

Potton Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109475
Local Authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	356556
Inspection dates	13–14 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Alan Jarvis

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	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	233
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alison Kitchener
Headteacher	Ruth Burmo
Date of previous school inspection	8 January 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 14 teachers and teaching assistants in 18 classroom visits. Meetings were held with governors, the headteacher and a number of staff responsible for key areas of the school's work. Inspectors looked at planning, minutes of meetings and other documentation, including that relating to safeguarding and pupils' learning and progress. Several informal discussions were held with parents and carers. Questionnaires returned by 172 parents and carers, 22 members of staff and 83 pupils were analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- how well pupils, particularly boys, progress in writing
- if teaching is equally challenging in both the single and mixed aged classes
- the impact of the introduction of topic work into the curriculum
- pupils' understanding of communities and cultures which are different from their own.

Information about the school

The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage in this average sized school. A few come from the Traveller community. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average as is the proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Most of these have moderate learning difficulties or behavioural needs. Pupils are taught in single age classes in Reception and Years 1 and 2 and mixed-aged classes in Years 3 and 4. The governors run a daily breakfast and after-school club. The school has the Active Mark award and has achieved Healthy Schools status.

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: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This good school has sustained and built upon its effectiveness. Pupils' academic achievement and their personal development remain good. Their skills in information and communication technology and their involvement in assessing their own learning are much stronger than reported in the last inspection. Parents and carers speak highly of the school with one writing 'My daughter really loves school. She has grown in confidence and ability thanks to the good care and teaching that is provided'.

All significant groups of pupils are making good progress. However, there are some variations within this profile. Pupils attain well in reading, mathematics and science. They also sing well and produce good quality artwork. In contrast, attainment is not quite as high in writing, especially for boys. This is because opportunities are missed to consolidate punctuation and sentence structure in Years 1 and 2 and use the eight parts of speech well to develop lively writing in Year 3 and 4. Not enough use is made of literacy in other areas of the curriculum, especially in the creative topic work and this inhibits progress in pupils' writing skills

Teaching is good and particularly so in Years 3 and 4. In the single and mixed-aged classes interesting tasks are set which are well matched to pupils of different ages, needs and abilities. Teachers assess pupils' learning well and have a clear idea of how they are progressing. Such tracking has identified that a few pupils with behavioural difficulties are falling behind in their learning and a small pocket of middle attaining pupils are stuck at a particular level in their learning. The academic or pastoral interventions these pupils receive are either not tailored sharply enough to quicken progress or address their sometimes complex pastoral needs.

The introduction of topic work has greatly improved pupils' enjoyment of school, introduced more creativity into learning and helped them develop good teamwork skills. Pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is reflected in their consideration for others and strong relationships. For their age they have a good understanding of world events, the beliefs of different faiths and ways of life in contrasting communities, including the Traveller culture.

Pupils' good understanding of how to keep fit and eat healthily is reflected in the school's recent sporting and health related awards. They also have a good sense of how to keep safe in different situations and play an active part in improving their community. The school is a very harmonious community in which all pupils are included and valued because staff keep a close eye on their welfare and needs.

The good outcomes reflect the effective leadership and management of the headteacher and extended leadership team. Their impact on pupils' progress is stronger in Years 3 and 4 than in Years 1 and 2. The monitoring and evaluation of steps taken to quicken the

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progress of the small pockets of slow moving pupils is not rigorous enough. The governing body provide a strong lead, are ambitious for further improvement and are seeking ways to bring greater efficiencies to the school. The good capacity for further improvement is evident from the good response to the previous inspection and a good spur to further improvement being provided.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- In the next eighteen months raise attainment in writing by:
 - giving a higher focus to pupils' using correct punctuation and sentence structure in Years 1 and 2
 - sharpening pupils' skills in using parts of speech effectively in Years 3 and 4 to write lively text in a variety of forms
 - providing more opportunities in topic work for pupils to develop and apply their writing skills.
- In the next year improve the progress of the small pockets of underachieving pupils by strengthening leadership and management in Years 1 and 2, tailoring the interventions they receive and monitoring and evaluating their success more rigorously.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Over the past three years, from a starting point which is typically in line with expectations, attainment has consistently been above national expectations in Year 4. This echoes the good progress evident in the school's tracking data and that seen in lessons. Most pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress in their learning. This stems from the mix of good classroom support, opportunities to develop independent learning and focused one to one teaching they receive. The Traveller pupils who do not receive additional support are also making good progress which is helped by their regular attendance.

Pupils enjoy their learning and practise their skills well. Pupils are very good readers. By Year 4 many can read fiction and non-fiction fluently and explain exactly what they need to do to read better. In Years 1 and 2 pupils showed keenness in their learning when discussing the recent rescue of the Chilean Miners. The older pupils in Years 3 and 4 were industrious and diligent in their practical mathematics when working individually to organise data into frequency charts.

Inspectors looked closely at behaviour as this was raised as an issue by a number of parents. Inspectors found the vast majority of pupils behaved extremely well in lessons and around the school. While the school has put in very good strategies to support the very small number of pupils who have clearly defined behavioural, emotional and social difficulties in the classroom these are not always fully effective. This interrupts their learning and slows their progress.

The school council raise funds for charity, have developed school policies and helped run the Christmas market stall in the local market square with the parent teacher association. Pupils' well-developed basic skills, good attendance and punctuality and creativity prepare them well for the next stage of their education.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Confident and well-trained learning support assistants are deployed effectively, support learning well and are sometimes used to take whole class sessions. However, some interventions are not tailored effectively enough to help the pockets of slow moving pupils quicken their progress. In most lessons teachers use questioning very well to challenge individual pupils' thinking and develop their understanding. Time targets are often used to sustain a good pace to learning. In a few lessons opportunities were missed to fully engage all pupils either through questioning or providing suitable resources. Pupils know their learning targets well and effectively assess their own and each other's work. Marking is very helpful to pupils giving encouragement and clear pointers to improvement.

Good attention is given to developing basic skills. A higher focus is now being given to English grammar and pupils in Years 3 and 4 study French. Pupils enjoy the practical and investigative approach to mathematics and the opportunities to think about different ways to solve problems. Topics such as 'A taste of the exotic' integrate learning from many different subjects including the geography of India, making different Asian foods and applying scientific knowledge to the forces experienced by elephants and snakes. Clubs such as computing, football coaching, rounders and guitar are enjoyed by the pupils and there is a high uptake.

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Parents and carers recognised the good care and guidance provided by the school when they wrote 'The staff are friendly and approachable', and 'My child has settled into her new school extremely well.' Typical of the school's commitment to ensuring the well-being of its pupils is provision of breakfast and after-school clubs which are greatly appreciated by the pupils. Induction and transition arrangements are very effective.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and her staff provide a good drive for improvement and channel their efforts to good effect, helped by a much improved school development plan. This is focusing on the right issues, has challenging success criteria and a longer term strategic view. Target setting is used well to sharpen teaching and set clear expectations of how well each group of pupils should do. Regular learning walks help staff gain a clear overview of how well teaching and learning is progressing and enable the headteacher to address any issues that arise. While observations of individual lessons also take place not enough of these explore the link between teaching and the progress different groups of pupils are making.

The effective governing body are very involved in the life of the school. Their regular visits to school help them keep their finger on the pulse and monitor the impact of the school development plan. In looking to the future they are actively strengthening partnerships with other local schools to seek mutual benefits and secure better value for money. All statutory requirements are met and a strong emphasis is placed on safeguarding. While policies and practice to protect and safeguard children are fully in place and of good quality there are a few minor omissions of detail.

Equality is promoted successfully. Staff strive hard to ensure that all pupils make good progress in each year and, although more needs to be done, are reducing the proportion of pupils whose progress is slower. The school has a very good understanding of the community it serves and promotes community cohesion well. Different cultures and religions are promoted well through the curriculum. The school is implementing ambitious plans to further extend opportunities to increase pupils' knowledge and understanding of contrasting communities. Good partnerships with local schools and specialist outside agencies help promote staff development, enrich the curriculum and support pupils' personal development well. There are strong links with parents and parents are encouraged to help the school move forward.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make good progress across all areas of learning. Nearly all reach or exceed the Early Learning Goals by the start of Year 1 and the numbers exceeding these expectations have been rising over the past three years. This is due to the good, and sometimes better teaching, and the stimulating indoor and outside environments which offer very good opportunities for pupils to choose their own learning. Assessment processes which recognise pupils as unique individuals are used well to provide children with tasks which are varied and challenging. Children work and play together in harmony. The Reception leader has built an effective team. Her analysis of data is first class, links with parents and carers are excellent and systems in place to safeguard children are robust. The excellent action plan rightly pinpoints boys' writing and the need to address rigorously any gaps in each child's learning as areas for development.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account: Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

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Views of parents and carers

The overwhelming majority of parents and carers are very happy with the school. In particular, they are pleased about how well their children enjoy school, the good teaching and the way the school helps their children lead a healthy lifestyle. A few parents had concerns about behaviour. Inspectors found this to be good but also report the school has good measures in place to support the very few pupils with known behavioural difficulties. A small number of parents expressed reservations about how well the school was led and managed. The school's good overall effectiveness demonstrates that leadership and management are effective but the school recognises there is scope for improvement in Years 1 and 2 and is taking action.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Potton Lower School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 172 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 233 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	115	67	52	30	2	3	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	108	63	62	36	2	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	68	40	93	54	8	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	87	51	68	40	9	5	3	2
The teaching is good at this school	100	58	66	38	2	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	90	52	72	42	5	3	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	94	55	75	44	3	2	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	77	45	72	42	4	2	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	75	45	72	42	4	2	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	75	44	80	47	10	6	3	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	61	35	83	48	15	9	7	4
The school is led and managed effectively	61	35	83	48	15	9	7	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	60	35	91	53	8	5	1	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



15 October 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Potton Lower School, Sandy, SG19 2PB

Thank you for making us so welcome to your school. We enjoyed talking with you, looking at your work and seeing you learning in your classes. We found out that you go to a good school. Here is a list of some of the things we liked best.

You told us how much you loved coming to school, and that you feel safe and learn a lot in lessons. Having seen you at work we can see why!

Children in the Reception class settle in well and get off to a good start.

At the end of Year 4, attainment is above the national expectations. Your attainment is best in reading, mathematics and science.

You know how to keep fit and healthy and enjoy the clubs you attend.

Although a few of you need extra support with behaviour, the vast majority of you behave very well and attend school regularly.

Topic work is varied, interesting and helps you develop your creativity.

Teaching is good in both the single-age and mixed-age classes and especially so in Years 3 and 4. This helps you learn well and make good progress.

The headteacher, senior staff and the governing body are leading the school well and have good plans to make it even better in the future.

Every school has some things that could be improved. These are the areas we want your school to concentrate on now:

To help you develop your basic writing skills in Years 1 and 2 and use parts of speech to write well in different styles in Years 3 and 4.

To provide you with more opportunities to develop your writing in topic work.

To provide fully tailored support to the small numbers of you who are making slower progress.

I wish you great success in the future. Keep up all the good work you are doing!

Yours sincerely

Alan Jarvis

Lead inspector

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