

Mill Vale School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109663
Local Authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	363756
Inspection dates	13–14 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Roger Whittaker

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	399
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nigel Hodgson
Headteacher	Gill Ellyard
Date of previous school inspection	6 May 2010
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 22 lessons and saw 18 teachers. Inspectors held meetings with staff, members of the governing body, the local authority representative and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school improvement plan, reports to the governing body and monitoring data in relation to pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. They analysed 59 questionnaires from parents and carers and 50 from pupils.

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

- How successfully has the school improved the learning and progress made in lessons?
- How well has the school addressed the variation in progress made by different groups of pupils?
- What impact has the school's monitoring and evaluation of its work had on teaching and learning?

Information about the school

Mill Vale Middle School is smaller than most secondary schools. The number of pupils has declined over the last few years. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic groups has increased and is now broadly average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of educational needs, is below average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The current headteacher was acting headteacher for ten months and then appointed as substantive headteacher in September 2010. The school was given a notice to improve at the last inspection in May 2010 and received a monitoring visit in October 2010. The school has experienced a significant number of changes in staff over the past year.

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

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Mill Vale Middle School is a satisfactory school. Significant improvements have taken place over the past year. During this time, the headteacher conducted a thorough evaluation of the quality of provision and identified that around a quarter of the teaching was inadequate. At the same time the number on roll was falling. Faced with these difficult and challenging circumstances, the headteacher created a new senior leadership team and clarified the roles and responsibilities of leaders and managers. Significant changes were made in staffing, at all levels, and the issue of inadequate teaching was successfully addressed.

Monitoring and evaluation of provision by senior leaders are rigorous, and so the school has a good grasp of its strengths and areas for development. Senior leaders have made good use of this information to identify a prioritised action plan to tackle the issues identified. They have made progress in implementing this and the impact is evident in the improving teaching, the improved learning and progress of pupils and in their positive attitudes to learning and behaviour. As a result, pupils are on track to finish Year 8 with attainment that is broadly in line with national averages. However, senior staff do not always review soon enough the impact of new initiatives they are implementing. As a result, they are not able to intervene to refine or adjust the actions they are taking in order to achieve their objectives more securely and rapidly. When monitoring the quality of teaching, some judgements are too focused on celebrating improvement and do not identify clearly enough what teachers need to do to improve. Nonetheless, given the tangible improvements that have been made, the school is demonstrating a satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

Although some good teaching was seen, overall teaching and the use of assessment are satisfactory, resulting in satisfactory achievement. Teachers do not always use assessment information well enough to plan appropriate challenge for pupils' individual ability levels. In some lessons, teachers over-direct learning and so restrict the development of pupils' independent learning skills. The school's system for recording and analysing data has improved so that there is a much better understanding of how well pupils are progressing. This has enabled the school to identify pupils who need additional support. Targeted work, including the withdrawal of some pupils for one-to-one and small group sessions, is helping pupils to catch up in their learning. As a result, the progress made by different groups of pupils is broadly satisfactory. Pupils say they feel safe at school and most parents and carers agree. Pupils enjoy school and this is reflected in their high levels of attendance.

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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?

- Ensure that teaching and learning is good or better in all lessons by the end of the next academic year by:
 - engaging pupils in creative and active learning, which enables them to develop and use independent learning skills
 - teachers using assessment information to plan tasks of appropriate challenge so that they meet the different needs of all pupils
 - making sure that pupils understand what they need to do to improve.
- Ensure consistency in the quality of leadership and management at all levels by:
 - always reviewing and refining how well new initiatives are having an impact on provision and outcomes in order to achieve objectives for improvement more quickly
 - increasing the rigour with which staff monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching by focusing on what teachers need to do to improve as well as celebrating their good work.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Attainment on entry is broadly in average. The school's accurate data shows that pupils are now making satisfactory progress so that attainment is on track to be in line with national averages in mathematics and English. Reading and writing skills are broadly in line with national averages but pupils' writing skills have not improved as much as those in reading. The school's analysis identified that lower attaining pupils and some pupils in Year 5 had been most affected by the school's past circumstances. However, the school quickly provided additional support which has enabled these pupils to achieve as well as other groups of pupils. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are making satisfactory progress in all year groups. This is as a result of the school's improved data tracking, which enables effective intervention through one-to-one support and small group withdrawal from lessons. Learning and progress in lessons are satisfactory and, at times, good. In a science lesson in Year 7, pupils were immediately engaged in interesting group activities. These helped them to learn by taking an active part in the lesson and to be more independent of the teacher. As a result, they largely worked out how to build circuits by themselves and by helping one another. The teacher's intervention with individual pupils ensured that they all understood how to produce circuits. Although pupils' attendance is excellent and they have opportunities to experience how businesses work and to act as year mentors, the preparation for their future economic well-being is limited to satisfactory by the level of their literacy and numeracy skills.

Pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour have improved but, as parents and carers point out, there are still some lessons where pupils move off task and demonstrate low-level behaviour issues. This is often the case where teaching does not engage pupils actively in their learning or provide creative and interesting activities to secure their interest. Pupils have a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle but do

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not always take responsibility for undertaking regular physical activity or choosing healthy food. Some pupils make effective use of the opportunities to take responsibility within the school and, to a lesser extent, in the local community. The school council has an increasingly influential voice within the school. Pupils cooperate well when working in pairs and small groups. They develop some understanding of other cultures through relevant topics studies within the curriculum but they have few opportunities for first-hand experiences of those from different cultural backgrounds.

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	3
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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	1
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?

Teaching is satisfactory. However, there has been improvement over the past year so that an increasing proportion is now good. In those lessons where learning is satisfactory, teachers over-direct learning and give pupils insufficient opportunities to decide how to proceed with tasks when working independently. Teachers do not often enough plan tasks which engage pupils in active learning through paired and small group work. Assessment is not used well to support learning in satisfactory lessons. However, in lessons where progress is good, pupils' work is regularly marked and detailed comments are written for them by the teacher to explain how they might improve. Pupils know their target levels and are clear about what they need to do to improve. Teachers plan activities which stimulate and engage pupils in these lessons. They are enthusiastic about their subject and pass this on to the pupils. For example, in a Year 6 literacy lesson, the teacher

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stimulated pupils with her enthusiasm when working with small groups to develop their independent learning skills.

The school provides a curriculum of adequate breadth and balance. However, senior staff are aware that, while it does not form a barrier to learning, it does not provide continuity across the two key stages or have cross curricular links which further develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. The school's improvement plan includes strategies to address both these areas. The school has introduced enrichment activities, including a range of outside speakers to bring learning to life. A drama group, for example, explores some aspects of life skills. Pupils are enthusiastic in their praise for how the school cares for them and many commented, 'There are always teachers around to help you if you need it.' Pupils are known as individuals, and support strategies are proving effective in ensuring that pupils are not left behind in their learning. Evidence was seen of effective care and support for pupils whose circumstances had led to diverse and challenging needs. Transition procedures for pupils who join the school in Year 5 ensure that they quickly settle at the school.

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?

Parents and carers and pupils are appreciative of the impact the headteacher has had in the school. She has succeeded in building a team of staff who are committed to improving the learning of the pupils. The headteacher has given staff a clear sense of direction and instilled an ambition to improve their practice. A new system for tracking pupils' progress has been introduced. This enables the school to check that different groups of pupils are making sufficient progress and to take remedial action where necessary. Systems for identifying and tackling any inequalities are satisfactory and any gaps in the achievement of different groups are appropriately addressed. The governing body has a satisfactory understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement and provides good support. However, it does not always challenge the school rigorously enough to account for their actions and the outcomes for pupils.

There have been improvements to the school's facilities and its environment. New computer suites have been developed and decoration to rooms has improved their appearance. Partnerships with external agencies, professionals and other schools are being used adequately to enhance the curriculum and support individuals and their families. They are having a satisfactory impact on pupil outcomes. Pupils' engagement with cultures other than their own is at an early stage but pupils from different ethnic backgrounds within the school cooperate well together. Safeguarding procedures have

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improved since the last inspection and are now good. Staff are well trained in child protection matters and risks are managed thoroughly. The school has taken good account of the views of parents and pupils, and has acted upon them carefully to improve its systems.

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	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

Views of parents and carers

A large majority of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaires were positive about the school. However, a minority had concerns about a few aspects of the school, particularly about how the school deals with unacceptable behaviour and about how well the school helps them to support their children's learning. The inspection team found that the school had recognised the issue of unacceptable behaviour and has implemented behaviour management strategies that have significantly improved behaviour, both in lessons and around the school. Senior leaders have also worked hard at improving the systems by which parents and carers can know more about the progress being made by their children. The institution of progress evenings and more opportunities for parents and carers to visit individual staff are helping to better inform them about how they can help their children's learning.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Mill Vale 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 59 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 399 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	9	16	40	69	3	5	3	5
The school keeps my child safe	11	19	38	67	6	10	1	2
My school informs me about my child's progress	7	12	36	62	12	21	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	5	9	36	62	7	12	2	3
The teaching is good at this school	3	5	39	67	6	10	1	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	3	5	35	60	8	14	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	7	12	35	60	8	14	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	10	34	59	6	10	1	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	7	12	33	66	8	14	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	6	10	30	52	11	19	7	12
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	6	10	29	50	8	14	2	3
The school is led and managed effectively	10	17	36	62	2	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	11	19	31	53	10	17	1	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	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.



15 June 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Mill Vale School, Dunstable, LU5 4QP

Thank you for your friendly welcome when we visited your school recently. We found that your school has improved over the last year and is satisfactory.

The school looks after you and you told us that behaviour has improved. We saw you behaving well in lessons and around the school. We are pleased to see that your attendance is high and that is because you enjoy coming to school and feel safe. The standards you are achieving by Year 8 are in line with the national average. This is because teaching has improved and is consistently at least satisfactory and sometimes good. For those of you who find some work difficult, the school has introduced ways for you to get extra support so that you learn as well as the other pupils. You are now better prepared to move onto the next stage of your education. Your headteacher and staff are enthusiastic and committed to continue to improve the work of the school.

We have asked the school to make the following improvements.

Ensure that all leaders and managers check how well you learn in lessons and regularly look over the school's improvement plan and how well it is being acted upon so that it helps you to improve your learning.

Make sure that teachers involve you actively in lessons, set tasks which meet your individual needs and give you written and verbal feedback so you know what you need to do to improve.

You can help your school by contributing even more to learning in lessons.

I wish you well for your future.

Yours sincerely

Roger Whittaker

Lead inspector

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