



Cockermouth School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 112381
LEA Cumbria
Inspection number 278918
Inspection dates 17 January 2006 to 18 January 2006
Reporting inspector Mrs Judith Straw

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Castlegate Drive
School category	Community		Cockermouth
Age range of pupils	11 to 19		Cumbria, CA13 9HF
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01900 325940
Number on roll	1385	Fax number	01900 325944
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Len Cockcroft
Date of previous inspection	1 October 2000	Headteacher	Mr Michael Wilde

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 19	17 January 2006 - 18 January 2006	278918

© Crown copyright 2006

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Cockermonth School is above average size for an 11 to 18 school. It is situated in a rural area and has been oversubscribed for the past 15 years. The proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals, with English as an additional language, from areas of social and economic deprivation and from minority ethnic backgrounds are well below the national averages. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is below average but the percentage of pupils with a statement of special educational need is above average. The school houses an Autistic Strategic Facility and became a specialist Mathematics and Computing school in 2003. Pupils' attainment when they start at the school is above the national average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is an effective and well led school. This is the same judgement as made in the school's self-evaluation. The school has the capacity, ambition and talent to become an outstanding one. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and his vision is shared with a good team of senior and middle managers who all know their school well. Key issues for action from the last inspection have been addressed and there is great capacity to improve further. The school is adept at securing extra funding for its numerous projects and provides good value for money. Governors take their responsibilities seriously and support the school well.

The majority of parents express overwhelming approval – one commented, 'Cockermouth stands out from the rest and we have nothing but praise for it'. The impact of specialist school status in mathematics and computing has enhanced the educational opportunities for all pupils, particularly in their experience of technology, and brought shared benefits with local primary schools.

Standards are well above average and the school promotes high achievement for all. Pupils enjoy school, feel safe and well cared for and participate in an outstanding range of activities. Behaviour is good and the personal development of pupils and students is outstanding. Teaching and learning are good. The tracking of pupils' progress and marking are both good but pupils do not always know enough about the standards at which they are working. The curriculum has been enriched with some vocational subjects as well as academic ones but not enough time is given to citizenship. The care, guidance and support offered to pupils at all levels are good. There is an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. The autistic strategic facility provides outstanding support for the pupils in its care.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school accurately assesses the quality and effectiveness of sixth form provision to be good. Students achieve well because they are extremely well supported in their learning through good teaching and individual attention to their personal needs and aspirations. Expectations are high and students strive to meet them. Students enjoy their courses and willingly engage in the many opportunities that contribute to school life and to the well-being of younger pupils. A sixth former commented that the school 'prepares them for life'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that pupils throughout the school know and understand the standards they are working at and how to reach their targets.
- Improve the provision for citizenship.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement and standards are good both in the main school and the sixth form and this confirms the school's evaluation. Attainment on entry is above average and by the end of Key Stage 3 pupils' attainment is well above average, representing good progress. In Year 9, pupils gain well above average higher grades in mathematics and science but not as many pupils reach the highest level in English. However, by the end of Year 11, the number of students achieving the higher grades in mathematics and English is well above average. Girls outperform boys but not by such a wide margin as that found nationally. In 2004, results at general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) fell but returned to their previous standards in 2005, when every pupil gained some qualifications. Pupils achieved results significantly above average in English language, English literature, French, German, geography, and mathematics. Results for all other subjects were well above average except in art and design and business studies, where they were in line with national averages. As yet, published data for A* grades is incomplete, but pupils achieved a significantly higher than average number of A* and A grades in at least eight subjects. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well and gain qualifications at age 16.

.

In the sixth form in 2004 and 2005, students reached well above average standards, with a high proportion gaining the highest grades. Some students achieve well above expectations. Students achieving the lower general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) grades are those with a lower level of attainment at GCSE; nevertheless, they are achieving well. The school sets very challenging targets which it has not quite succeeded in meeting. The underlying principle is that the school wants pupils to achieve as well as they can.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development of pupils is outstanding. Pupils have positive attitudes and enjoy being at school. Behaviour is good. Their attendance record is consistently well above the national record and pupils are punctual to lessons. The majority of pupils are committed to learning and enjoy school activities, so exclusions are low. Pupils are considerate of others and cooperate effectively in their group work. They develop respect for other cultures and religions through their work in many aspects of the school curriculum. On 'life days', specific topic work focuses on moral and social issues such as the misuse of drugs. Most pupils take part in charity work. Pupils are able to influence change through the work of the excellent School Council. In a meeting observed by inspectors, the Council was discussing new buildings and the economic viability of such projects. Pupils feel secure and are confident in the school's safety procedures. Sixth form students are attached to younger pupils' tutor groups to help limit any bullying problems. Students in the sixth form act as leaders in school; they have various roles and use these extremely effectively to extend their own personal

development, which is outstanding. Pupils talk confidently and develop good skills in their use of information and communication technology (ICT), literacy and numeracy. Work-related activities assist planning for careers and future employment.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall from Years 7 to 13; some teaching is outstanding. The teaching force comprises confident subject specialists who clearly understand what pupils of all abilities must do to make good progress. High expectations are frequently evident regarding the challenge set for pupils. As one French teacher comments: 'In Year 7 you start your GCSE.' Pupils value the extensive individual support they receive from their teachers. Lesson planning is thorough, based on clearly explained learning objectives. Teaching assistants provide effective guidance for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In the very best lessons, planning identifies a wealth of motivating tasks that effectively gain pupils' enthusiastic participation in their learning. As befits a specialist computing college, an increasing number of departments are developing effective online learning. These enhance the well established opportunities for independent learning. In the less effective lessons the pace of learning is slower. The pupils' concentration suffers because the teaching is not engaging enough. Marking is mainly informative. In music, pupils have a very clear idea of their standards in terms of grades and level criteria and of what they must do to reach their targets. This excellent use of assessment to boost learning is not embedded in all subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum gives the pupils good opportunities to do well. Therefore, all pupils at the end of Year 11, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are well qualified for the next stage of their education or employment. The school has broadened its curriculum so pupils in Years 10 and 11 take courses that better match their needs, such as off-site college courses. Pupils have good opportunities to improve literacy and numeracy in all subjects. They develop very good ICT skills, reflecting the school's status as a specialist computing college. The pupils enthuse about the school's very wide range of enrichment activities. In the sixth form there is a good range of academic, vocational and enrichment opportunities. The school rightly recognizes the need to broaden further provision in the sixth form now that more pupils are entering it. It has identified the need to make more time available for personal, social and health education, careers and citizenship and to monitor the coverage more closely. Consequently, it judges its curriculum to be satisfactory but this judgement is too harsh. It does not acknowledge the curriculum's good contribution to the pupils' good achievement from Years 7 to 13.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school offers good care, guidance and support to all its pupils. There is an environment of mutual support and care. Pupils with severe learning difficulties, emotional needs, behavioural problems or physical impairments get outstanding care and guidance, with provision improving as more specialist facilities are provided. Pupils at risk of exclusion are monitored carefully and strategies effectively target these pupils. Care, guidance and support are equally good in the sixth form. Pupils and parents are positive about the school's arrangements, for example, with the specialist staff involved in transition arrangements at each key stage from primary schools to the sixth form, higher education or employment. The school provides a safe, secure environment because all staff know the procedures for child protection, first aid and safety in school and on visits. Pupils' progress is regularly monitored and recorded using effective systems but this is not consistently passed on to pupils and students. They are not always clear about their targets or specific ways in which they can improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership and management of the school and the sixth form are good. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding, which reflects the parents' views. Other managers share the headteacher's vision for the school and constantly challenge pupils and other staff to meet demanding targets. The school is innovative and entrepreneurial, for example, in its status as a specialist college and in its successful bid to become part of a national project targeted at 'Teaching Environments for the Future'. The Eco-Centre currently under construction is scheduled to provide multi-faceted opportunities for cross-curricular work, particularly in relation to sustainable global climates. The school is not afraid to take risks where change is perceived to be beneficial to pupils' overall personal development.

Secure systems for monitoring the performance of pupils, sixth formers and staff underpin the pupils' good achievement. Hence, they are prepared well for life beyond school. The good partnership between pupils, parents and staff is built on mutual trust. The school knows itself well and applies itself successfully to tackling those aspects of its work that could be improved still further, such as the use of information from assessment procedures. Governors work closely with the school, both as critical friends and to hold it to account.

Pupils' needs are well provided for through the use of a wide range of good quality resources. Teachers and other adults are deployed well; they interact and complement each other's work to avoid duplication of effort. The school has made good improvement since the previous inspection and has the capacity to improve even further. It provides good value for money.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Alexandra House

33 Kingsway

London

WC2B 6SE

T 0207 421 6800

F 0207 421 6707

Ofsted helpline

08456 404045

Mr Michael Wilde

Cockermouth School

Castlegate Drive

Cockermouth

Cumbria

CA13 9HF

19 January 2006

Dear Students

The inspection team greatly enjoyed visiting your school and we thank you for all your friendliness and cooperation during our visit. You are right to think highly of your school and to enjoy learning there. We noted the well above average standards you reach in your work, how well you behave for most of the time, your very positive attitudes and the way you enjoy learning in most of your lessons. We saw how much the sixth form contributes to the good atmosphere in school.

Your school takes good care of you and we can see why you feel safe and secure. We were particularly impressed by your School Council and enjoyed attending an excellent Council meeting. You obviously appreciate the wonderful range of extra-curricular activities on offer and take part in many of them. The range of subjects provided by school is good but we don't think you have enough time to reach the higher standards in citizenship.

Your teachers do a good job and some are outstanding professionals. However, we saw that at the moment not every subject teacher is telling you what level you are working at in Years 7-9 or which grade you are aiming for at GCSE.

Your school is well led and managed and the leadership of Mr Wilde, the headteacher, is outstanding. You are all clearly well aware of how much being a specialist school has improved your education and given you even more opportunities.

You all have a part to play in helping to raise standards even further by working hard and gaining even better results than you are already achieving. In order to help you do this we are recommending that your school shares more information with you about the levels at which you are working and gives you more advice on how to improve. We also think you need to have more time devoted to the teaching of citizenship.

We are confident your school will continue to thrive and become even better. We wish you all well in the future.

Best wishes
Judith Straw
(Lead inspector)