



Ardley Hill Lower School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109517
Local Authority BEDFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 288409
Inspection dates 6–7 February 2007
Reporting inspector Martin Newell

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

Type of school	First	School address	Lowther Road
School category	Community		Dunstable
Age range of pupils	4–9		Bedfordshire LU6 3NZ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01582 667955
Number on roll (school)	207	Fax number	01582 606933
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Darren Fletcher
		Headteacher	Mrs Susan Watts
Date of previous school inspection	11 February 2002		

Age group 4–9	Inspection dates 6–7 February 2007	Inspection number 288409
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average sized primary school situated just outside the town centre of Dunstable. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is broadly in line with the national average. However, the percentage of pupils with a statement of special educational need is above that found nationally. Most of the pupils are from White British backgrounds and, of the small number of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds, none are at an early stage of acquiring English. The school has gained Healthy School status and Activemark Gold.

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 a good school and the pupils are proud of it. The school's judgement of how well it is doing is accurate and the robust and successful way in which the headteacher has tackled the weaknesses highlighted by the last inspection indicates that there is a strong capacity for further improvement. The school provides good value for money.

Improvements in the quality of teaching, behaviour and how well pupils' progress is monitored have proved to be a winning combination in raising standards and accelerating achievement. Pupils now make good progress as they move through the school. Standards are broadly in line with national expectations when pupils start at the school and they do well in Reception, where provision is good. By the time that they leave at the end of Year 4, they are securely above average in key subjects. Much of this is due to the good quality of teaching, which challenges pupils and, when at its best, is exciting and vibrant. There are, however, occasions when teaching is too directed and does not provide enough opportunities for pupils to thrive and flourish as independent learners.

Pupils' personal development is good. Good relationships between staff and pupils result in pupils feeling valued. Pupils behave well and many show positive attitudes to learning. The school has put much effort into promoting good attendance but a relatively high number of families take holidays in term time. Pupils have a good understanding of what is needed to keep safe and to follow healthy lifestyles. The curriculum is satisfactory overall with some strong features. However, the school recognises that the next steps are to put pupils' good basic skills to the test through more innovative, exciting and interesting cross-curricular learning experiences. The school cares well for all pupils and the school council gives pupils a voice that is both listened to and acted upon. Pupils' academic and personal progress is tracked well and pupils have a good awareness of the targets they are working towards.

Leadership and management, including governance, are good. The headteacher has made the school a better place. She has tackled weaknesses in a quietly determined manner through the implementation of effective programmes, intervention strategies to support particular pupils and rigorous monitoring procedures that have seen much improvement in the quality of the education provided. Staff morale has improved and there is a shared commitment from staff and governors to take the school on to the next level. The headteacher and the effective senior management team are well supported by a knowledgeable, effective and supportive governing body.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teaching consistently provides plenty of opportunities for pupils to develop independent learning skills.
- Develop further appropriate links between subjects so that the curriculum is more thought-provoking, enjoyable and interesting for pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children start at the school with standards that are broadly in line with national expectations although a little lower in aspects of communication and mathematics. Children get off to a good start in the Foundation Stage because of good teaching and learning experiences, which help them to achieve well and to be securely in line with national expectations by the end of the Reception year. Test and assessment data in 2006 showed that standards in Year 2 in English, mathematics and science had risen from being in line with the national averages in 2004 and 2005 to being above average. Inspection findings show a similar picture for the current Year 2 pupils. This represents good progress and achievement from their starting points. Standards reached by the time that pupils leave school in Year 4 are again securely above average in English, mathematics, science and history. Pupils of all abilities and ethnicities make good progress and reach the challenging targets that are set. The improved picture of attainment and progress across the school owes much to the strengths in leadership, which have seen the implementation of stronger tracking and assessment, good quality intervention programmes, more rigorous monitoring of learning and, importantly, better teaching.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including their overall spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Pupils are reflective and there is a strong sense of community in assemblies. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to school are good with pupils showing a strong understanding of right and wrong. They enjoy their education, although the number of families taking holidays during term time has resulted in attendance dropping from above average to close to the national average. Pupils' awareness of other cultures is developing well although there is still work to be done on this. Pupils are proud of their school and they feel safe and valued. Bullying is a rare occurrence and, as pupils point out, 'It would be sorted out right away.' Pupils have a good understanding of healthy living due to lessons on staying safe, balanced diets and exercise. Effective opportunities are provided for pupils to take on responsibilities, such as the school council, 'Buddy Pals', '4+ helpers', and 'peer mentoring'. Opportunities for pupils to contribute to the local community are satisfactory. Pupils develop a good range of skills and qualities to help them in later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Across the school, relationships are good and adults work hard at building up the confidence and self-esteem of the pupils. Teaching

assistants fully play their part in enhancing the quality of pupils' learning and the school makes good use of their individual skills and talents. Good teaching is characterised by work that is well matched to the individual needs of the pupils, good behaviour management and a balance between teachers' addressing the class and pupils having ample time to complete their work. There are times when teaching is better because it is vibrant and exciting and puts emphasis on pupils' investigating, exploring and finding things out for themselves. However, not all teachers consistently provide opportunities for pupils to develop as inquisitive and independent learners. Assessment is good. Good procedures are in place for assessing and then tracking pupils' progress as they move through the school. The information is used well to guide lesson planning and to set challenging targets. Marking of pupils' work is at its best when it sets clear pointers for improvement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Curricular provision is satisfactory. Standards have risen because of the strong emphasis the school has put on improving skills in English, mathematics and science. This has helped pupils build a strong foundation for their next school and, eventually, for the world of work. There has been good improvement in information and communication technology (ICT) provision since the last inspection and the school now teaches French to Year 3 and 4 pupils. However, opportunities to link work between subjects where pupils can put their good basic skills to the test in a more interesting, exciting and innovative way are underdeveloped. Good provision is made for pupils with learning difficulties and for higher attaining pupils, with the provision for gifted and talented pupils being satisfactory. The good personal, social and health education programme makes a telling contribution to keeping pupils safe. The curriculum is enriched by a satisfactory range of clubs, visits and visitors, which enhance pupils' enjoyment of school as well as adding to the school's commitment to promoting healthy living. The success of this is reflected in its Healthy Schools and Activemark accreditations.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, support and guidance are good and a high priority is given to pupils' welfare. The very good procedures that have been put in place by the headteacher have resulted in significant improvements in pupils' behaviour and attitudes since the last inspection. Pupils feel safe and secure in school. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are rigorous and risk assessments are completed and reviewed regularly. The strong links with outside support agencies ensure that pupils who may need extra help, be it academic, personal or social, receive the necessary support. The school has also established positive links with other providers in order to smooth transition between stages of learning. It is looking to further strengthen liaison procedures with pre-nursery provision and with the breakfast and after-school clubs which share the school's site. Good procedures are in place for assessing and tracking academic progress and the information is used well to guide and support pupils. Discussions with pupils indicate

that they have a good awareness of their individual targets and what they need to do to work at a higher level.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher leads the school in an understated but effective and determined manner. She has played a pivotal role in moving the school forward and in addressing the considerable weaknesses that were identified at the last inspection. She benefits from the good support of the recently restructured senior management team and plans are already in hand for new members to have clearly defined roles in evaluating various aspects of the school's performance. The school's self-evaluation gives an accurate picture of the school's strengths as well as outlining initiatives aimed at tackling weaker aspects of school life. The headteacher has led the pursuit of monitoring how well the school is doing, through lesson observations, work scrutinies and the robust analysis of test and assessment data. This has led to standards rising and the better achievement of all pupils. The headteacher canvasses the views of parents. Although many parents speak highly of the school, the head is keen to address the perception of a minority that the school does not always appear as approachable as it could be. Governance of the school is good. Governors are supportive yet challenging. Their regular visits to lessons and to school give them a good grasp of how well the school is doing, and what needs to be improved. Governors recognise that attendance at more training courses would enable them to set the work of the school in a wider regional and national context.

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Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
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	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

8 February 2007

Dear Children

Ardley Hill Lower School, Lowther Road, Dunstable, Bedfordshire, LU6 3NZ

You may remember that we recently visited your school and this letter is to tell you what we found out. But first, I just want to take this opportunity to say thank you for making our stay so enjoyable and for making us so welcome. We had the chance to talk to lots of you and it was good to hear how much you enjoy school, how many of you feel proud of it and, importantly, that if on the rare chance that bullying does occur, you feel very confident that it will be dealt with quickly and sensitively.

You will be pleased to hear that we think Ardley Hill is a good school. Teaching is good and that helps to make sure that you make good progress and do well in subjects such as English, mathematics and science. Your headteacher runs the school well and together with all staff at the school makes sure that you are well looked after, happy and safe and that you are encouraged to keep fit and healthy. Another strength of the school is you! Most of you behave well and enjoy what you do, particularly when lessons are exciting and fun. We have made some suggestions as to how Mrs Watts and the staff can make the school an even better place for you to learn. There are times when teachers do not always give you enough opportunities to become more independent as learners or to find more things out for yourselves. We also think that your teachers need to link subjects together more to make what you learn more interesting and exciting.

Mrs Watts, the staff and the governors want the school to get better and better. Having met you, we are sure you will want to play your part by always behaving well, attending school regularly and becoming accomplished, independent learners. We wish you every success for your future. It was a pleasure to meet you.

Best wishes

Martin Newell (Lead inspector)

Richard Perkins