and keeping track of their progress, and for setting targets for students. However, such procedures are not implemented equally rigorously throughout the school or within subjects. For example, while some marking is very good, with teachers giving clear feedback on performance and setting precise short-term targets, some poorly presented work is accepted and sometimes students' progress towards their targets is not noted.

The school offers courses that are matched to students' needs and interests. For instance, in several subjects, including science and information and communication technology (ICT), modular courses are offered at GCSE level. Additionally, students following work related courses now also work towards accredited qualifications. These features represent an improvement in the curriculum in the main school and the sixth form. The impact is seen in higher academic standards and fewer students excluded from school. There is also a good range of activities beyond lessons. The school's technology specialism enhances its provision and has a positive impact on students' achievement.

The quality of pastoral care is good, particularly for those students who need extra support to stay on track and benefit from school. There are tight systems for keeping a check on whether

all students are doing as well as they should in their school work and additional help is provided for those at risk of underachieving. Heads of departments and class teachers now make better use of the information obtained from assessments of students' performance. They set suitably challenging targets and students know what they need to do to reach them.

Taken overall, leadership and management are good. The school's dependence on support from local authority staff is much reduced. Good capacity for improvement is evident from what has already been achieved in key aspects of the school's work and the commitment to further development seen at all levels. There are clear strengths at senior leadership level and in governance. Middle leadership has improved. Staff at this level generally understand their responsibilities and are keen to fulfil them. Some of these staff have played a key role in raising expectations of what students can achieve and holding teachers to account for standards. However, the quality and effectiveness of leadership and management vary between subjects.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sharper focus and greater rigour seen in the main school are also evident in the sixth form which is led and managed well. Students' achievement has improved since the previous inspection. Their rate of progress is now average. The curriculum has broadened to offer courses beyond the traditionally academic. The school is trialling some distance learning and it provides suitable opportunities for students who might otherwise be at risk of not being in education, training or employment. More students want to join the sixth form but some teaching groups remain very small and the provision is, therefore, expensive. The sixth formers' personal development is good. They benefit from a broad range of enrichment activities and good opportunities to take responsibility in school life.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further improve teaching and learning, in particular by:
- sharpening teachers' skills at keeping all students fully involved in lessons
- spreading the best practice in marking students' work
- strengthening teachers' skills at using assessment in lessons to promote good learning.
- Consolidate recent improvements in subject leadership and management and further develop the middle leaders' contribution to improving students' achievement.

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

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The picture of students' standards and progress this year is more promising than that seen in 2007 and 2008. The school presented strong evidence that standards have risen considerably and are now broadly average and that students in Year 11 are set to reach suitably challenging targets which would represent satisfactory progress since they joined the school and good progress in Key Stage 4. For some courses, for instance, in science, English and ICT, results at GCSE or equivalent are already known and they closely match what the school predicted. The work seen by inspectors also generally confirmed the school's view of standards. Students in Year 9 recently took tests and the results show that students at all ability levels have made

satisfactory progress in Key Stage 3. Students in Year 7 and Year 8 are making satisfactory progress but, overall their progress is better in mathematics and science than in English where some need to catch up lost ground.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are looked after by the local authority make satisfactory progress. However, in general, across the school, boys do not perform as well as girls.

Exam results in 2008 were not good enough. The headline figures at GCSE, of five good passes including English and mathematics, were significantly below the national average. The students had not made sufficient progress during their time at the school. However, their rate of progress in English and mathematics improved in Key Stage 4. A significant contributory factor in the underachievement was the number of students undertaking work related learning that did not lead to accredited qualifications. Improvements to the curriculum have resulted in this issue being overcome. The school's specialism in technology has a positive impact on standards. Some of the better performing subjects are within the specialism.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall. Students generally get on well with each other, they have good relationships with the adults in school and their behaviour is satisfactory. They appreciate the school's increased focus on recognising and rewarding good behaviour and attitudes to learning. Students enjoy working on behalf of others, for example through charitable activity. They like taking responsibility. The role of the school council has increased greatly and councillors have very good opportunities to contribute to school life and decision making. However, other students would welcome more opportunities to take responsibility in school life. Students develop an appreciation of cultural diversity, particularly through citizenship and religious education, but they have little first-hand experience in this area.

In most lessons, most students are cooperative and have positive attitudes to learning. A few, however, show limited commitment; they are easily distracted and take little responsibility for learning or pride in their work.

Students have a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. Participation rates in extra-curricular sporting activities are reasonable. Students eat and drink healthily while at school.

Students' understanding of safety matters is good. They follow safe routines in lessons, for instance, wearing goggles when appropriate in science lessons, and know the reasons for them. They have a good awareness of the risks associated with the Internet. Their knowledge of emergency aid is good as a result of work on 'Out of the Box' days.

The attendance rate is above average. As a result of the school's dogged pursuit of the most persistent absentees, very few students have poor attendance. Additionally, the number of instances when students have been excluded from school has reduced greatly since November 2007. At the same time there has been a significant reduction in the number of lessons in which learning is hindered by incidents of poor behaviour. Students recognise the fairness of the school's behaviour policy and agree that it is applied fairly.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The school's records show that teaching has improved steadily since November 2007 and only rarely slips below satisfactory. The satisfactory overall quality of teaching is testament to the effectiveness of the action taken to strengthen teachers' skills. Lessons normally cover appropriate work, which is planned satisfactorily, and staff maintain sound classroom discipline within positive relationships with students. Differences in the effectiveness of teaching depend on the individual teachers' skill rather than the subjects being taught.

There were several common positive features in many of the good lessons. Teachers were very clear about exactly what the students needed to do to reach the next level in their work. They pitched their expectations high and set well conceived, interesting tasks that were matched well to students' range of learning needs. Consequently, students enjoyed rising to the challenge. These lessons started off with lively openings that set the tone and left students keen to learn. Teachers used their good subject knowledge well. They kept a good track of how well all students were progressing in the lesson and they questioned students skilfully to probe their understanding and help them move forward in their thinking. A particularly significant strength of the best lessons was the teachers' skills in keeping all students fully involved through the course of the lesson.

Where the teaching was satisfactory, rather than good, it was for two main reasons. Firstly, though teachers maintained order they did not hold all students' attention throughout each lesson. Consequently, there was a degree of low level misbehaviour, restlessness and inattention which slowed the pace of learning as teachers' efforts were partly diverted to responding to students who were seeking attention inappropriately and making unreasonable demands. This was more often seen in lower ability sets. Secondly, opportunities to reinforce and extend learning were missed. This was mainly because teachers did not check students' learning rigorously during lessons and, though the teachers talked to the students, they provided few opportunities for them to clarify their understanding through discussion.

The quality of marking and the targets set for students, varies considerably, sometimes even between teachers in the same subject. Some work is marked rigorously. Students are told exactly how well they have done; they are given appropriate and helpful pointers for improvement, whatever their ability level; and when a target is reached it is noted so students can see that they are progressing. In some books, however, teachers' comments are less well focused, careless and poorly presented work is accepted, and progress is not often noted.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school's curriculum meets requirements. It is suitably tailored to meet students' needs and interests and this is an improvement since November 2007 which has made the school more inclusive. The range of alternatives to GCSE, including modular courses, has increased. Students on work related programmes are now working towards accredited qualifications, including in the key skills of literacy and numeracy. Provision is satisfactory in English, mathematics, science and in ICT. In English, a coherent and progressive programme of work has been introduced to support teaching in Key Stage 3. This has resulted in greater equity for students, with all ability sets covering the same basic work though at different levels. Planning to meet the particular

needs of each student with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has improved. This has helped the school to tackle the previous underachievement of this group. The improvements in the curriculum have contributed to raising standards and to the significant reduction in exclusions since November 2007.

The curriculum is enhanced by a good range of visits and visitors which appeal to students and support their learning and personal development, particularly their understanding of how to keep healthy and safe. The range of activities beyond lessons is extensive and take up is reasonable. However, the school does not analyse patterns of attendance at these activities by different groups of students and more could be done to ensure that students who travel a distance to school are able to participate.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral care is strong and staff go to considerable lengths to ensure that all students are able to achieve. This strength has a positive impact on attendance, the rate of exclusions and students' behaviour. Increased staffing means that all students who have difficulties are allocated to a learning mentor, who coordinates support for them. Staff work in good partnership with external agencies and families to support vulnerable students. Students with behavioural or emotional difficulties are supported well and eased into mainstream lessons. There are good arrangements with primary schools to smooth transition to secondary school, particularly for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school keeps a close eye on the effectiveness of pastoral care and is continually looking to strengthen it further.

The arrangements for safeguarding students meet government requirements. Students feel safe at school. They say that any concerns they raise, for instance, about incidents of bullying, which occur only occasionally, are taken seriously and dealt with effectively.

The quality of academic guidance and support has improved and is satisfactory. There is greater rigour in the way targets are set and students' progress towards them checked. This is evident at all levels, though not entirely consistent. As a result, students know how well they are doing and how to do better; they say that the 'constructive criticism' from teachers is helpful. Students who are not doing quite as well as they should are identified and given sharply focused additional teaching to help them catch up.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Since the previous inspection this aspect of the school's work is much better and the pace of improvement has stepped up considerably. The culture in the school is now such that, within a positive and supportive ethos, staff at all levels, are held to account for students' achievement. Since September 2007, staffing has been strengthened. There have been several appointments, including a second assistant headteacher, a new coordinator for special educational needs, a new head and new second in the English department, a new head of science and several learning mentors. Recently appointed staff speak highly of the support they have received from the senior team.

The senior team's commitment to improving the school is undiminished.. Capacity at middle leadership level has been strengthened. Heads of departments have benefited from additional

training, much of it provided in-house. They are taking a greater role in setting expectations for students and staff, evaluating the quality of teaching, managing their teams and planning for improvement in their departments. They relish this responsibility and the challenges it brings and they appreciate the support of senior staff. Not all, however, are equally effective so the development of leadership and management skills at this level remains an area for improvement. Nevertheless, there are examples where senior staff have recognised talent and coached individuals who, as a result, have developed good leadership and management skills and raised standards in their subjects. Close and supportive links have been established between senior and middle leaders and between middle leaders and teachers. The enhanced role of the staff responsible for overseeing students' progress in each key stage has developed well. It contributes significantly to the school's good evaluation of its performance and to raising expectations.

Governors are knowledgeable about the school's work and very closely involved in it. They provide good support and challenge.

The school promotes community cohesion soundly and there are strengths in the contribution to the local community. Some international links have been established. Educational visits in the local area and further afield and the curriculum for citizenship are used to extend students' understanding of diversity.

The school's specialist status has a positive effect on standards and on partnerships with primary schools. Plans are in place to further develop the specialism and strengthen its impact across the school's work.

While under special measures, the school has received considerable support from the local authority. It is now considerably less dependent on this external support. This is evident, for example, in two areas. The school is more autonomous in planning for the future and how it will continue to improve. The school's judgements on the quality of teaching and learning are more accurate. In most instances, inspectors' judgements were broadly in agreement with those of the school.

The school carries a deficit of around 7% of its budget. This has been authorised by the local authority with whom an action plan has been agreed to clear the deficit within five years.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

| | | |
|---|----------------|-------|
| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | School Overall | 16-19 |
|---|----------------|-------|

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 | 3 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes | Yes |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being? | 2 | 2 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 2 | 2 |

Achievement and standards

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 3 | 3 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 3 | 3 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 3 | 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 | 2 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 3 | |
| 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 | 3 | |
| The attendance of learners | 2 | |
| 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 | 3 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 3 | 3 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 2 | 2 |

Leadership and management

| | | |
|--|-----|-----|
| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 2 | 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 | 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 | 3 | |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 2 | |
| Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements? | Yes | 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**

8 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Millom School, Cumbria, LA18 5AB

I am writing on behalf of the inspection team. The most important thing we want to say is that the school has improved a lot since November 2007 and it no longer needs special measures. It now provides you with a satisfactory education. We would also like to thank you for welcoming us and for your contribution to the school's inspection. It was good to hear your views, especially about the ways in which the school has improved.

We know that the staff, governors and you, the students have all worked very hard to move the school forward. We saw improvement in five key aspects of the school's work. First, your work is of a higher standard and you are making better progress in learning. Second, the quality of teaching has improved and many more lessons are good. Third, the courses on offer meet your needs and interests better and more students are on courses that lead to useful qualifications. Fourth, the support and guidance you receive has improved so you are clearer about how you are getting on and how to do better. Fifth, the senior staff and heads of departments are leading and managing the school's work better.

Mr Smith and his leadership team do not intend to rest on their laurels. They are determined that your school will continue to improve. We think they can do it, not least because there is a real enthusiasm for development among staff.

To improve the school further, we have told the school to concentrate on two things:

- further improving the quality of teaching and learning so that the large majority of lessons are at least good
- developing the work of heads of departments so that you do as well as possible in all subjects.

Of course the staff will not improve the school on their own. Every one of you has a part to play too. For each of you the most important things are to set your sights high, to work hard and behave well in lessons, and to take in pride in always doing your very best. You can also make suggestions about how to improve things through the school council.

You have our very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Pat Kime

Her Majesty's Inspector