

Vickerstown School

Mill Lane, Walney, LA14 3XY

Inspection dates 5–6 March 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	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.

- Children generally enter the school with much lower levels of skills and development than expected for their age. From these low starting points, they make good progress as they move through the school. By the end of Year 6, the majority of pupils reach average standards in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The proportion of pupils who make more than expected progress is increasing rapidly, particularly in Years 5 and 6 where teaching is sometimes outstanding.
- Pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs make good progress as the school is very effective at supporting pupils with a very broad range of specific needs.
- Teachers use questioning particularly well to promote pupils' thinking skills and this accelerates their progress.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. Relationships with adults are strong and support pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher provide strong leadership that is driving up standards and improving pupils' progress.
- Systems to manage staff performance are rigorous and are used effectively to improve the quality of teaching.
- Governance is strong. Governors know the school well and provide good support and challenge for further improvement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In some lessons, teachers spend too long talking and do not allow sufficient time for pupils to complete work independently.
- Teachers in Key Stage 1 do not always plan activities in lessons to stretch more-able pupils to make as much progress as they can.
- The quality of marking is variable and teachers' written comments in marking do not always give pupils enough information on how to improve their work.
- The systems in place to enable school leaders to check on pupils' progress as they move through the school are too complicated. This means that the information gained is not always used as well as it could be to help teachers identify and support pupils at risk of slipping behind in their learning.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 15 lessons or parts of lessons, one of which was a joint observation with the headteacher. In addition, they listened to some pupils reading and observed teaching assistants working with pupils both in and out of lessons.
- Inspectors spoke to a range of pupils, including the school council, about their work and play in school.
- Inspectors met with three members of the governing body as well as teaching staff, including senior and middle leaders and the school counsellor. They also met with a local authority representative about support for the school.
- Inspectors took account of 16 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), one letter from a parent and 25 responses to the staff questionnaire. They also spoke informally with some parents.
- Inspectors observed the overall work of the school, including its school development plan and systems for checking pupils' progress. They also looked at documents relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors also looked at a wide range of other evidence, including pupils' current work in books and displays across the whole school.

Inspection team

Janette Corlett, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

John Ellwood

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller-than-average primary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action is average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well above average.
- The school operates a strategically resourced provision for 14 pupils with disabilities and/or special educational needs. The provision caters for the needs of pupils with a very wide range of severe learning, physical or medical difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders who are educated with other pupils of similar age.
- Most pupils are from a White British background and no child is at an early stage of acquiring English.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- Inspectors were aware during this inspection that a serious incident that occurred at the school recently is under investigation by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate incidents of this kind, actions taken by the school in response to the incident were considered alongside the other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform inspectors' judgements.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to outstanding by:
 - reducing the amount of time teachers spend talking in lessons so that pupils have more time to complete work independently
 - ensuring that teachers' marking is of a consistently high quality in all year groups and gives pupils specific information on how to improve their work
 - making sure that there is always enough challenge in lessons in Key Stage 1 to ensure that more-able pupils are stretched to achieve as much as they can.
- Improve leadership by:
 - ensuring that the systems in place to check on pupils' progress are simplified, clearly understood by all staff and that they are used more effectively to help teachers identify and support pupils at risk of falling behind in their learning.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Achievement has improved since the last inspection because the quality of teaching is better and the majority of pupils now make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Due to the exceptionally high proportion of pupils with severe learning difficulties, standards at the end of Year 6 vary from year to year but, overall, are broadly average. This represents good progress from starting points in the Reception class that are well below those expected.
- Progress in Key Stage 1 is good overall, but not quite as rapid for more-able pupils as it is in other year groups. This is because teachers do not always plan activities in lessons which stretch these pupils to reach the highest possible standards by the end of Year 2.
- By the time pupils leave the school, standards in reading are average. They are improving due to better teaching of the sounds which letters make (phonics) and to daily guided reading sessions where adults support individuals and small groups of pupils in developing their skills.
- The school makes effective use of the funding available to support pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium. School leaders have worked hard to close the gap between the progress of this group of pupils in English and mathematics, and the progress of other pupils. This gap is closing rapidly due to effective, targeted support. In 2012, pupils eligible for the pupil premium reached scores in English and mathematics that showed they were just over one term behind other pupils. More recent information shows that this gap is now closer to half a term and that these pupils are making good progress.
- Disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs and the pupils included through the strategically resourced provision have highly skilled support for both their personal and academic development. This ensures that they make good, and sometimes outstanding, progress.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is usually good and a growing proportion is outstanding. This is due to teachers' strong commitment to continually improving their practice and effective teamwork between school leaders, teachers and support assistants.
- Occasionally, in Key Stage 1, more-able pupils are expected to spend too long repeating tasks which they can complete easily and this sometimes limits their progress.
- Teachers use questioning well to probe pupils' understanding and accelerate their progress. In one mathematics lesson in Year 5, for example, the teacher skilfully prompted a group of pupils working on finding the area of irregular shapes, to find the area of a triangle and then to express this as an algebraic formula, with very little assistance.
- Teachers regularly mark pupils' work and give frequent praise for pupils' efforts and achievements. Sometimes teachers' written comments do not give sufficient information on how pupils' work can be improved and this limits the effectiveness of the marking.
- Occasionally, there is not a good enough balance in lessons between the time teachers spend talking and the time that pupils work on tasks independently. This sometimes means that pupils do not have enough time to complete their work and it limits their development of independent learning skills.
- The teaching of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is a real strength of the school. These pupils receive a balanced programme of specific work and support for their very wide range of individual needs that ensures they make the same good, or sometimes even better, progress as their classmates.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Most pupils are keen to learn and they behave well both in lessons and as they move in and around the school. They treat one another and the adults in school with courtesy and respect.
- All adults in the school expect that pupils will behave sensibly at all times and the school's systems for managing behaviour are consistently applied. As a result, pupils say that behaviour in the school is good and they know that they are always treated with fairness. They were keen to tell inspectors that there is very little bullying of any kind in school and that most of the time they get on well with one another.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school because the grounds are secure and adults look after them well. Good links with the local community, including the fire and police services, support pupils in learning how to keep themselves safe from harm.
- Disabled pupils, those with special educational needs and pupils whose circumstances might place them at risk particularly enjoy coming to school because they are made to feel very welcome and valued members of the school community. During the inspection, there were numerous examples of pupils supporting one another, for example, making sure that those who find it hard to mix with other children or to deal with changes in their routine were fully included in classroom activities and in playtime games.
- Parents appreciate how well the school cares for their children and typically comment that their children are really eager to come to school. Parents know staff are approachable and most feel very comfortable talking to them about any concerns.
- Attendance is average and improving. Highly effective support from the school counsellor ensures that, increasingly, pupils attend regularly, are on time and are happy and ready to learn.

The leadership and management are good

- School leaders share a determination that the school will provide the very best for pupils' academic and personal development. Teamwork is strong and this is driving up standards and improving pupils' progress.
- Performance management has been used very effectively to improve teaching. Teachers have clear targets for improvement that are having a measurable impact on pupils' outcomes. Good professional development has further supported improvements in teaching, particularly in the teaching of phonics, and this helps pupils to improve their reading and writing skills.
- Currently, the systems in place to check on pupils' progress are too complicated to give school leaders at all levels a swift means of finding out how well pupils are doing individually and in their year groups. Occasionally, this limits school leaders' ability to identify rapidly those pupils at risk of falling behind and to make sure that teachers act swiftly to support them.
- The curriculum has improved since the last inspection and provides ample opportunities for pupils to practise their reading, writing and mathematical skills in a variety of subject areas across the school day. Pupils also have good skills in using information and communication technology because they regularly use computers and other equipment to support their learning.
- Pupils speak enthusiastically of the wide range of activities that the school provides, both during and after school. Gymnastics and football are firm favourites, along with rock choir and Eco-club. Outside visits, for example, the Year 4 residential trip to Bradford, and interesting visitors who come into school, broaden pupils' experiences and promote their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness.
- Good partnership working with a range of outside agencies is particularly effective in supporting disabled pupils, those with special educational needs and pupils whose circumstances might put them at risk. There are also strong links with the local high school that support pupils well in moving on to the next phase in education.
- School leaders have a strong commitment to making sure that pupils are safe, and safeguarding procedures meet requirements.
- The local authority has provided good support for the school's journey of improvement. In particular, it has helped to establish a link with another local school that has supported improvements to the quality of teaching and to pupils' achievement.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors are a real strength of the school. They have a good understanding of pupils' progress and personal development and they play an important part in improvement planning. Individual classes 'adopt a governor' who then spends time with pupils during the school day to gain first-hand knowledge of pupils' experiences. Governors are involved in the performance management of the headteacher and set challenging objectives that are measurable in terms of improved outcomes for pupils' progress. Governors are also aware of the school's arrangements for the appraisal of teaching staff. They receive appropriate information on the outcomes from this that allows them to make informed decisions on teachers' pay and progression.

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	112209
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	401244

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	183
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Graham Hemsall
Headteacher	Michelle Phizacklea
Date of previous school inspection	17 May 2010
Telephone number	01229 471350
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