

Maple Tree Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132236
Local Authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	360414
Inspection dates	3–4 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Glynis Bradley-Peat

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	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	223
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nigel Aldis
Headteacher	Pauline Duncombe
Date of previous school inspection	28 April 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 14 lessons, observed eight teachers and held meetings with the headteacher, senior leadership team, teaching staff, governors and pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at pupils' books. They checked documents including the school improvement plan, systems for tracking pupils' progress, safeguarding documentation and school policies. They also analysed information from 86 questionnaires from parents and carers, in addition to those received from staff and pupils.

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

- Are the most able pupils achieving as well as they could and do teachers have high enough expectations of them?
- What progress do pupils make across all year groups and is attainment continuing to rise?
- Are leaders able to demonstrate good capacity to improve, taking into account current staffing issues?
- How well do leaders and managers secure improvements in teaching?

Information about the school

Maple Lower is an average-sized lower school. There is provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage in two mixed Nursery and Reception classes. Pupils come from predominantly White British backgrounds, with a very small minority from a variety of other heritages. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is low. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. Their needs are mostly related to moderate learning difficulties and autism. The school has gained Healthy School status and the Activemark award.

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

Maple Lower School provides a satisfactory standard of education for its pupils. Through their sound self-evaluation, senior leaders are aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have been successful in making some improvements since the time of the last inspection. In light of this, there is clear evidence of the school's satisfactory capacity to improve further. The curriculum has been enhanced during the afternoon sessions and is much more creative; most teachers' marking offers pupils clear advice and help about how to improve their work but this is not always consistent across all classes.

Children make a good start to their education in the Early Years Foundation Stage where they learn well and make good progress. This is because teaching is well planned and children are able to learn independently through a wide range of different activities. However, in Key Stage 1, progress slows. Currently, the school's own tracking data reveals weaknesses in writing in a small minority of classes in Key Stage 1. Although pupils make satisfactory progress overall in this key stage, teaching is not consistently good enough to ensure that all pupils achieve what they are capable of.

Pupils make better progress in Key Stage 2 but again, teaching is not always good enough to make up for the underachievement of some pupils lower down the school.

Although there are some significant strengths of teaching, there are occasionally low expectations, and some instances of teachers giving unnecessarily lengthy explanations to pupils; both of these limit progress in a few lessons. In addition, teaching assistants are not always well deployed to support learning.

The headteacher has already begun to tackle the shortcomings in teaching but this has been hampered by a variety of issues with staffing. The long-term absence of the deputy headteacher combined with three maternity leaves and some sickness have hindered planned improvements. Under these challenging circumstances the headteacher has ensured that attainment has not dipped and has remained above average since the time of the last inspection. The leadership and management of teaching and learning, although satisfactory, do not always hold teachers to account rigorously enough for the progress their pupils make. This is because monitoring activities are not systematically recorded so that progress against areas for improvement can be reviewed and measured.

The governing body ensures that statutory requirements are met, including those for safeguarding. However, governors do not hold the school to account well enough for the work that it does and are insufficiently well informed about academic strengths and weaknesses. As a result, their ability to act as critical friends is limited. Although the school promotes community cohesion satisfactorily, the governors' understanding of their role in this is limited and so is their contribution to improving this aspect of the school's

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work. Despite all this, the headteacher has worked hard to maintain pupils' above average attainment.

A strength of the school is the good care, guidance and support it offers to pupils. Those with special educational needs are supported well in a warm, welcoming learning environment. As a result they make good progress in their learning. Safeguarding requirements are met well. Behaviour in and around the school during the inspection was predominantly good. However, where teaching is less effective, a few pupils sometimes lose interest and begin to fidget. They are prepared satisfactorily for the next stage of their education and develop workplace and other skills. Most pupils are keen to adopt a healthy lifestyle and know, for example, the impact of eating well and taking regular exercise on healthy lifestyles.

Up to 40% of the 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 so that it is consistently good to enable accelerated progress in Years 1 to 4, but particularly in Key Stage 1 in writing by:
 - ensuring that all teachers have high expectations of what pupils can do, especially the most able, so that they are challenged more effectively and reach even higher standards of attainment
 - reducing the time that teachers spend explaining activities to pupils and thus increasing opportunities for independent work to be completed.
 - ensuring that teaching assistants are used and directed consistently well across all classes to promote the progress of all learners.
- Improve the leadership and management of teaching and learning by:
 - rigorously holding teachers to account for the progress their pupils make
 - ensuring that observations, learning walks and work scrutiny are more systematically recorded.
- Improve the quality of governance by:
 - ensuring that governors are trained effectively to become critical friends and to challenge the school independently
 - ensuring that governors understand and promote community cohesion.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Following good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage, progress slows in Key Stage 1 because teaching is not effective enough to ensure that all pupils achieve their potential. Pupils make better progress in Key Stage 2 but again, teaching is not always sufficiently challenging to make up for the weaknesses in writing in a minority of classes in Key Stage 1. In some lessons, direct teaching occupies too much time and so pupils sit passively for too long. Too little time is given for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning and to work together collaboratively to solve problems.

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Most pupils enjoy school, have good attitudes to their learning and behave well. They are articulate and confident to answer questions. They generally work well in pairs and groups, learning to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each other's work. In a physical education lesson pupils made good progress using their bodies to make different shapes. This was because pupils learnt from each other and then planned how they could develop their own jumps to incorporate more complex shapes. However, occasionally, pupils are not sufficiently clear about what they need to do to succeed and there are instances where more able pupils do not learn as well as they should because expectations of their level and pace of work are not high enough.

The very few pupils with special educational needs make better levels of progress than their classmates. Many make good progress and benefit from one-to-one support they receive. However, their achievement in writing is not as good as in other subjects.

Pupils understand issues such as bullying and think carefully about their own general personal safety. Although there have been a few incidents of bullying, pupils are confident in the school's ability to deal with them. Pupils respond well to the school's efforts to promote healthy lifestyles and are able to speak knowledgeably about how they might adopt them. Within school, they are willing to take on responsibilities and have some input into decision making. Links with the local community are satisfactory, but pupils social and cultural development do not benefit as a result. They develop a good understanding of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues.

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	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	3
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

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How effective is the provision?

Good care, guidance and support are at the heart of the school's work. The school has been very successful in helping several pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities to learn and develop personal qualities and interpersonal skills. This has helped them to develop independence and to make good progress during their time in the school. The school works well with outside agencies to maximise support when necessary.

The quality of teaching and learning has been affected by staff turbulence over a number of months, the vast majority of which has been beyond the school's control. Although it is satisfactory overall it is inconsistent across classes and year groups resulting in uneven progress. There are examples of good teaching, for example a Year 3 literacy lesson where the teacher promoted pupils' independent thinking skills and helped them to be creative in their writing. All pupils engaged well with their learning because work was carefully matched to their individual needs. Although there is no single weakness that distinguishes less successful teaching, there are occasions when pupils finish work too quickly because tasks do not challenge them enough, as well as instances where pupils lose interest because direct instruction goes on for too long. In a few lessons, teaching assistants are not effectively directed to support learning,

There have been some improvements made to the satisfactory curriculum by making it more creative in the afternoons. Pupils are more interested and motivated, especially the boys. Pupils working on an Italian theme visited an Italian restaurant and then prepared a meal in school for parents; this promoted high levels of enjoyment. However, in mathematics and English there is less creativity and the work does not always match the needs of all pupils well enough. As a result they become bored and do not learn effectively. The school provides a satisfactory range of extra activities and visits which contribute well to encouragement of healthy lifestyles.

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?

Leaders embed ambition for the future of the school and drive forward improvement satisfactorily. The headteacher has done well to ensure that attainment has remained above average despite major challenges in staffing. However the leadership and management of teaching and learning have not been robust enough. As a result, the quality of teaching in some year groups has not promoted good progress. Monitoring is not always recorded well enough or followed up as effectively as it should be. Targets set

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have not always been challenging enough. The headteacher has taken action and raised thresholds appropriately.

The governing body has supported the school through some difficult situations in recent times but has failed to act as a critical friend or to focus effectively on securing improvements in teaching and learning. There is a satisfactory understanding of the community in which the school sits but evaluating the impact of how well it promotes community cohesion is at an early stage of development. The school overcomes any potential discrimination and has a firm commitment to promoting equal opportunities for all. Safeguarding arrangements are good. Parental and carer questionnaires indicate overall good support for the school but a significant minority do not feel that the school listens effectively to their concerns or that it communicates with them effectively.

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	4
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
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

Most children begin school with understanding and skill levels which are as expected when compared to other children of a similar age. They develop quickly in confidence because the school has effective systems in place to ensure they settle into school life quickly and easily. Progress is good in both Nursery and Reception and children move forward well in their acquisition of knowledge, skills and understanding. This is because of good, focused teaching and a curriculum which provides a wide range of stimulating activities. Children enter Year 1 with above average attainment, some well above.

Children have many opportunities to work independently and teacher led activities are short and sharp, keeping children both interested and motivated. Observations are accurate and assessment ensures that work is well matched to need. In one session, children worked cooperatively together to build a patio outside the playhouse. One said to

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the others, 'We need to lift it together as its heavy.' The teaching assistant monitored the activity well and supported it with helpful conversation.

Leadership and management are good and focus well on achievement for all. Staff display good teamwork, ensuring all children are included, particularly the most vulnerable. There are good links, with parents and carers, and outside agencies, which ensure children's safety and security. Data are used increasingly effectively to map progress and to look at what needs to be improved.

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	2

Views of parents and carers

A minority of parents and carers returned the questionnaires but the majority of these were positive about the school overall. Almost all parents say that their child enjoys school. The vast majority feel that their children are kept safe. Most feel that their children are encouraged to lead a healthy lifestyle and that the school meets the needs of their child. The large majority said they are happy with the experience their children have in the school. About a third of parents and carers made additional comments. Some spoke of the good start their children receive in the Early Years Foundation Stage and inspection findings support this view. A minority feel that unacceptable behaviour is not dealt with effectively. Inspectors found behaviour to be well managed and good during the inspection. A small minority do not feel that the school is led and managed effectively. Inspectors found the school to be led and managed satisfactorily. A small minority felt that the school did not take account of their suggestions and concerns. Inspectors brought this to the attention of the school during the inspection.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Maple Tree 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 86 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 223 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	40	47	45	52	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	43	50	39	45	3	3	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	28	33	44	51	13	15	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	27	31	44	51	7	8	3	3
The teaching is good at this school	31	36	41	48	11	13	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	30	35	41	48	10	12	3	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	33	38	46	53	6	7	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)	23	27	51	59	2	2	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	28	33	50	58	4	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	23	27	40	47	14	16	5	6
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	27	31	32	37	15	17	7	8
The school is led and managed effectively	22	26	34	40	14	16	11	13
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	32	38	44	52	6	7	2	2

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.



7 February 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Maple Tree Lower School, Sandy, SG19 2WA

Thank you for the lovely welcome you gave us when we inspected your school recently. We were very interested in your views and opinions. These, along with everything else we saw, helped us to get a clear picture of your school. We think your school provides you with a satisfactory education which prepares you for your next school and the future. Your school ensures that you stay safe and the adults all care about your health and welfare. We were very pleased to find that you knew very well what keeps you fit and healthy. This is highly commendable, well done! We thought you were well behaved and courteous.

Your school does some things well but it needs to make some improvements too. We decided that it is satisfactory overall. The youngest children in your school get a good start to their education and make good progress. Your headteacher and teachers do a satisfactory job. Your attainment is above average. So that your school can make steps to becoming a good school, we have asked that they work on these things:

We would like the school to make sure that you make more progress, particularly in writing. Teachers are going to give you more time to work on your own. They will explain to the teaching assistants what they would like them to do to help you. Teachers will give all of you work that makes you think hard and that you don't find too easy. You can help by always trying your hardest to write carefully and thoughtfully.

We have asked your headteacher to ensure that she checks that teachers are helping you to make as much progress as you can and that she always writes what she sees in your lessons.

We have asked the governors to take part in some training so that they can support the work of the headteacher. Also we have asked them to make sure that they know how to develop what the school does to help you understand your place in the community.

We wish you all the best in the future.

Yours sincerely

Glynis Bradley-Peat

Lead Inspector

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