

Robert Ferguson Primary School

East Dale Street, Denton Holme, Carlisle, Cumbria CA2 5LA

Inspection dates

21–22 November 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher inspires staff and promotes high aspirations for pupils. He empowers staff to use their initiative and share good practice.
- Leaders at all levels ensure that the school keeps on improving. Governors support and challenge leaders successfully. They have ambition and high expectations for staff and pupils.
- Highly effective partnership working with other schools, universities and educational organisations enhances the work of the school.
- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is excellent. Pupils' well-being is at the heart of everything the school does.
- Pupils make an excellent contribution to the happy atmosphere in school. Their good behaviour contributes to their good progress.
- Improvement planning is incisive and focused on raising pupils' attainment.
- Teaching is effective. Teachers and support staff are motivated and make learning interesting. They constantly develop their knowledge and skills by engaging in educational research and training.
- Staff use assessment effectively to ensure that pupils make at least good progress from their starting points in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' attainment in these subjects is rising in each year group.
- Leaders are aware of where further improvement is needed. For example, they are aware that the most able pupils are not given enough work that deepens their learning in mathematics.
- Children in the early years settle happily and feel safe and secure. Adults are enthusiastic and plan lots of interesting activities. Children make good progress from their starting points, although their mathematical development is not as strong as in other areas.
- Leaders ensure that the curriculum across the whole school is broad and covers all subjects suitably. Pupils enjoy the broad range of topics they cover and the interesting activities, trips and visitors.
- Pupils' progress is not as rapid in geography, history and art as it is in other subjects. Activities in these subjects do not build on pupils' prior learning as rapidly as they could.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and learning in geography, history and art by using assessment effectively to build on pupils' knowledge and skills systematically.
- Build on pupils' progress in mathematics by making sure that pupils who grasp mathematical concepts quickly are provided with work that deepens their learning.
- Improve further children's progress in the early years, so that more children reach a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year, by:
 - ensuring that children's mathematical skills are developed as effectively as their skills in other areas
 - making the most of opportunities to interact with children and deepen their learning when they are selecting activities for themselves.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher's high ambition for pupils and empowering approach to leadership inspire staff and motivate pupils. Staff in the school are dynamic and forward-looking. They engage with research and take part in external training to improve their practice. They work together constructively to share good practice and secure improvement across the school.
- Partnership working is highly effective. The school's active participation in the Carlisle Schools Partnership facilitates the sharing of best practice across schools. As chair of the partnership, the headteacher brokers training and supports peer review across the cluster. Staff are also engaged in several research projects in collaboration with various organisations and other schools.
- All staff contribute effectively to school improvement planning. They have tackled past weaknesses in pupils' progress successfully, ensuring that pupils currently in school make good progress in each year group. Planning is focused on improving pupils' outcomes further and supporting them to develop effective academic and personal skills. It is underpinned by accurate evaluation of pupils' achievement.
- Pupils' lower-than-average performance in Year 6 standardised tests in 2016 and 2017 has been fully analysed. Detailed tracking of pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics ensures that any gaps in pupils' learning or weaknesses in teaching are identified early and acted on.
- Leaders at all levels play an important part in school improvement and successful management of teachers' and support staff's performance. Subject and phase leaders check the quality and impact of teaching and coach and mentor members of their team constructively. Regular checks on pupils' work accurately identify strengths and weaker aspects in teaching and learning.
- Leadership of provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and for the most vulnerable pupils is very effective. Leaders set high expectations for pupils' achievement and track their progress carefully. Additional funding for special educational needs is used effectively. The sharper focus on identifying pupils' specific needs ensures that support is targeted to minimise barriers to learning.
- Staff training is planned carefully to support whole-school priorities for improvement and to develop the skills of staff. Staff are highly reflective and self-improving. They evaluate the impact of their own teaching and identify their training needs knowledgeably and successfully.
- The curriculum is broad and interesting, and leaders ensure that teaching covers relevant content in all subjects. Pupils enjoy learning in cross-curricular topics as well as in lessons that focus on different subjects. However, pupils' knowledge and skills are not developed as systematically in history, geography and art as they are in other subjects.
- The curriculum is enriched with a range of exciting additional activities. Pupils benefit from visits out, making the most of the local environment and travelling further afield

to enhance learning. They enjoy listening to inspiring speakers who visit the school, for example to raise pupils' aspirations for their future careers.

- Pupils have many opportunities to develop their musical skills, for example by learning to play percussion, woodwind or brass instruments in Years 3, 4 and 5 and playing guitar and drums in the 'school of rock'. The various after-school clubs are very popular and well attended. The physical education (PE) and sport premium is used effectively to broaden pupils' experience and participation in physical activity.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted exceptionally well. The school is recognised as a 'Global Learning' lead school. This reflects the school's exemplary approach to raising pupils' awareness of global issues such as poverty, gender equality and diversity. Assembly themes reinforce pupils' understanding and learning across the curriculum and support them to reflect on spiritual, moral and ethical matters. Pupils say that they enjoy learning from each other about different religions and cultures. They have a good understanding of diversity and are prepared well for life in modern Britain.
- British values are promoted with success in lessons and demonstrated in the running of the school. The school is a democratic community, with equality of opportunity, respect and tolerance at its heart. Staff and pupils feel valued and all contribute to the harmonious and reinforcing atmosphere.
- Almost all parents who made their views known are positive about the work of the school. They say, for example, 'the headteacher and staff are doing a phenomenal job in creating a balanced culture of respect, honour and great teaching' and 'the school has a fantastic vision and welcoming feel.' Parents accurately reflect that 'the headteacher makes time for all children and he seems to know every child by name.' Inspection evidence supports their view.
- Staff work constructively with parents, as reflected in the comment, 'the school has made an effort to engage me in her learning so we are working on the same things at home and school.' The engagement of more parents in their child's learning is an ongoing priority of the school.

Governance of the school

- Governors have a good understanding of the performance of the school. They understand data on pupils' performance and are well informed by leaders. They share staff's ambitions for pupils and check that school improvement planning has the intended impact on pupils' outcomes.
- Governors ensure that the pupil premium is spent appropriately to minimise barriers to learning. The difference between the progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils and others in school is diminishing in each year group. Governors have a detailed action plan to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils in standardised tests and are monitoring its progress closely.
- Governors have good oversight of the school's performance management systems and ensure that salary progression is warranted. They manage the performance of the headteacher effectively.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Procedures for the safe recruitment of staff, risk assessment and safeguarding are thorough. Records of any incidents are meticulously kept. Staff have completed relevant training and know what to do if they have any concerns. Leaders follow up concerns assiduously.
- Vulnerable pupils are supported extremely effectively. The school liaises closely with outside agencies to provide support for families and children where appropriate. Parents and carers are very positive about the school's approach to safeguarding pupils. The procedures to support children who are in the care of the local authority are excellent. The school ensures that they and their carers receive the support they need to stay safe and achieve well.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Effective training and strong leadership have raised the quality of teaching, so that pupils now make good progress. Teachers are highly motivated and make learning interesting and relevant for pupils. They develop positive relationships that help pupils to become self-motivated and confident to try new tasks.
- Teachers know the pupils well. They are good at drawing on pupils' experiences to make new learning meaningful. Assessment is used effectively from the early stages to help pupils catch up and work at the standards expected for their age in each year group. Where pupils have gaps in learning, teaching is targeted to overcome these.
- The teaching of writing is effective. Teachers focus skilfully on developing pupils' language and expressive skills. Pupils are also taught grammar, punctuation and spelling effectively. As a result, pupils produce interesting and well-crafted pieces of writing.
- Teachers develop pupils' reading skills effectively across the school. Phonic skills are taught successfully for the younger pupils, and the current focus on comprehension skills is improving pupils' ability to read for deeper meaning as they get older. The focus on developing a love of reading is successfully encouraging pupils to read more. Pupils are keen to talk about what they are reading.
- Effective teaching of mathematics helps pupils to attain standards expected for their age. Pupils develop successful reasoning and problem-solving skills in different contexts. However, the most able pupils are not taught in sufficient depth in some classes to enable them to achieve greater depth in their learning. They sometimes complete more of the same rather than being able to have a go at more complex problems. The school's recent training on mastery in mathematics included a focus on the most able pupils and is beginning to have a positive impact on providing more challenge for these pupils.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are supported effectively in lessons and small groups. Teaching is tailored closely to their needs. Support assistants are fully involved

in planning for pupils' learning; they have relevant training and their expertise is used effectively.

- The school has highly effective procedures to ensure that children in the care of the local authority make good progress. Good-quality personal education plans support learning effectively. The school liaises closely with the virtual school to ensure that it has good-quality resources and additional help if needed.
- Assessment is not used as effectively in history, geography and art as it is in other subjects. Activities that are set for pupils in these subjects do not support them to develop their knowledge and skills systematically from year to year. Some activities are at too low a level and some are too difficult for pupils to complete because they do not have the relevant prior learning.
- Parents are positive about teaching, saying, for example, 'The teaching staff are all dedicated and professional and seem very motivated to help children do their absolute best.' Many made positive comments about homework.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Attributes such as collaboration, curiosity, aspiration and reflection are promoted successfully in lessons, enrichment activities and the day-to-day running of the school. Pupils make an excellent contribution to the harmonious, respectful and happy atmosphere in the school.
- The focus on personal development in the curriculum equips pupils with a broad knowledge of global issues and a range of personal skills that enable them to reflect on different points of view. They listen to the points of view of others and respond in a reasoned and respectful way, for example by prefacing their response with 'I understand, but I disagree and these are my reasons...'
- Pupils support each other in many ways. For example, playground leaders develop constructive play, and reading buddies help younger pupils to develop effective reading strategies.
- Pupils say that 'small changes make a big difference'. They are rightly proud of their contributions to the school and wider community, such as their work to reduce food waste and contribute to a local food bank. School councillors are proud of their fundraising, for example to support children in need, and of their drive to promote healthy eating in school.
- Bullying is extremely rare. The vast majority of pupils who made their views known say that they have not experienced bullying in school and have every confidence in staff to 'sort it out quickly'. Pupils have discussed different types of bullying in depth in workshops, so they have a good understanding of bullying based on prejudices such as homophobia or racism. They understand the difference between falling out and intent to cause harm through repeated name-calling or hitting.

- Pupils say that they feel safe in school and that the school's work to keep them safe is excellent. Pupils are taught how to keep safe in the community and develop a good understanding of risks. All Year 6 pupils have first aid certificates, and the internet safety committee makes sure that all pupils know how to keep safe when online.
- Pupils who join the school at times other than the start of the Reception class are supported extremely well. They are welcomed by everyone and soon make friends.
- The school's work to raise pupils' aspirations is inspiring. Pupils are encouraged to think about their future career ambitions, and staff support them in developing relevant skills from an early stage. Motivational speakers are brought in to school to talk to them about how they can achieve their goals.
- Parents are very positive about the work the school does to promote pupils' all-round development, saying, for example, 'The staff are continuously inspiring children to better themselves and be the best they can be. They care about each and every one of the children that attends the school and encourage them to reach their full potential.' The inspection corroborates the parents' positive views.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Clear procedures to manage behaviour are upheld consistently by all staff and respected by pupils. Serious incidents of misbehaviour are extremely rare and followed up meticulously if they should occur.
- Pupils are well behaved in lessons and develop positive attitudes to learning. Pupils are aware of classroom routines and follow directions. The focus on developing pupils' skills to learn independently helps them to become increasingly confident, self-reliant and self-motivating.
- Pupils' positive attitudes support them to make good progress. Occasionally, pupils are distracted from learning when tasks are not matched accurately to their ability. This is because activities are either at too low a level to sustain pupils' interest or are too difficult for them to complete independently. However, even in these situations, pupils rarely disturb the learning of others.
- Pupils behave courteously and sensibly in shared areas around the school. High-quality playground equipment ensures that pupils are engaged constructively in physical or creative activities at breaktimes.
- Attendance is average. Persistent absenteeism has reduced considerably in the last year due to the positive impact of the work by the pastoral mentor.
- Fixed-term exclusion is rare and when it is used, it is with a clear rationale and close liaison with parents. Permanent exclusion has not been used for a number of years.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Leaders carried out detailed analyses of pupils' below-average performance in Year 6 standardised tests in 2016 and 2017. They have taken effective action to ensure that pupils currently in school make better progress.
- In 2017, attainment in reading, writing and mathematics was higher and closer to the national average than it was in 2016. However, although attainment improved, pupils' progress was still below average given their attainment at key stage 1. Leaders are taking effective action to ensure that pupils' knowledge and skills are built on effectively in each year group, so pupils now make at least good progress. The proportions of pupils working at standards expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics increase as pupils move through the school.
- The whole-school focus on improving the teaching of reading and writing has successfully raised achievement and is having a positive impact on pupils' enjoyment. Teachers use assessment effectively to identify what pupils can do and build on pupils' reading and writing skills progressively. An increasing proportion of pupils achieve at the expected standards for their age in reading and writing as they move through school. The most able pupils also make good progress. More pupils are working at greater depth in each year group than was the case previously.
- Leaders' actions to improve pupils' progress in mathematics are at earlier stages but are having a positive impact. Lower- and middle-ability pupils make at least good progress and increasingly work at the standards expected for their age. Pupils who grasp mathematical concepts quickly are not provided with work that challenges them and extends their learning in some classes, however. Consequently, the most able pupils make good progress but do not always make the rapid progress of which they are capable.
- Pupils make good progress in subjects across the curriculum and thoroughly enjoy the range of topics they cover. Their progress in history, geography and art is not as rapid as it could be in their topic-based work, however. This is because activities do not build on pupils' prior learning as effectively as they do in other subjects.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress from their various starting points. Their needs are identified accurately and teaching is targeted well to help them develop key skills and foundations for further learning.
- Pupils who are disadvantaged currently make good progress in line with others in school from their various starting points. The wide differences between disadvantaged and other pupils in the Year 6 standardised assessments of 2017 are not typical and are not replicated across the school. Differences are diminishing in each year group.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language make rapid gains in their learning. Their aspirations are encouraged and teachers work closely with families to help pupils access the curriculum fully.
- Pupils who join the school during the school year and after the usual start time in the Reception class make good progress from their starting points. Pupils sometimes have gaps in their learning and the school assesses these fully and provides extra support where needed.

- Pupils are prepared well for further learning when they move to secondary school. Their good basic skills and excellent personal skills support them to approach new learning confidently.

Early years provision

Good

- Children enter the Nursery and Reception classes with a wide range of pre-school experiences. Many have knowledge and skills that are below those typical for their age in several areas, especially in communication, language and literacy, knowledge and understanding of the world and mathematical understanding.
- Children settle well, attend regularly and play happily together. They feel safe and secure and thoroughly enjoy learning in the welcoming and stimulating setting. Adults' enthusiasm inspires children to develop positive attitudes to learning.
- As in the rest of the school, children's personal, social and emotional development is excellent. Staff are caring and encouraging. Children share resources, play together constructively and grow in confidence.
- Teachers and support staff use assessment effectively to establish what children can do and build on their skills successfully from the start. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development is increasing and was closer to average in 2017.
- Children currently in the early years make good progress from their various starting points. They develop firm foundations for further learning and these, together with their excellent personal development, prepare them well for their move into Year 1.
- Teaching is effective in all the Nursery and Reception classes. Teaching and support staff plan together effectively, taking account of children's prior learning. Adults know the children well, and teaching appeals to their interests. Children make good gains in their phonic knowledge, for example, because they are grouped appropriately and teaching builds skilfully and rapidly on what they know already.
- The activities provided for children to access independently are interesting and engaging. Children thoroughly enjoy exploring in the classroom 'jungle' and building in the outdoor construction area, for example. However, while adults supervise children carefully, they do not make the most of opportunities to interact with children to take learning forward during such activities in line with the school's policy.
- Children's progress in mathematical development is good but is not as rapid as it is in other areas of learning. Activities to support mathematical development are not as wide-ranging or challenging as activities that support other areas of learning.
- Good leadership of the early years is improving provision and raising the achievement of children. Leaders know where further improvements are needed and plan effectively to secure them. Staff plan and work together effectively to provide children with interesting and motivating activities. All welfare requirements are met. Funding to support disadvantaged children is used effectively to ensure that they make the same good progress as others.
- Developing partnership with parents is a priority for leaders and is progressing well. The 'stay and play' sessions are increasingly well attended and enjoyed by parents and

children. Workshops are extremely helpful in supporting parents to help children learn at home.

School details

Unique reference number	112242
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	10043206

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 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	417
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alan Johnson
Headteacher	Graham Frost
Telephone number	01228 535091
Website	www.rferguson.org
Email address	office@rferguson.cumbria.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	25–26 September 2012

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school is larger than average. Since the last inspection, the intake number has increased and pupils have joined the school in different year groups.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who are supported for special educational needs is below average. An average proportion have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups and the proportion who speak English as an additional language are below average.
- The school is active in the Carlisle Schools Partnership; the headteacher is the chair of the partnership.

- The school met government floor standards in 2016, which set the minimum standards for pupils' progress and attainment.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all classes. Some observations were carried out jointly with school leaders. They looked at pupils' work and scrutinised a sample of books in more detail with school leaders.
- Inspectors talked to pupils in lessons and at breaktimes. They met with groups of pupils and gained their views about the school.
- Inspectors met with school leaders, staff, the chair and seven other representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- They looked at documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement planning and records of monitoring, management of performance and training. Safeguarding policies and procedures were examined.
- Inspectors took account of 39 responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire for parents, 114 responses from pupils and 15 responses from staff.

Inspection team

Jean Olsson-Law, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Claire Hollister	Ofsted Inspector
Linda Griffiths	Ofsted Inspector

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