

Harrold Lower School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	109455
Local authority	Bedford Borough
Inspection number	377923
Inspection dates	23–24 February 2012
Lead inspector	Margaret Goodchild

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	128
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Silke Brittain
Headteacher	Kate Yelland
Date of previous school inspection	7 June 2007
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Introduction

Inspection team

Margaret Goodchild

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. All six teachers were seen teaching 10 lessons; half of these were observed jointly with the headteacher. Meetings were held with pupils, members of the governing body and staff. The inspector took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at documentation relating to self-evaluation and monitoring, the analysis of pupils' progress, teachers' planning and procedures for safeguarding pupils. Questionnaires returned by 47 parents and carers were scrutinised, together with those completed by staff and pupils.

Information about the school

Harrold Lower is smaller than most schools of its type. It serves the North Bedfordshire villages of Harrold and Odell, though about a quarter of the pupils come from further afield. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. Nearly all pupils are of White British heritage and currently no pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is well below average. The school is one of a number that form the North Bedfordshire Schools Trust.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school that is well placed to improve further. It has a number of excellent features but teaching is not exceptional in enough lessons for the school's overall effectiveness to be outstanding.
- Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and move into Year 1 with attainment that is above average. In Years 1 to 4, pupils make good progress and do outstandingly well in some areas to reach high standards at the end of Year 2 and Year 4. Pupils' attainment in art, dance and music far exceeds national expectations for their age and they make outstanding progress in these subjects.
- Teaching is good with some that is outstanding, particularly in the arts. Throughout the school, teachers provide pupils with varied experiences that capture their interest and make them want to learn. In outstanding lessons, teachers use information about pupils' prior attainment to match tasks precisely to the next steps in learning for different groups. They also give pupils the opportunity to contribute their own ideas to the direction their learning takes. These features are less evident in lessons that are good or occasionally satisfactory.
- Pupils' outstanding behaviour and readiness to work hard makes a significant contribution to their achievement. They love school, say that they feel very safe and that bullying is extremely rare.
- The headteacher is committed to the pursuit of excellence and teachers' work is frequently monitored. Leaders all contribute to managing the school's performance and to a rigorous drive for improvement. They have not focused sufficiently, however, on ensuring that lessons are always matched to the needs of different groups. The curriculum is outstanding and the school makes excellent use of external partnerships to engage pupils and promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on the many strengths in teaching to increase the amount that is outstanding by:
 - ensuring that teachers use assessment information consistently to match work to the next steps in learning for different groups of pupils
 - making sure that all lesson planning is of equal quality to the best
 - more regularly drawing on pupils' ideas and enabling them to take greater responsibility for the way their learning unfolds
 - focusing monitoring and self-evaluation activities continuously on these key factors.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Children join the school with skills that usually range from being broadly in line with national expectations to above what is expected for their age. They make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage in response to provision that is matched increasingly well to their needs. Attainment at the end of Year 2 has been significantly above average in reading, writing and mathematics each year since the last inspection. Attainment at the end of Year 4 shows a rising trend and has been high in both English and mathematics over the last three years. A few pupils in Year 4 have met with success in tests in reading and mathematics normally taken by bright pupils two years older than themselves; this represents outstanding achievement. In most lessons, all groups of pupils make at least good – and at times, excellent – progress. Where work is not matched closely to the prior attainment of different groups, it tends to be less-able pupils who find some tasks difficult. Nevertheless, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs do well overall and benefit from the many programmes the school has introduced to help with their learning.

Parents and carers, rightly, believe that their children are making good progress. In lessons, pupils collaborate very well, written work is carefully presented and pupils approach problem-solving activities with confidence. They have a well-developed knowledge of phonics (the sounds that letters make) and their high attainment in reading at the end of Years 2 and 4 supports their achievement across the curriculum. Pupils' learning skills are particularly well developed in the arts. Visual art is of exceptionally high quality, as seen in superb portraits after the style of Picasso. In dance lessons, boys and girls move expressively and sensitively, making use of a wide repertoire of gestures, and contribute thoughtful ideas that help to inform the choreography. During the inspection, pupils presented a highly polished dramatic performance on the theme of recycling; their speaking and communication skills were of a high standard. Pupils particularly shine in situations like this where they are given responsibility and showcase their talents for an audience. This is evident in an

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outstanding presentation about the school, produced independently by a group of pupils in Year 4, which reveals excellent creative skills and high attainment in information and communication technology.

Quality of teaching

Parents and carers are right in their belief that their children are taught well. Pupils agree and say that teachers make learning fun. Teachers have excellent relationships with their pupils and provide them with interesting and varied activities. Pupils' acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding is frequently tested, and teachers and their assistants are skilled in questioning them to see how much they have understood. Detailed assessment information is provided in the front of pupils' books and this helps to ensure that they are aware of their personal targets. Marking is thorough and provides pupils with clear guidance about how to improve their work.

The outstanding progress pupils make in the arts is underpinned by excellent teaching. In lessons in art, dance and music and in the best lessons in English and mathematics, teaching is dynamic and fast paced. Expectations are high, pupils are challenged to think deeply and take a considerable amount of responsibility for their own learning. In these lessons, tasks are planned precisely to meet the needs of different groups so that pupils make rapid and tangible progress. This was evident in an outstanding mathematics lesson in Year 2, where pupils began by learning about fractions such as halves and quarters. This knowledge was successfully consolidated for less-able pupils, while others moved on to matching more complex fractions. More-able pupils were given greater challenge, which involved identifying equivalent fractions – work that is normally undertaken by older pupils during Key Stage 2. In less successful lessons, teachers sometimes plan different activities for groups of pupils but the work is not different enough. At times, the method used is not necessarily the best one for teaching the skills, knowledge and understanding they want pupils to gain. On occasion, there is also a tendency for some teachers to talk too much and to give pupils limited opportunities to contribute their own ideas.

Curriculum organisation supports teaching well. Grouping pupils by prior attainment for phonics, rather than by age, means teachers are able to match work in reading closely to the next steps in pupils' development. Equally, the regular timetabling of mathematics workshops provides a focus for teachers to develop pupils' knowledge in using and applying their mathematical skills. The 'learning platform' features strongly in the promotion of pupils' independent learning and the setting of homework. The school's involvement in the 'values education' system permeates many lessons, supporting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Parents and carers, as well as pupils themselves, are very positive about behaviour and safety. They recognise that the school is a calm and orderly place where working hard and being responsive to the opportunities on offer is the norm. Around the

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school, pupils are extremely polite and helpful. In lessons, their excellent attitudes and enjoyment of learning mean that their concentration and application are outstanding. Pupils' maturity and self-discipline create an environment where all learn in an atmosphere of respect. They quickly focus and engage deeply with set tasks, whether working individually, in pairs or groups, and use time very productively without coming off task. Pupils' ability to shape and control their own behaviour is a major factor in the high quality work they produce, including during performances and when developing presentations. Pupils' outstanding behaviour is underpinned by teachers' exceptionally consistent implementation of the school's behaviour policy.

Pupils are able to talk knowledgeably about how to keep themselves safe and display a high regard for their own and others' safety. They know about different types of bullying and their consideration for one another means that instances of bullying are extremely rare. Pupils say that they feel exceptionally safe and are confident in the knowledge that the school will take seriously any concerns they may have, especially through use of the 'worry box'. This simple but highly effective system for identifying and tackling bullying means that any minor issues are quickly resolved. Attendance is well above average and reflects pupils' enthusiasm for learning and the school's rigorous efforts.

Leadership and management

The headteacher holds a very clear vision for the school and senior leaders have sustained and built on the many strengths found at the previous inspection. Standards have risen in mathematics and middle leaders are more actively involved in driving improvement. The Early Years Foundation Stage is developing well with the addition of clearer systems and improved provision. Senior leaders and those with subject responsibilities regularly monitor all aspects of teaching. The headteacher's lesson observations are of excellent quality and staff receive sharply focused feedback that contributes significantly to their professional development. The checking of pupils' work and teachers' planning takes place much more frequently than in most schools. However, expectations for the quality of lesson planning have not been high enough to move teaching from good to outstanding. In all other respects, leaders with key responsibilities have worked most effectively and the school has a good capacity for further improvement. The governing body works closely with senior leaders and its members have a detailed knowledge of the school's work. Safeguarding receives careful attention and procedures fully meet statutory requirements. School leaders, together with the governing body, ensure that pupils are given equal access to all opportunities. Pupils' progress is regularly tracked and performance data is analysed rigorously to identify pupils who need additional help, including those whose circumstances make them vulnerable.

The curriculum is outstanding because it provides pupils with a range of memorable experiences that not only develop their skills but spark in them an excitement for learning. Provision in the arts is exemplary and, together with a combination of stimulating events and varied after-school clubs, contributes significantly to pupils'

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outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Information and communication technology has been fully integrated into the curriculum since the last inspection and is a major strength. The school works very closely with others in the North Bedfordshire Schools Trust and makes active use of a range of commercial and educational partners to enrich pupils' learning. For example, partnerships have helped the school to provide extremely well for pupils who have particular gifts and talents. The school works well in partnership with parents and carers, and has made a good start in increasing parental involvement in children's early learning.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



27 February 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Harrold Lower School, Bedford, MK43 7DE

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful when I visited your school recently. I really enjoyed my visit and having the opportunity to talk with some of you and to see you working in lessons. You told me how much you enjoy going to Harrold Lower. I agree with you and your parents and carers that it is a good school and there are a number of excellent things about it.

These are some of the best things about your school.

- You make good progress and do extremely well in some lessons. This helps you to reach high standards at the end of Year 2 and Year 4.
- Teaching is good in most lessons and your teachers make learning interesting. In some lessons, teaching is outstanding, especially in art, dance and music.
- Your behaviour is excellent and you work hard in lessons.
- You feel very safe and find the 'worry box' really helpful if you have any concerns.
- The school provides you with many exciting things to do.

Your school is led and managed well and it has made good improvement since it was last inspected. Your headteacher and the other teachers want to make the school as good as possible for you. I have asked them to make sure that they plan work for you in all your lessons that matches the next steps in learning for everybody in the class, and that teachers always give you a chance to contribute your ideas. You can help your school with this by always doing your best and telling your teachers if you can think of something important that would improve your learning.

I wish you well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Goodchild
Lead inspector

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