

Castle Park School

Sedbergh Drive, Kendal, Cumbria, LA9 6BE

Inspection dates 25–26 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils achieve well. Most make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. They develop good attitudes to learning.
- Children get a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They thrive in a vibrant and highly organised environment.
- Good, and at times, outstanding teaching gives pupils a great enjoyment of learning. Activities are interesting and reflect the pupils' interests.
- Talented staff support pupils with disabilities and special educational needs and those known to be eligible for additional funding through pupil premium. Consequently, these pupils make good progress.
- Pupils have many opportunities to explore the wider world and benefit from a good range of educational visits and interactions with people from a range of different backgrounds.
- Outstanding spiritual, social, moral and cultural development leads to good behaviour almost all of the time. Pupils treat each other with respect and are generally eager to learn.
- Parents are unanimous in their support of the school. They report that their children are happy, safe and cared for well.
- The headteacher, senior leaders and governing body provide clear and purposeful leadership. Considerable improvements are under way including raising achievement and broadening the pupils' experience of the wider world.
- The school is well placed to continue to improve.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The achievement of the most-able pupils is not as good as that of other pupils.
- The rate of progress and quality of learning vary slightly between classes.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching in all classes. They visited 22 lessons and part-lessons.
- Meetings were held with staff, including the headteacher and her deputy, the manager of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the leaders of English and mathematics and the managers of inclusion. In addition, discussions were conducted with the leaders of each Key Stage, the sports co-ordinator and the leader of religious education and spiritual, social, moral and cultural development.
- Discussions were also held with all except two members of the governing body. A conversation was held with a representative of the local authority.
- Information from a range of school documentation was reviewed. This included:
 - samples of pupils' work in their books
 - the details relating to safeguarding
 - the school's procedures for gaining an accurate view of its performance and plans for its improvement
 - records held by the school about pupils' attainment and progress.
- The views of pupils were gathered by evaluating a recent questionnaire carried out by the school as well as frequent discussions with individuals and groups during lessons, at play and during lunch. Representative groups of pupils from Key Stages 1 and 2 met with inspectors to discuss their views of the school and to share their reading books.
- An analysis of 28 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) coupled with an evaluation of parents' opinions expressed in the school's own survey secured a picture of the parents' judgements of the school.
- An analysis of 27 inspection questionnaires completed by staff, together with an on-going dialogue with them during the inspection informed inspectors about their opinions.

Inspection team

David Byrne, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

John Ellwood

Additional Inspector

David Halford

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger than average-sized primary school.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for additional government funding, known as the pupil premium, is below average. (The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children that are looked after by the local authority.)
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported through school action is average. The proportion of pupils supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The headteacher took up post in January 2012. She is a local leader in education supporting another colleague in a nearby school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the achievement of the most-able pupils by:
 - devising and implementing a policy that ensures that most-able pupils are identified across the school
 - rigorously checking that in each class, expectations for the most-able pupils are high enough for them to make the best possible progress
 - making sure that work for the most-able pupils is hard enough to take their learning forward.
- Strengthen further the quality of learning to remove the variations in progress by:
 - sharing the outstanding practice within the school with others to improve aspects of teaching
 - making sure that marking consistently gives pupils precise guidance about how to improve
 - in every class, deepening the pupils' understanding of their own achievement and what they need to do to reach higher standards.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Children start school in the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and knowledge that are below what is typical for their age. A significant proportion of children have disabilities and special educational needs. They make good progress; many reach or exceed a good level of development by the start of Year 1, but the overall proportion doing so is just below average.
- In Key Stage 1, standards are improving quickly in response to improved leadership which sets high expectations for achievement. From the individual starting points to Key Stage 1, pupils make good progress. In 2013 the proportion reaching the standards expected for their age was above average and significantly so in reading.
- The results of the 2013 Year 1 phonics screening check (linking sounds and letters) were just below average. The school investigated the reason for this and has taken effective action to remedy this. Observations during the inspection show that pupils in Key Stage 1 make good progress in phonics. Many pupils in Year 2 have an advanced understanding of sounds and letters and routinely use their knowledge to read and write to a good standard.
- Reading for enjoyment is promoted well across the school. Staff open up the pupils' experience of reading in many ways, including regular group reading time in lessons, visits to the school libraries and frequent times when adults read a book to pupils – something they say they love! Pupils who find reading difficult receive high quality support and while their standards may be lower than those of some other pupils, their confidence and enjoyment of reading is high.
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 2, although broadly average, over time are rising. Rapid improvement is under way in writing, with evidence of some outstanding work throughout the school.
- Improvements to the curriculum and the quality of lessons are accelerating progress across the school, although at Key Stage 2, the rate varies between classes. In the 2013 Year 6 national tests and assessments, an above average proportion of pupils gained the standard expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics and an above average proportion made the progress expected of them.
- The proportion of pupils exceeding the national expectations for Year 6 pupils dipped in 2013, compared to the good results of the previous year. The proportion of pupils making more than the progress expected of them also dipped from good in 2012 and was below the national average in reading and mathematics.
- Leaders have reacted swiftly to this dip and considerable improvement is now under way. Improved training for staff and an increased rigour in checking on the progress pupils make mean that successful actions are now taken to support pupils at risk of underachieving, including the most able. Such decisions are leading to an increased proportion of pupils in Year 6 now working at the higher Level 5, with some targeted to gain the highest Level 6. This reflects the school's commitment to ensuring that every pupil is given an equal chance now to reach their potential.
- The needs of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are managed exceptionally well. These pupils reach higher standards than similar pupils do nationally, but below the national average for all pupils.
- The pupil premium funding is used very effectively to support individual pupils in all year groups. Currently, these pupils, including those entitled to free school meals, are making better progress than that of their peers, leading to the relatively small gap between their knowledge and understanding and that of other pupils narrowing. In 2013, their standards at Year 6 were above those of similar pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics, but slightly below those of other pupils in the school.

The quality of teaching**is good**

- The strong leadership of the headteacher promotes a consistent approach to learning across the school. Increasingly, pupils are given time to reflect on what they learn, how they learn and whether or not they have done well enough. Some differences in the quality of learning remain. At times, pupils receive similar work which hampers progress, in particular of the most-able pupils. While marking is regular, its quality varies and does not consistently give precise guidance about how pupils can improve their work.
- Usually, learning activities are tailored to the interests of pupils, which encourages good enjoyment of learning. This is particularly the case in the Early Years Foundation Stage where children benefit from a wide range of highly organised and purposeful activities. An exciting environment inspires learning both inside and out. Children are skilfully managed by adults to promote creativity and independence alongside developing early reading, writing and mathematical skills.
- Throughout the school, teachers and teaching assistants work together very effectively. The needs of pupils with disabilities and special educational needs and pupils known to be eligible for additional funding through pupil premium are identified and given support where required. Talented support staff intervene to accelerate learning in reading and mathematics and give skilled guidance for pupils needing emotional support.
- Pupils made rapid progress when they were given clear guidance on what they were expected to do and how they could achieve their targets.
- In an English lesson in Year 6, pupils were encouraged to express their opinions about a poem by Charles Causley, responding very positively to highly skilled questions that deepened their knowledge of the text. Learning was rapid because they knew in detail what they needed to do to improve their writing. This depth of knowledge is not always the case; in some classes, some pupils are not clear about their targets for improvement and lack the knowledge about how to get better. This reduces their progress.
- Staff use resources, including computers, effectively. During an excellent science activity, Year 3 pupils became totally engrossed in investigating the qualities of different rocks using hand lenses and vinegar. Because pupils had been very well prepared with key scientific words and excellent explanations about the way different rocks are formed, they excitedly observed the effect of vinegar on each rock and used scientific words to explain what happened.
- In English, progress is most rapid when adults model good handwriting and clear diction well. This latter point is especially successful in helping pupils in Key Stage 1 learn the sounds that letters make. Adults show pride in all they do, creating, for example, vibrant displays of pupils' work and sharply focused information boards to support literacy and numeracy, and so pupils aspire to write well themselves and present work neatly.
- Pupils are encouraged to write in a wide variety of subjects which adds to the purpose of the work they do and raises their achievement. In Key Stage 1, pupils' imaginations were fired up by reading a story which included an 'ogre'. They eagerly set about writing their own character descriptions and confidently used dictionaries to seek words and check spellings.
- Learning in mathematics is good and enhanced further when pupils' learning is set to real-life situations. In Year 6, pupils have combined investigations into forces in science with using measurement of force, weight, and time of falling objects. The mathematical understanding and empirical accuracy is very strongly enhanced because of the motivation that the pupils gained.

The behaviour and safety of pupils**are good**

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Parents who gave a view are unanimous that pupils behave well and that their children are cared for very well. School records show that behaviour has been improving quickly, reflecting strong and effective systems introduced by the headteacher to promote good behaviour over time.
- Pupils usually get on very well with each other. Some with challenging behaviour struggle at

times, but benefit from excellent support. Pupils are eager to learn in most lessons, but when pupils are not stretched enough, their enthusiasm drops and they become restless and slightly disruptive.

- Pupils understand the need for school rules. They report that they feel secure in the way staff manage behaviour. Pupils respond positively to the rewards given for good behaviour, but they also say that the existence of sanctions for misbehaviour, such as detention, is important.
- Pupils are proud of their school. This pride is evident in the exceptional care taken by most pupils with the presentation of their work and in the high quality displays they contribute to around the school. A confidence is instilled in pupils which, in turn, results in high aspirations within them for their own behaviour and academic standards.
- The pupils' love of school, reported to inspectors and observed throughout the school, is reflected in good punctuality and above average attendance. Pupils' opinions are respected and valued. School councillors willingly contribute to developing and improving the school by taking their classmates' views to staff and beyond. Recently, some pupils made the case for a safer crossing outside the school by confidently presenting their argument to elected councillors.
- An excellent approach to promoting pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development leads to outstanding levels of awareness. The opportunities for pupils to interact with pupils in a school in Ghana coupled with educational visits, for example a tour of Blackburn Cathedral conducted by a Muslim multi-faith worker, give pupils a good perspective on the diversity of modern society. High quality art and increasing opportunities for pupils to develop their dance and musical prowess extend pupils' scope to dwell on the value of spirituality.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils and parents are unanimous that the school is very caring and secure. Pupils and parents say there is very little bullying in school and they are confident that staff deal with any incidents promptly and fairly. Good systems within the school, including regular personal, social and health education give pupils good awareness of the different forms that bullying takes, including name-calling, and physical and cyber-bullying.

The leadership and management are good

- Under the strong and highly effective leadership of the headteacher, supported by an active and supportive governing body, the school is improving rapidly. Standards are rising, pupils are receiving increasingly high quality lessons, and both staff and pupils benefit in improved knowledge and skill by the school's philosophy of looking outwards to learn from others.
- Since her appointment two years ago, the headteacher has gained the utmost respect of staff, pupils and parents. Her leadership qualities are highly valued by others; her role as a local leader in education reflects this. Staff morale is high. They thrive on the respect and trust placed in them by the headteacher, supported by a skilled deputy headteacher.
- Everything in the school is well organised. Staff know their roles, who they are answerable to and the part they play in achieving the school's aim. The school's motto of 'learning for life' underpins all that goes on and the school is well down the road in securing this ambition.
- Because the school's evaluation of its performance is detailed and very accurate, there are very pertinent and well-reasoned targets for improvement. These are wide ranging and include improving aspects of the child's personal development as well as academic achievement.
- A wisely structured management team keeps a close eye on the progress occurring towards the targets for school improvement. This includes regular reviews of the performance of pupils and staff. Regular meetings are established to plot the progress of pupils so that none fall behind.
- Staff value the regular discussions they have with senior leaders about their performance, because it enables them to seek training where they feel it necessary as well as understanding the next steps for the whole school. It is accepted that moves up the pay scale are linked to the impact of actions to raise achievement for pupils.
- An imaginative approach to the curriculum inspires pupils to become confident learners. It promotes strengths in pupils in writing, science, art and, increasingly, an awareness of global

issues. Lessons and topics reflect the pupils' own interests. This generates better learning because pupils understand the meaning of what they are doing. Frequent links between subjects add further relevance for pupils, for example writing may be developed as part of geography and mathematics as part of a science investigation.

- Parents are unanimous in saying they would recommend this school. Much is being done to encourage parental support for their children at home. The school's website shares a lot of important information and parents are welcomed to school to meet staff and discuss their children's progress. School leaders and governors work hard to increase the quality of partnerships with parents.
- The school benefits from excellent links with local schools as part of the Kendal Collaborative Partnership (KCP). This enables extensive staff training and curriculum development which benefits pupils. It gives pupils opportunities to participate in a wide range of events including sport and the arts.
- The primary school sport funding employs a qualified sports coach. A key part of her role is to develop the confidence and skills of staff. The funding also enables pupils to participate in a wider variety of sports, including inter-school sports events and competitions. Pupils' well-being is enhanced further because the funding has enabled the training of pupils as play leaders to promote activity outdoors during lunchtime.
- The local authority has worked closely with the headteacher and staff over the last two years. Good advice, guidance and support by a skilled local authority representative have been a key factor in the school's improvement.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors know the school inside out. They are very well informed about pupils' achievement because they constantly review the school's performance data and discuss its features with the headteacher. In addition, regular visits to school and links to subject leaders offer further information about the quality of education provided for pupils. Armed with their good knowledge of the school, governors understand the targets for the school's improvement and they keep an eye on how effectively the school meets these.
 - Roles within the governing body are clearly defined. There is strong and experienced leadership by the Chair of Governors and the many skills within the governing team are clearly valued. Governors bring to their roles a great wealth of professional experience that is given selflessly to benefit the school and its pupils; for example, in supporting the school in helping pupils with disabilities and special educational needs or in offering advice about architectural developments within the school.
 - Governors set targets for the headteacher which include securing higher academic achievement for some pupils. There are checks on the performance and pay of staff. The governing body implements a pay policy which complies with the requirement that movement up the pay scale is linked to performance.
 - Finances are managed very effectively to minimise the impact on the budget arising from fluctuations in the number of pupils on role. The effect of the grant in supporting pupils known to be eligible for additional help through pupil premium funding is carefully monitored. Governors are aware of how it is spent and know that it is raising achievement for these pupils.
 - All aspects of the governing body's statutory duties are met, including procedures to secure safeguarding.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	112189
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	439551

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	264
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Austen Robinson
Headteacher	Helen Richardson
Date of previous school inspection	17 March 2009
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