

Cotton End Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109446
Local Authority	Bedford
Inspection number	356544
Inspection dates	16–17 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Michael Sheridan HMI

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	47
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Amanda Tyrrell
Headteacher	Monica Eeuwens (Acting Headteacher)
Date of previous school inspection	5 December 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. Learning was observed in 10 lessons taught by three teachers. Meetings were held with pupils, leaders, members of the governing body and the local authority. The inspector observed the school's work, and looked at school improvement planning, notes from local authority visits, teachers' planning, work in pupils' books, tracking data and policy documents. The views of staff, pupils and 15 parents and carers were shared with the inspector through questionnaires.

The inspector reviewed many aspects of the school's work. He looked in detail at a number of key areas:

- How well are the curriculum and teaching adapted to take account of mixed- age classes?
- What is the impact of leaders in planning, delivering and evaluating school improvement?
- How well does the environment in the Early Years Foundation Stage support children's learning?

Information about the school

This school is significantly smaller than average for its type. Pupils are taught in three classes. The Early Years Foundation Stage admits children part-time in the term following their third birthday with children starting full-time in the term following their fourth birthday. The proportion of pupils known to be entitled to a free school meal is in line with the national average. The proportion from minority ethnic groups is above average. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below average. The school has national Healthy Schools status, Activemark and the intermediate International School 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

2

Main findings

This is a satisfactory school which is well respected by parents and carers. Pupils are happy in school. They enjoy the range of activities that are planned to enrich and promote their learning. During the inspection, the whole school walked to a local forest where they planted trees, considering with awe the fact that these trees would not be fully grown in their lifetime. This activity and others like it are typical of what gives this school its distinctive feel.

Because of the small numbers in each cohort and the wide range of ability represented within the school, the skills that children have as they enter into Early Years Foundation Stage vary considerably. Consequently, the standards of attainment pupils leave with at the end of Year 4 also vary. Pupils make satisfactory progress in their time at school so that those who enter with the expected skills for their age leave with broadly average standards.

Teaching is satisfactory overall. In good lessons, pupils' progress accelerates because they enjoy interesting tasks and engage with what they are being taught. Most learning seen was satisfactory and work in books shows that this is typical. In most lessons, pupils, generally, work conscientiously, although the work for some is not matched closely enough to their learning needs or ability. When this is the case, or when teachers talk for too long, behaviour deteriorates as a small number of pupils become distracted. Marking encourages pupils to think about how well they have done in their work, but, too often, teachers focus too much on completion of task rather than the specific small steps that pupils could take to improve their work. In some lessons, more could be done to adapt the curriculum to ensure all pupils engage in learning at a level appropriate to their maturity and ability. This is particularly the case in the Early Years Foundation Stage and, to a lesser extent, in Key Stage 1.

Pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage enjoy learning through a range of activities. Generally, they make satisfactory progress towards the early learning goals, but some make limited progress in their social and emotional development because of the missed opportunities to promote positive behaviour. The Early Years Foundation Stage room and outdoor area is adequately equipped, but not well organised, so, consequently, children cannot make the best use of the activities, equipment and learning opportunities available.

The acting headteacher has evaluated the school's effectiveness quickly with sharp accuracy. She has set out a very clear and ambitious agenda for school improvement and is galvanising the support of staff in moving forward on the most significant areas for development. Useful links with other local schools and the local authority have been brokered by the headteacher and School Improvement Partner. These are beginning to support school improvement and provide expertise and experience that the school alone could not provide. Writing is improving as a result of effective leadership from the English

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subject leader. Important work has been done in monitoring the quality of learning in classrooms accurately and credible actions are beginning to improve the quality of provision across the school. The decisive action of leaders has ensured the school is in a strong position to move forward and capacity to improve is good.

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 learning in lessons by:
 - making sure work is set at the right level of challenge for all pupils
 - ensuring all teaching and marking focuses on learning rather than tasks
 - ensuring the curriculum and environment are sufficiently well adapted to meet the needs of all pupils
 - develop clear expectations for behaviour in class and ensure that all staff follow procedures to promote positive behaviour.
- Improve the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - ensuring space indoors and outside is well organised so children can make the best use of the different areas for learning
 - ensuring that teacher's planning and their interaction with children consistently promotes positive social development.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Pupils enjoy their time at school. They are curious about the world about them and demonstrate a hunger for learning when teaching is good. Pupils take part in cultural activities well. For example, Key Stage 2 pupils performed with gusto when working with a musician as part of the 'sing up' programme. Pupils learn about different cultures and talk about similarities and differences with maturity. Many pupils make morally sound judgements and can recognise the importance of making balanced decisions. Pupils say that they feel safe and enjoy the range of activities on offer. Pupils and parents and carers say that adults take concerns seriously, care for pupils and act on what they are told. In lessons, pupils enjoy many of the activities and experiences on offer, but some of the more mundane tasks lead to some pupils losing interest and concentration. When opportunities arise for older pupils to engage in interesting discussions, most do so with increasing maturity. Pupils who fall behind or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve in line with their peers because of the well-planned support and intervention they receive. Boys and girls make similar progress. Pupils who speak English as an additional language make rapid progress in their early language development so they are able to make progress in line with their peers. Most children behave well around school and in class. However, one or two pupils demonstrate challenging behaviour that sometimes gets in the way of learning and this is not always dealt with effectively enough. Consequently, the behaviour of a small minority of other children becomes challenging, especially when they are less engaged in their learning. Pupils talk with confidence about the importance of healthy living. They learn about staying healthy through the curriculum

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and most talk sensibly about the decisions they can make to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Pupils in Key Stage 1 were able to talk about the importance of eating healthy food while enjoying their daily fruit in class.

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	3
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	3
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	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?

While the quality of provision is generally satisfactory, there are clear strengths, particularly in the curriculum and in the way the school provides care, guidance and support. Pupils make progress at a steady pace because of the generally satisfactory teaching they receive. Those who fall behind are able to catch up through one-to-one tuition and small-group work. Teaching is no better than satisfactory because there are too many missed opportunities to engage pupils in learning at their own level. In some classes, there is an over-reliance on worksheets and use of prepared presentations on the computer, which hamper the teacher's opportunity to adapt and develop the lesson in line with pupils' responses and emerging learning needs.

The curriculum is broad and covers the National Curriculum. Enrichment activities are much appreciated by pupils and these contribute well to their enjoyment of learning. Cross-curricular links are recognised, but are not always practised effectively across all subjects to develop literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills. In some classes, the curriculum is adapted only adequately to meet the learning needs of all children and this has a detrimental impact on behaviour and learning.

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The school's systems for supporting potentially vulnerable pupils are embedded and effective. The school works well with a range of agencies to make sure that individual children and their families are well supported. Pupils are well cared for and satisfactory safeguarding arrangements are in place. Some of the systems for monitoring and reporting incidents of behaviour, for example, are too informal to be absolutely robust and limit leaders' capacity to monitor patterns and plan improvements.

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	3

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders, including the governing body, communicate high expectations and are ambitious for the school. They can point to significant examples of where they have strengthened aspects of provision to ensure the school continues to improve at pace. School improvement plans identify areas for improvement accurately and these are based on good quality and highly accurate monitoring and evaluation. Teachers express a commitment to continue to improve their practice and point to examples of where they have made changes to what they do as a result of feedback and guidance.

The governing body is developing at a rapid pace. The Chair of the Governing Body and other experienced members are proving excellent role models for the significant number of new and inexperienced members. The governing body is increasingly well informed and some members are effective at holding the school to account. Systems for safeguarding pupils are in place and secure. Staff and the governing body have received appropriate training. The member with responsibility for safeguarding has a clear understanding of the requirements and is proactive in ensuring that these are met.

The school's engagement with parents and carers is good. Parents and carers are highly positive about the work of the school. Regular newsletters keep parents and carers informed. Relationships between school and parents and carers are open and honest so families and school work well together to support each child.

The school has a strong commitment to equality of opportunity and this can be seen in the positive relationships that exist among pupils. The school collects data that show how different groups and individuals are performing academically. This information is used successfully to inform planning for intervention so pupils who fall behind have the opportunity to catch up and make satisfactory progress in line with their peers.

The school is a cohesive community with pupils from different backgrounds getting on noticeably well with each other. Leaders have analysed accurately their provision to promote community cohesion. Plans to develop links beyond the existing international

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ones are well placed to give pupils a wider understanding and appreciation of the cultural diversity of the United Kingdom.

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	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	3
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enjoy the activities in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Most children play well together and learn to take turns, share and work together with some encouragement from adults. A small minority of children find these skills difficult and adults are not very successful in developing these children's social skills so they learn appropriate ways to express their feelings. The outdoor area is adequately stimulating. Children enjoy playing games and using bikes and scooters outside. Typically, children leave Early Years Foundation Stage with skills in line with those expected for their age, although these vary from year to year.

Leaders have a secure understanding of the priorities for improvement in this stage. They have secured the support of Early Years Foundation Stage consultants from the local authority to provide models of good practice. While some improvements are evident, the full impact of this advice is yet to be realised.

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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

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Negative comments related to the way that the school communicates with them and helps them support their children. This was the view of a very small minority and not reflected in the experiences of most. Inspectors found that the school communicates well with parents and carers both on an individual basis and through formal newsletters. Inspectors found also that, while it is not an immediate area for development, the school could do more to involve parents and carers in supporting their children's learning through workshops and parents' and carers' courses.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Cotton End 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 inspector received 15 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 47 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	9	60	6	40	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	10	67	5	33	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	8	53	5	33	2	13	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	9	60	5	33	1	7	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	9	65	5	35	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	9	65	5	35	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	9	60	6	40	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)	6	50	6	50	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	8	57	6	43	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	7	50	6	43	1	7	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	6	40	9	60	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	9	60	6	40	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	9	60	6	40	0	0	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.



18 February 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Cotton End Lower School, Bedford, MK45 3AA

You may remember that I came to inspect your school recently. This letter is to let you know what I found out and what you can do to help your teachers make your school better than it is already.

I found that your school is satisfactory. You enjoy being at school, but in some lessons some of you get a little silly or fidget. I found that this was when you did not find your learning interesting enough. I have asked your teachers to make sure all lessons are interesting so they maintain your attention. They will need your help. It is important that you all think about your behaviour so that it is the best it can be all the time. I have also asked your teachers to make sure you always know what you are learning about and what you can do to improve your work. You can help your teachers by taking a little time each day to read the comments they make about your work and then trying to make it better by taking their advice. Finally, I have asked your teachers to make sure the Robins' classroom is better organised so the youngest children in your school can get the very best out of the games and activities in their room.

I would like to finish by thanking those of you who spoke with me. It was a great pleasure to meet you and I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Michael Sheridan

Her Majesty's Inspector

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