

Milton Ernest VC Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109613
Local Authority	Bedford Borough
Inspection number	356584
Inspection dates	9–10 February 2011
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	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	62
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Deborah Inskip
Headteacher	Mary Harris
Date of previous school inspection	13 March 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Seven lessons were observed and five teachers were seen. Meetings were held with staff, a representative of the governing body and a group of pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at information about pupils' progress, evidence of monitoring, the school development plan, a variety of policies and safeguarding documentation. In addition, they analysed the questionnaires returned by 36 parents and carers, eight members of staff and 20 pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- What accounts for pupils' apparent variable attainment and progress in writing and mathematics?
- What impact has the introduction of a more creative curriculum had on pupils' enjoyment and attitudes to learning?
- How effectively are monitoring and evaluation driving improvement further?
- To what extent do pupils understand cultures and communities that differ from their own rural environment?

Information about the school

This is a much smaller-than-average primary school. The pupils are taught in three classes. A much smaller proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals than in most schools. The pupils are predominantly from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. The school has achieved Healthy School 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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The school provides a satisfactory education. Pupils are very happy in school and clearly want to please their teachers, parents and carers. The headteacher, staff and governing body are keen to improve provision and outcomes. This is evident from the introduction of a more creative curriculum which links subjects together in topics. Pupils say how much they enjoy the opportunities these provide for them to learn in depth and develop their research and enquiry skills. Many engage enthusiastically in sporting and artistic opportunities and have a good sense of what is right and wrong. However, their knowledge and awareness of cultures other than their own is patchy. This is partly because they have limited opportunities to experience these at first hand. While they study a range of festivals and topics including those about Mexico and Brazil, there are not enough topics which look at cultural diversity.

The impact of the increased range of opportunities provided beyond the curriculum and the good care provided is seen in pupils' enjoyment of school and in the many good aspects of their personal development. The pupils feel very safe in school and behaviour is consistently good. The school's Healthy Schools status reflects pupils' good adoption of healthy eating habits and their relishing of physical activity.

Attainment has been above expectations by the end of Year 4 in recent years. Within this context, pupils do particularly well in reading and make good progress. In writing and mathematics, progress is satisfactory. Consequently, achievement is satisfactory overall. The school development plan has clear actions to improve this, but the actions are not sufficiently focused on boosting the quality of teaching and the curriculum. While teaching is consistently good in some lessons, in others the expectations shared with pupils are not clear enough or high enough and there are periods in which the pace of learning is slow. Some pupils have difficulty in using their knowledge of letters and sounds to choose the correct spellings in their writing from several plausible alternatives and this slows their progress. In mathematics, not enough priority is given to developing pupils' problem-solving skills or to practising and using their number facts to help them develop more confidence and rapidity in carrying out mental calculations.

Various monitoring activities are undertaken to help drive improvement, some of which are more effective than others. The assessment and tracking of pupils' progress is working well. In contrast, the monitoring of the quality of lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work, while accurate, are not rigorous in evaluating the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and progress. The comprehensive school development plan provides a clear agenda for improvement but is not focused enough on raising achievement. However, good action has been taken in providing more opportunities for more-able pupils to shine, and the outdoor accommodation in the Early Years Foundation Stage is much improved. There have also been good developments in partnerships with other schools locally which,

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among other benefits, have helped staff training and provided high-quality provision in sports. These factors and the school's sound self-evaluation which identifies the correct areas needing attention show that the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

Up to 40% of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and the curriculum in writing and mathematics in order to accelerate the progress pupils' make by:
 - ensuring expectations of what pupils can achieve are consistently high
 - sustaining a good pace and momentum in all lessons
 - giving more attention to help pupils use their knowledge of letters and sounds to choose the correct spellings in their writing
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to develop their problem-solving skills and rapid recall of number facts in mathematics.
- Bring more rigour to all monitoring and evaluation activities so that they have a sharp focus on the impact that teaching has on pupils' learning and progress.
- Ensure pupils have a good understanding of communities in the United Kingdom and beyond by:
 - establishing links with communities in more culturally diverse areas
 - developing more topics that have a strong cultural dimension.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Year groups are small, and children's skills and abilities when they enter school vary from year to year. Taken overall, attainment on entry is in line with or above that expected for their age. Over recent years, with generally strong cohorts, pupils' attainment has been typically above that expected by the end of Year 4. This reflects a consistently strong performance and good progress in reading. While attainment in writing and mathematics has also been typically above average, performance is not as strong and progress has been satisfactory. Many older pupils are confident and fluent readers because they read regularly to adults at school and at home and the guided reading programme is implemented well.

Pupils make better progress in some lessons than in others. In one English lesson, for example, pupils' participation was very good and they sought to produce their best work when looking at and discussing similes, metaphors and alliteration in a variety of poems. However, the presentation of their written work, while satisfactory, varies in its neatness and contains too many spelling errors. In the same class, pupils' learning slowed in parts of a mathematics lesson because the more-able pupils marked time before going onto activities that really challenged them. In a further lesson, pupils worked steadily when working on their number facts, but a faster pace was impaired because the introductions and explanations were too long and not enough pace and challenge was injected into the lesson.

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Most pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are making satisfactory progress and are supported appropriately by teaching assistants. The few with more complex learning or personal needs initially make slower progress, but they make up lost ground and make progress in line with other pupils once specialist external advice has been received and acted upon.

The pupils have a good understanding of safe and unsafe situations. For example, they know that it is harmful to play computer games which 'are not meant for our age group'. The good uptake of healthy meals at lunchtime and their awareness that 'chicken is better for you than red meat because it contains less fat' reflect their good awareness of what you need to do to eat healthily. The pupils are keen to participate in school life beyond normal lessons, such as helping as librarians, as members of the school council or being play pals at lunchtime. They contribute well to their local community, such as raising money for charity, helping at the school fete or visiting senior citizens in the local care home. Pupils' regular attendance and satisfactory progress in their basic skills mean they are soundly prepared for the next stage of their education.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
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	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
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?

Although some teaching is consistently good, there are inconsistencies that mean pupils make progress in line with expectations in writing and mathematics rather than exceeding them. In the best teaching seen, various strategies and activities were used to generate a

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good pace to learning, and these were enhanced by quick-fire questions that kept pupils of all abilities on their toes. However, in some lessons not enough is expected of pupils and the pitch of work is not as challenging as it might be. In writing, opportunities are sometimes missed to correct pupils' spellings. In some lessons, the more-able pupils sometimes mark time doing work that is too easy for them even though challenging activities are provided later. Marking is strong on praise and correction, but weaker in identifying pupils' next steps in learning. Pupils make regular reference to their targets, for example in reading, but their work reveals that these are not always followed up in writing assessments.

The curriculum covers all the required subjects plus French in Years 2, 3 and 4. It provides a sound preparation for the next stage of pupils' education. Many interesting and enjoyable activities, such as visits to the Scott Polar Museum in Cambridge, Rockingham Castle and the Science Museum Live, benefit pupils' personal development and add extra zest to the curriculum. Information and communication technology is used regularly in subjects. The virtual learning environment is used to good effect as a curriculum resource for homework. Pupils develop new interests from very popular school clubs such as multiskills, chess and street dance.

The needs of each pupil are very well known within this small school and underpin the good care that is provided. Pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable are included in all the school offers, and they benefit from good, timely support when this is needed with the help of inter-agency support. Typical of the good care provided are the breakfast and after-school clubs which pupils say, 'Keep us safe, give us a healthy snack and many fun activities.' Good induction arrangements operate when children first join the school, and effective transition arrangements with the local middle schools help pupils to quickly settle in to their new schools.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher, staff and governing body are keen to make improvements. The good and accurate assessment and tracking of individual pupils' progress have given all staff a much clearer picture of progress in different subjects. Teaching staff are observed regularly. However, not enough attention is given to identifying how teaching can be improved or what impact the teaching is having on the progress of different groups of pupils, especially in writing and mathematics. Members of the governing body make regular visits to the school to look at the progress of the development plan. However, not enough of these are focused sharply on the key priority of raising pupils' progress and

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achievement. In addition, some of the targets and success criteria within the school development plan, especially those relating to pupils' progress, are too broad, making it difficult for the headteacher or governing body to evaluate accurately the impact of developments on the outcomes for pupils.

The governing body is evolving, with 'new blood' helping to bring fresh ideas and skills and have a good plan for their development. While the governing body has ensured that there are no concerns about safeguarding pupils, and that individual pupils receive good care and support, some of the policies and procedures are not monitored rigorously enough in order to reflect best practice. The school has good relationships with parents and carers. It keeps them well informed through regular newsletters, termly updates and very well attended consultation evenings. Good links and partnerships with a variety of agencies are particularly effective in supporting the few pupils who have specific needs. Partnerships with the local cluster of schools also have a positive impact on staff training. Furthermore, pupils benefit from some specialist teaching and access to a strong programme of sporting and artistic activities. Although discrimination is tackled well, remaining variations in teaching and the progress of pupils mean that the promotion of equal opportunities is satisfactory. A sound policy for community cohesion has resulted in pupils having a strong sense of their local community. Plans to extend provision to build links with a school in an urban area or in another country are at an early stage of development.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
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	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Satisfactory teaching and a well-planned range of interesting activities ensure that children make satisfactory progress in most areas of learning and reach a good level of development. Progress is a little stronger in their knowledge and understanding of the

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world and in their physical and creative development. Children are settled in their class, behave well and care for the equipment and resources they use. During the course of the week, there is an appropriate balance of teacher-directed and free-flow activities. Children enjoyed learning about the Chinese New Year, dressing up in costumes and played a range of percussion instruments while singing a Chinese song. The outdoor area is much improved and is used well in all weathers. Outside, they had good opportunities to choose to develop their physical skills on wheeled toys, using 'snakes and ladders' to learn about number and working together acting out a Chinese play. While regular assessments feed into the planning of activities, the tasks provided are not always finely tailored to children's individual needs. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are cared for very well and enjoy all the activities provided. Strong induction procedures, including home visits, help parents and carers work with the setting to help their children settle in smoothly when they first start in September. The leader is aware of the need to give more priority to teaching letters and sounds to boost children's progress in early writing.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire was higher than that typically found. Almost all who responded were very happy with their children's experiences at school, the teaching, and how well the school helps them support their children's learning at home. Most of those who added additional comments were particularly pleased with the care provided. A very small number were concerned that unkind behaviour was not quickly addressed. The inspectors found that such occurrences are quite rare and the school deals with them appropriately, a view which is supported by pupils on the school council.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Milton Ernest VC 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 36 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 62 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	26	72	10	28	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	22	61	14	39	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	20	56	14	39	1	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	22	61	13	36	0	0	1	3
The teaching is good at this school	29	81	7	19	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	24	67	12	33	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	23	64	13	36	0	0	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)	20	56	14	39	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	21	58	13	36	1	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	13	36	16	44	2	6	2	6
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	22	61	1	3	2	6	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	22	61	11	31	2	6	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	27	75	8	22	1	3	0	0

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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



11 February 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Milton Ernest VC Lower School, Bedford, MK44 1RF

Thank you for making us feel so welcome in your school. Special thanks are due to the school council for sharing their views and the pupils from Years 3 and 4 who kindly read to me. We judged that you go to a satisfactory school. This means that it does a number of things well but could do some things better.

Best of all, you develop well as individuals and know a lot about how to keep fit and healthy. You told me how much you enjoyed raising funds for charity and play a full role in the local community. I am told the local residents of the care home relish your visits, and I can see from your smiling faces and willingness to please why this is the case. Adults in the school care for you well, and that means that you feel safe and always have someone to turn to if you need help. Your behaviour is good and you all get on well with each other. You are keen to learn and I can now see why the creative curriculum and the many popular clubs add to your enjoyment.

You do particularly well in reading. I have asked the headteacher to make some improvements to the way you are taught and to strengthen the curriculum in writing and mathematics so that you make faster progress in these subjects. You can help in two ways. First, when using your knowledge of letters and sounds in your writing, think carefully about the correct spelling of each word when the sounds might suggest there is more than one way to spell them. Second, work hard at remembering your number facts and understanding what is being asked when you solve problems in mathematics. I have also asked the headteacher and governing body to be more thorough in the way they check to see everyone is making good progress in lessons and that their development plan is working as well as it can. I can see that you are now learning more about people who live in other communities, but I have asked your headteacher to give you more chances to experience this either first hand or through topic work.

Your answers to my questions helped me a lot and I hope the report will result in everyone making good progress in every lesson.

Yours sincerely

Alan Jarvis

Lead inspector

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