

Vicarage Park CofE Primary School

Vicarage Drive, Kendal, Cumbria LA9 5BP

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| Inspection dates | 11–12 November 2015 |
| Overall effectiveness | Requires improvement |
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Requires improvement |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Requires improvement |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Requires improvement |
| Outcomes for pupils | Requires improvement |
| Early years provision | Requires improvement |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Outstanding |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Many of the staff are new to the school and are not yet familiar and confident with new procedures and ways of working.
- Teaching and marking is not consistently good enough to ensure that all pupils achieve as well as they should.
- A leisurely pace and low-level tasks promote a lack of urgency in the learning and some lessons can be disrupted by inattentive behaviour.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning is not rigorous enough and does not challenge weak teaching or lead quickly enough to improvement.
- Middle leaders are not yet effective in developing teachers' skills and confidence in order to promote good learning in the full range of subjects.
- The curriculum is not planned or resourced sufficiently well enough to ensure that all subjects are taught well and to a sufficient depth.
- Governors do not challenge school leaders sufficiently about the school's performance including the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.
- In the Reception class, ongoing assessment is not up to date and this makes it difficult to plan next steps in the children's learning.
- Writing across the curriculum is not being promoted well enough. Tasks set frequently limit the responses from pupils.
- The basics of spelling, punctuation and grammar are not being tackled with sufficient vigour.
- The school website does not meet statutory requirements.
- The input and quality of support provided by teaching assistants varies greatly.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher has begun to change the culture of the school and has put new management systems into place.
- The primary school sports funding is being used effectively to promote pupils' health and well-being
- Pupils are thoughtful, kind and caring to one another and instinctively help others without being asked.
- Pupils are valued and well cared for and they enjoy coming to school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of school leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that the school’s self-evaluation of its performance is based on a clear and realistic understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, and that this provides a clear template for improvement
 - making sure that monitoring of teaching and learning is rigorous, challenges weak practice and provides clear direction for further improvement
 - developing the skills and knowledge of middle leaders to ensure that they are able to monitor their subjects effectively and provide relevant advice and support to enable teachers to deliver the full range of subjects confidently and effectively
 - making sure that there is a plan for the Reception class which provides clarity and direction about how to develop and improve provision
 - ensuring that the school website meets statutory requirements and informs parents about the work of the school and how their children are doing.

- Improve the quality of governance by:
 - making sure that governors receive and understand information about pupils’ achievement and the quality of teaching and learning to enable them to ask challenging questions of school leaders
 - providing relevant training for all governors to enable them to fulfil their duties effectively.

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that pupils are able to make more than expected progress by:
 - ensuring that teachers always set tasks for pupils which reflect their abilities and challenge them sufficiently
 - injecting pace and variety into lessons to keep pupils fully engaged and interested in their learning
 - planning a cohesive curriculum which meets the needs of all pupils and enables teachers to build on pupils’ previous learning across the full range of subjects
 - focusing on improving the quality of spelling, punctuation and grammar by providing more rigour and structure in the way it is corrected and improved
 - ensuring that the marking of pupils’ work is always of good quality and provides opportunities for them to respond and improve their work
 - making sure that ongoing assessment in the Reception class is up to date and informs next steps in children’s learning
 - ensuring that teaching assistants receive the training they need to support pupils effectively.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- The school is undergoing a period of transition. Since taking up post just over a year ago, the headteacher has been faced with the difficult problem of balancing a very big turnaround in staffing with improving outcomes for pupils and creating a more motivational culture throughout the school.
- The atmosphere around the school is now purposeful and new systems and processes linked to assessing pupils' progress and the monitoring of provision have been put into place. However, impact on improving outcomes for pupils is in its early stages.
- Significant staffing changes over the last year have disrupted and slowed down the implementation of a range of proposed improvements, including the implementation of the new National Curriculum. Staff are still coming to terms with new systems and ways of working.
- Self-evaluation is not sharp enough and is overgenerous. School leaders have not taken into sufficient account the evidence from year on year outcomes for pupils, including the quality of work in their books. Currently, there is insufficient evidence to equate with a good judgement on overall effectiveness. There remain too many areas which still require improvement.
- An extensive programme of monitoring of teaching and learning has been set up. There is clear evidence that lessons are being monitored more frequently and pupils' work is undergoing scrutiny. However, at this stage, this is not rigorous enough to accurately identify pupil progress and enable challenge to weaknesses in teaching. Not all leadership staff involved are confident or secure in their judgements.
- Middle leadership is in an embryonic stage of development and as yet is not having sufficient impact in improving teachers' skills and confidence to teach the full range of subjects. Curriculum plans lack structure and are not sufficiently focused on manageable strategies. There is insufficient emphasis on developing teachers' subject knowledge and classroom skills.
- Systems to assess the ongoing progress of pupils are now established. Previously this assessment was limited to tests at the end of each term. Less attention was paid to the intervening months and, as a result, gaps in pupils' learning were not rigorously tackled. Teachers are still familiarising themselves with the process and are not yet secure enough in ensuring that the assessment information is accurately based on solid evidence.
- The school was ill prepared to teach the new National Curriculum in September 2014 when the current headteacher formally took up post. Ongoing staffing turbulence hampered implementation. Currently, a new creative curriculum is in the process of being developed. The school admits this is a work in progress and the intention is to review outcomes by the end of term. Although well intentioned, this currently is not planned or resourced sufficiently well to ensure that all subjects are able to be taught with rigour and to a sufficient depth.
- A new system to manage the performance of teachers, as well as teaching assistants, has been put in place and this is now more closely linked to specific targets as well as pupils' outcomes. As yet, this is not being used to support the professional development of individuals by informing schools leaders what specific training courses teachers could attend to improve their practice.
- The primary school sports funding is being used effectively to promote pupils' health and well-being. Pupils are also able to participate in a wide range of sports. They take part in a range of competitive tournaments and competitions. Specialist support from a local school has helped to train teachers to become more confident in teaching groups of pupils on their own.
- Links with the church, and greater recent involvement with religious groups, have helped improve spirituality and pupils are well supported in their moral and social development. They are reflective and thoughtful and respect one another.
- There is limited evidence to suggest that they are being well prepared for life in modern Britain. They have very limited exposure to other cultures, either directly or through the curriculum. This issue was raised as an action point in the last inspection and to date has not been addressed with any rigour. For example, the school has not yet developed any meaningful links with a contrasting school, either in this country or abroad.
- The school has received some limited support from the local authority when the school was considered too at risk of requiring improvement last academic year. This included advice and support for the new headteacher. Support from the music service is used well to enable pupils to compose and perform music either individually or in groups. The school is a member of the Kendal Community Partnership of Schools, which has recently been formed to share good practice and offer support.

- The school website does not meet statutory requirements. Much of the information is not up to date and does not keep parents well informed about the work of the school and how their children are doing. Information about the governance of the school is especially weak.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governance requires improvement. The long-established governing body has recently been reconstituted and streamlined. They have the school's best interests at heart and they are keen to participate in an external review of governance to ensure that they have the right balance of expertise and experience to enable them to function more effectively.
 - Governors recognise that they should have been more proactive in being prepared to ask more challenging and leading questions of school leaders. They know that the school is not as good as it used to be but do not fully understand why.
 - They are aware of the headline facts and that some teaching is not as good as it should be but are unclear about how weaknesses are being tackled. The school self-evaluation has not yet been shared with all the governors and they have not yet been presented with the development plan. They know broadly how funding to support disadvantaged pupils has been spent but are unclear about impact. Despite concerns about the quality of provision, they did not challenge school leaders to ensure that staff only progressed in salary when this was merited.
 - Mandatory safeguarding training has been completed. However, governors have not taken full advantage of the training available to ensure that they are well placed to fulfil their duties effectively.
 - There is a lack of information about the governors on the school website and they have not fulfilled their statutory requirements to keep parents informed about, for example, the Special Educational Needs information report.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective and meet requirements. The pupils spoken with feel safe in school because they know who to turn to when they have concerns. Parents agree overwhelmingly that their children are safe in school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Teaching is inconsistent across the school and too much does not fully meet pupils' needs. Through looking at work in books and observing lessons, Her Majesty's Inspectors identified that expectations in too many lessons are low. Frequent use of worksheets in some subjects can limit what pupils can produce.
- In those sessions where questioning is effective and teachers have good subject knowledge, pupils are able to develop their understanding and basic skills in a particular subject more readily. For example, in a German lesson the teacher was able to engage the pupils in active conversation so that by the end of the lesson they had developed some basic vocabulary. They were able to express this through active participation in a song, recognising and using key words very quickly. Unfortunately, teachers generally lack the subject knowledge to teach the full range of subjects with any confidence or to any great depth.
- Pupils benefit where expert knowledge is available, or where teachers have participated in appropriate training, for example in PE (physical education). Pupils interviewed commented positively about the quality of their PE lessons, including those taught by outside coaches, and the frequent opportunities they have to participate in sport and team games. Teachers' skills have been more finely honed through active subject-specific training provided through the primary schools' sports funding programme.
- In too many mathematics lessons, there is too much repetition of the same type of calculation even though many pupils get the answers correct. Pupils are not being moved onto more complex tasks quickly enough in order to deepen their understanding and accelerate their progress.
- The quality of teaching of disabled pupils and pupils with special educational needs is too variable. The most severe disabled pupils progress at an appropriate rate because teaching assistants ensure that this group of pupils are challenged at an appropriate level. A small number of pupils who are at risk of falling behind do not progress rapidly because some activities are not matched well enough to their individual and specific needs.
- There is inconsistency in the marking of pupils' work, which is best applied in English. Pupils identified that they are getting much more detailed information about how they can improve their work. Evidence from books suggests that they are not always acting on this advice and similar errors, especially in spelling and punctuation, still occur.

- The input and quality of support provided by teaching assistants varies greatly. At its best, it enables pupils to access and complete tasks for themselves. For example, in a design and technology lesson, thoughtful care and support enabled a physically disabled pupil to make good progress. In preparation for the task of making a lantern to celebrate St Martin's Day, the assistant had encouraged the pupil to squeeze play dough to ensure that his fingers were supple and flexible enough for him to attempt and complete the folding task successfully.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are valued and well cared for and they enjoy coming to school. This is reflected in the fact that attendance is good and above the national average. Parents were very positive about the care their children received.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to treat each other kindly and they cooperate well with one another without being asked. For example, during break and lunchtimes the vast majority of pupils are engaged in games, talk and sharing activities. No one is left out and groups play well together.
- Relationships are positive. For example, some pupils take on the responsibility of working closely with disabled pupils or those who have learning difficulties. This results in those pupils who are helped feeling included in lessons and in the playground. The school is very inclusive and equality of opportunity is part of the everyday school culture.
- Incidents of bullying are very rare and pupils are confident that any incidents which do occur are quickly dealt with by adults. They are aware of the risks involved when using computers and they know the steps they need to take to stay safe.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- In too many observed lessons, where expectations were low, pupils' attention wandered. They were fidgety and lost interest. This was particularly obvious when they were asked to sit for long periods on the carpet and were not engaged or stimulated by the questioning or the content.
- Equally, too often a leisurely pace and low level-tasks, including colouring in, promote a lack of urgency in the learning. Pupils themselves remarked that they found some lessons dull and that some lessons were disrupted by silly behaviour.
- In lessons, pupils are often passive learners. There is a tendency for pupils to be too dependent on adults to direct and support their learning. There is a lack of challenge for some groups and restricted opportunities for pupils to practise new learning independently.
- In order to change the culture of the school, leaders are aware of the need to 'develop more explicit learning behaviours such as persistence and resilience to failure in challenging activities' and the need to 'develop a deeper level of understanding'. Current teaching does not encourage pupils to do this often enough.
- Conduct around the school is good. Pupils are polite and courteous to adults and to one another. They hold doors open and movement around the school is sensible and orderly. Pupils are punctual to school in the morning and to lessons at the end of break and lunchtime.

Outcomes for pupils require improvement

- Children enter the Reception class with knowledge and skills that are broadly typical for their age. At the end of Year 6, the greater majority leave having made expected progress. This does not represent good progress overall.
- As pupils move through Key Stage 1, progress is limited because outcomes at the end of the two years are broadly in line with national averages and this is part of a pattern of gradual decline over the last few years.
- Although the percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard in the phonics screening test remains above the national average, there is a downward trend and the gap between the school and national has narrowed over the last three years. Boys traditionally do better than the girls, which is a reversal of the

national trend.

- At Key Stage 2, the pattern is more complex and pupils do not make good enough year on year progress. As a result, there is a heavy reliance on catch up in Year 6, where pupils generally make good progress to ensure that they meet national standards at the end of the year. There is heavy reliance on intervention and catch-up strategies to ensure that pupils are able to make up for the weaker progress lower down the school. Historically, most progress has been made in Year 6.
- Current assessment information shows that, even with accelerated progress, this year's outcomes for pupils will continue to remain broadly average.
- In 2014, outcomes in writing were disappointing and fell below the national average. A concerted effort was made to improve final outcomes, especially in Year 6, and in 2015 the trend was reversed, with results rising to slightly above the national. However, achievement in reading, and especially in mathematics, continues to cause concern. Currently, there is a lack of opportunities for pupils to solve problems and apply their mathematical learning to real-life situations.
- The very small number of disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to their peers. Year on year they generally fail to make the progress they should and, like the others in their class, they catch up in Year 6.
- The quality of the curriculum beyond English and mathematics is poorly organised, planned and delivered and the progress of pupils is often patchy. In subjects such as science, history or geography, pupils do not make the sustained progress in their knowledge, skills and understanding that they should. In reality, pupils experience snippets of subjects and there is little evidence of building on previous learning. Topics may be covered but learning is often shallow.
- Although pupils are being asked to improve their writing, the basics of spelling, punctuation and grammar are not being tackled with sufficient vigour. This remains an issue throughout the school and is reflected in the end of Year 6 tests where standards of spelling, punctuation and grammar, especially of boys, were below the national.
- Writing across the curriculum is not being promoted well enough. Tasks set frequently limit the responses from pupils. This is often compounded by the overuse of worksheets in some classes. These often occupy pupils but limit the opportunities for them to express themselves, especially through their writing.
- As a result of early identification and well-thought-out support programmes, pupils with special educational needs and disabilities make progress which is in line with that of their peers.

Early years provision

requires improvement

- Progress from starting points is not yet good, with children only making expected progress through the Reception class. The majority reach expected levels of development and are reasonably well prepared for more formal teaching.
- Children are developing strong social skills and take turns. For example, when persevering with discovering how water tubes fit together properly or when making a mud pie in the outdoor provision, they showed good collaboration, sharing skills and turn taking.
- Children have 'challenge books' in which they have focused activities to complete and are rewarded with a sticker. They have a wide range of activities to complete both in and out of the classroom. They enjoy finding out and exploring, whether with sand, mud, water or working on computers independently.
- Adult interventions tend to be positive and generally help shape learning through focused questioning.
- Links with parents are being developed and are improving. An open door policy is now becoming routine and the greater majority of parents engage with the teacher through the newly introduced online resource. Parents are now able to comment about the work and progress their children are making through this resource. As one parent stated, 'It's like having a personal parents' evening every day.'
- Teachers' ongoing assessment, however, is not up to date and this makes it difficult to plan next steps in the children's learning. Children's interests are not routinely used to further develop their engagement and instil a greater eagerness to learn.
- Management planning does not provide a clear idea about how to develop and improve provision. There is a lack of clarity about the desired impact and how this might be achieved.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 112269 |
| Local authority | Cumbria |
| Inspection number | 10002553 |

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

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Voluntary controlled |
| Age range of pupils | 4–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 207 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mrs Norma Bates |
| Headteacher | Miss Bernadette Calvey |
| Telephone number | 01539 735442 |
| Website | http://vicarageparkschool.org.uk/ |
| Email address | admin@vicaragepark.cumbria.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 25 February 2010 |

Information about this school

- The school is slightly smaller than average in size.
- The majority of pupils come from relatively advantaged backgrounds as seen by the fact that only eight pupils are entitled to free school meals.
- Nearly all the pupils are White British and very few speak English as an additional language.
- There is enhanced provision for a small number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities – their needs comprise profound and multiple learning difficulties and/or physical needs. As a result, the percentage of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is above the average. Otherwise the proportion with pupils who require special educational needs support is below average.
- Over the last year, there have been significant staffing changes, with the greater majority of staff retiring or leaving for other posts. This has proved disruptive.
- A completely new leadership team is in post from September 2015.
- The school has achieved the Activemark, the Healthy Schools Award, the Inclusion Chartermark and the Artsmark Gold award. It has also received an inclusion award from the local authority.

Information about this inspection

- Her Majesty's Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all classes in the school. They looked at phonics teaching (letters and the sounds they make), listened to a small group of pupils read and observed pupils at break, lunchtime and around the school.
- On the first day, Her Majesty's Inspector conducted two learning walks through the school, accompanied by the headteacher, looking at outcomes and engagement in lessons.
- Her Majesty's Inspectors scrutinised and evaluated pupils' work across a range of subjects, especially English, mathematics, and topic work, which included science, history and geography.
- A wide range of documentation including school policies, local authority reports, monitoring files on the quality of teaching, self-evaluation and procedures to safeguard pupils was looked at.
- Her Majesty's Inspectors met with school leaders, staff, two governors and held a telephone discussion with a representative from the local authority.
- Meetings were held with two groups of pupils to discuss their work, how safe they felt and what they thought about the school. Her Majesty's Inspectors also talked to many other pupils during lessons and around the school.
- Fifteen responses from the online questionnaire Parent View and a letter handed in by a parent were considered. Her Majesty's Inspectors also talked briefly to a small number of parents who were bringing their children to school at the start of the second day.

Inspection team

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| Leszek Iwaskow, lead inspector | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Drew Crawshaw | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Ian Hardman | Her Majesty's Inspector |

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