

Gothic Mede Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109427
Local Authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	363748
Inspection dates	16–17 June 2011
Reporting inspector	David Wynford-Jones

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

Type of school	First
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	5–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	236
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Bernard Griffiths
Headteacher	Mary Phillips
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2007
School address	High Street Arlesey SG15 6SL
Telephone number	01462 732002
Fax number	01462 733249
Email address	gothicmedeoffice@cbc.beds.sch.uk

Age group	5–9
Inspection dates	16–17 June 2011
Inspection number	363748

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 4234

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2011

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Inspectors visited two assemblies and 14 lessons, observing nine teachers. They held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and groups of pupils. They scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the data the school has collected on pupils' attainment and progress, procedures for keeping pupils safe and the school development plan. Inspectors analysed 92 questionnaires completed by parents and carers, together with those 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.

- How well do teachers use assessment information to challenge pupils and to ensure that they know what to do to improve their work?
- To what degree are strategies to accelerate pupils' learning in mathematics successful and embedded throughout the school?
- How much do pupils know and understand about the customs, values and beliefs of those from different ethnic backgrounds?

Information about the school

Gothic Mede Lower is broadly similar in size to most schools of its type. Fewer pupils than average join or leave the school during the year. The large majority of the pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is below the national average for primary schools. Very few speak English as an additional language, and none is at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is similar to the national average. Very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs. A very small minority of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals.

Among other awards, the school holds National Healthy School Status and the Arts Mark.

The school has been led by an interim headteacher for the last two years. A permanent headteacher has been appointed for September 2011.

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

Gothic Mede Lower School provides its pupils with a good education. All pupils are made welcome. The pastoral care is good for all pupils, but particularly those who find learning difficult. Parents and carers speak highly of the school and are pleased with the improvements made under the leadership of the interim headteacher, including the effective initiatives to raise attainment in mathematics. One wrote, 'The temporary headteacher has been an asset to the school and encouraged great improvement.' Others wrote similar comments.

Pupils' achievement is good. Children settle quickly and make satisfactory progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. It is not better than satisfactory because planning for most activities does not clearly identify outcomes for different ability groups, and children have insufficient opportunities to practise their early writing skills. Even so, by the end of Year 4, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is above expectations for their age. Pupils' progress accelerates because teaching is good and the curriculum is well matched to their needs. Strengths in teaching include positive relationships with pupils and well-planned lessons that are executed at a quick pace. Questioning strategies are used effectively and pupils are given opportunities to think for themselves. Good use is made of assessment information to match work to pupils' needs, although progress sometimes slows because marking does not consistently provide sufficient guidance to help pupils reach their literacy and numeracy targets.

Under the leadership of the interim headteacher, staff work together well. They have developed the curriculum and this has contributed to pupils' greater enjoyment of learning and their improved attendance. The strategy of drawing subjects together in a thematic approach is now well embedded. Good links between elements ensure pupils' literacy and numeracy skills and their ability to use information and communication technology are consolidated in topic work. This approach has contributed to accelerating pupils' progress and is successfully reversing a slight decline in standards. The curriculum effectively supports pupils' personal development. Pupils have a good understanding of healthy living and of how to keep themselves safe. This has contributed to the school gaining National Healthy School Status. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. They behave well and make a good contribution to the school community, but their contribution to the wider community and their understanding of different cultures and ways of life are less well developed.

The senior leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for development which are clearly laid out in the school development plan. Newly appointed middle managers are developing their roles well and know what has to be done to bring about further improvements. The governing body is determined to ensure the school continues to move forward and has carefully explored all options before the appointment

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

of a substantive headteacher. Secure systems and structures, a track record of improving standards and a clear vision for future development mean that the school's capacity for improvement is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - giving children more opportunities to practise their early writing skills
 - ensuring that activities are well planned to match the abilities of all groups.
- Provide pupils with consistently clear guidance on how to improve their work.
- Improve pupils' understanding of other cultures and lifestyles through the development of wider community links.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Children enter the Reception class with skills and knowledge broadly in line with those expected for the age. In Years 1 to 4, pupils respond well to challenge and work hard in lessons. Their speaking and listening, reading, writing and mathematical skills develop well. For example, in a Year 4 mathematics lesson, pupils held discussions with a partner to establish if certain statements were sometimes, always or never true. They established that a triangle can have one angle of 90 degrees but never have two. They were able to explain their reasoning diagrammatically. They were further challenged to establish if a rectangle with an area of 12cm² always, sometimes or never has a perimeter of 16cm; pupils carefully worked out the possible lengths of the sides, calculated the area and established that the statement is sometimes true. They used mathematical terminology correctly as they investigated the problem.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable, make similar progress to their peers. They respond well to additional support provided in lessons and are engaged in their learning.

Pupils say they feel safe, and enjoy school and the opportunities to work together. One said, 'We like to talk to each other and think things out for ourselves, especially in the maths lessons, it makes it more fun.' Pupils demonstrate a good awareness of safety issues, including e-safety. They contribute appropriately to the school as members of the school council and others undertake responsibilities and voluntary tasks around the school. Pupils take part in local events but are not fully involved in activities beyond the school. They typically display a good understanding of right and wrong. Their ability to reflect on others' feelings is developing well, but their knowledge of different cultures, values and beliefs is relatively limited. Pupils' key skills in English and mathematics and the strengths in their personal development ensure that they have a good basis for the next stage in their education and later life.

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

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	3
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	3

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?

In nearly all lessons, teachers plan a good range of activities that capture the interest of the pupils. They share the purpose of the lesson so that pupils are clear about the intended outcomes. Measures by which the outcomes can be evaluated are identified and discussed with the pupils, although pupils do not consistently contribute to the formulation of the criteria. In most lessons, questioning strategies are used effectively to challenge pupils' thinking and to consolidate learning. There is a good balance between teachers and pupils' contributions. Lessons proceed at a quick pace and the sharing of ideas with a 'talk partner' is a regular feature. This helps pupils to develop their social skills and their ability to communicate with others. Teaching assistants are well deployed and provide good support to individuals and groups. Teachers use assessments effectively to plan their lessons and pupils' work. There are some examples of good developmental marking, especially in English books. However, not all marking provides pupils with sufficient guidance to improve their work.

The curriculum supports well pupils' learning in mathematics and English. It is modified effectively to meet the needs of pupils who find learning difficult and those learning English as an additional language, and the well-thought-out theme or topic approach makes learning accessible and interesting for all. Good use is made of information and communication technology to support learning. Examples of good quality art work have contributed to the school gaining the Arts Mark award. The on-site swimming pool

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

provides pupils with a good opportunity to learn to swim and understand about water safety. Pupils respond positively to French being taught throughout the school. The curriculum is enhanced by links with external bodies and a good range of extra-curricular activities, visits and visitors to the school.

Systems and structures to offer support and guidance to pupils are embedded well in the work of the school. Pupils know they can turn to staff if they have any concerns and any issues will be followed up. Pupils are encouraged to become independent, respect each other and take responsibility. Absences are carefully monitored and analysed, and any identified patterns are followed up well to ensure good attendance.

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 interim headteacher and senior leaders work together well to drive school improvement. They evaluate the school's performance accurately and are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Senior leaders have acted effectively to bring about improvements in provision and ensure that pupils' progress is accelerating and attainment rising.

The governing body is working closely with the local schools' consortium to ensure consistency and continuity of provision. Members of the governing body monitor the work of the school effectively and regularly seek information on how well pupils are progressing. Issues relating to equality of opportunity are monitored well to ensure that any discrepancies in performance between groups of pupils or any signs of discrimination are quickly investigated and tackled. The governing body ensures that the school's safeguarding checks, staff recruitment and child protection procedures meet requirements and are established in school routines, although it has not ensured that an appropriate number of staff holds the required current paediatric first aid certificates. The governing body promotes community cohesion satisfactorily. It has taken initial steps to promote pupils' understanding of different cultures, but it has yet to develop a good understanding of cultures not represented within their immediate community, and to pursue possible links with schools in contrasting areas.

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

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

Early Years Foundation Stage

Induction arrangements and relationships with parents and carers are good. Children settle quickly. They feel safe and enjoy learning within a caring environment. They follow instructions, develop their social skills and behave well. Children are developing a good understanding of healthy living. They know the importance of washing their hands before eating and that some foods are better than others to keep you healthy. One child said, 'It's better to eat a banana than chocolate because it's fruit and it's healthy.'

Resources are of suitable quality and appropriate for the age of the children. Planning covers all the areas of learning but does not ensure that all activities provide sufficient direction and challenge for all children. There is a reasonable balance between activities led by the adults and those that children choose for themselves. However, there are insufficient opportunities for the children to consolidate and extend their early writing skills.

The Early Years Foundation Stage team has a satisfactory understanding of the strengths and areas for development. As a relatively new team, they have worked together effectively to ensure consistency of approach and greater accuracy in the assessments of children's learning. Assessments are regularly undertaken and meticulously recorded in the children's 'Learning Journey' folders. They are increasingly being used to identify individual children's needs and to target support. The classroom is well organised and children's work is celebrated and displayed effectively. The outdoor area is developing well but its potential to promote all aspects of learning has not been maximised.

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

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

Most parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire were entirely supportive of the school. Nearly all stated that the school is led and managed well, their children are kept safe, and the school helps their children to have a healthy lifestyle. A few parents and carers commented that the school does not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour. Inspectors judged that pupils' behaviour overall is good and any incidents of misbehaviour are dealt with appropriately by staff.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Gothic Mede 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 92 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 236 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	56	61	29	32	5	5	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	59	64	30	33	2	2	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	52	57	35	38	4	4	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	56	61	30	33	5	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	60	65	28	30	4	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	50	54	36	39	5	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	53	58	36	39	1	1	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)	46	50	39	42	3	3	2	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	46	50	38	41	3	3	3	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	36	39	42	46	9	10	3	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	44	48	43	47	3	3	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	59	64	31	34	2	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	62	67	24	26	3	3	3	3

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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 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 2010/11 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.



20 June 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Gothic Mede Lower School, Arlesey, SG15 6SL

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school, and for completing the questionnaires. We enjoyed our visit and talking to you. You told us that you enjoy school and want to learn, and that the staff look after you well. We were pleased to find that you have a good understanding of staying safe and most of you are keen to adopt a healthy lifestyle. We saw that you behave well and show respect for each other. You make a good contribution to the school community but your knowledge of people from other cultural backgrounds is not as well developed as we would expect for pupils of your age.

Overall, your school provides you with a good education. Standards in the school are rising. You get off to a satisfactory start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. By the end of Year 4, your attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is above national expectations. Overall your progress is good. Well done.

We have asked the school to do these things to help you reach higher standards and make even better progress:

- give children in the Early Years Foundation Stage more opportunities to practise their writing skills, and plan activities that really challenge them
- give you more written feedback to help you reach your literacy and numeracy targets more quickly
- improve your understanding of other cultures and lifestyles by developing wider community links.

Please remember, to make your school better you must play your part by always trying your best.

Yours sincerely

David Wynford-Jones

Lead inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.