

Mary Exton Junior Mixed and Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117329
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	363865
Inspection dates	30 June 2011–1 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Marion Wallace

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	225
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Karen Kester
Headteacher	Karen Ireland
Date of previous school inspection	9 June 2008
School address	St Michael's Road Hitchin SG4 0QA
Telephone number	01462 456997
Fax number	01462 451756
Email address	admin@maryexton.herts.sch.uk

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	30 June 2011–1 July 2011
Inspection number	363865

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. They observed seven teachers in 12 lessons, and held meetings with parents and carers, groups of pupils, members of the governing body, and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at subject and whole-school improvement plans, minutes of governing body meetings, assessment information and curriculum planning. In addition, they carried out a scrutiny of pupils' work and analysed 160 questionnaires received from parents and carers.

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

- The progress made by pupils of average ability in writing at Key Stage 1.
- How well boys progress in reading, writing and mathematics at Key Stage 1.
- The provision made for individual pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the progress they make.

Information about the school

Mary Exton is an average-sized primary school. Most pupils are White British and a small minority are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The percentage of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below average and no pupils are in the early stages of learning English. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average, but no pupil has a statement of special educational needs. The main needs relate to learning and behavioural difficulties. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average. There is Early Years Foundation Stage provision in the Reception class.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Mary Exton is an outstanding school. Pupils of all abilities achieve extremely well in their academic and personal development. Pupils and their parents and carers appreciate the high-quality care and exciting learning opportunities. One parental comment summed up the views of the vast majority: 'The school is excellent due to the support and dedication of the staff, the open caring family ethos ensures children thrive academically and in their personal development.' Pupils were equally positive. One pupil summed up the views of many when saying, 'The school is brilliant, we like lessons because learning is fun, we love it here.'

These are the key strengths of the school.

Pupils make excellent gains in their personal development because relationships are extremely strong and the school's ethos is vibrant, warm and welcoming.

Outstanding teaching enables pupils to make excellent progress as they move through the school.

Expectations are extremely high and consequently children in the Early Years Foundation Stage get off to a flying start in all areas of their learning.

Attainment in English, mathematics and science is high. Pupils also achieve very well in music, physical education, and information and communication technology (ICT).

The vast majority of pupils enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in high attendance levels.

Care, guidance and support are extremely strong, so pupils behave superbly and are sensible and enthusiastic learners. Staff are passionate about creating a stimulating environment for all pupils to support learning, and they deal very effectively with any needs the pupils may have.

Pupils are enthusiastic about all aspects of the curriculum and are constantly challenged to achieve higher targets. They develop exceedingly positive attitudes to their learning because they are encouraged to evaluate their own progress and identify what they need to do to make their work even better.

The headteacher and senior management team are excellent role models who, together with an active team of governors, lead the school very effectively and have a very clear vision for its future improvement.

Excellent links with parents and carers, the local community and external agencies contribute very effectively to pupils' learning and their well-being. Parents and carers support pupils' reading daily and regularly attend class assemblies.

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

There is also a continual drive for improvement. The very effective systems for evaluating the strengths and further areas for development of the school are playing their part in sustaining high standards over time. The school's excellent organisation and strong, shared vision underpin its outstanding capacity to continue moving forward.

The school's leaders promote community cohesion well. Cultural diversity is valued and shared, so pupils develop an excellent understanding of the school and wider local communities for their age. However, they develop and monitor the outcomes of school, local and global community initiatives more effectively than national initiatives.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop links at national level and monitor more rigorously the impact of community cohesion at national level by:
 - tracking the impact of the school's initiatives to improve provision of the national dimensions of community cohesion
 - using the information gained to enhance current provision and hence raise pupils' awareness of other parts of the United Kingdom
 - developing links with contrasting schools elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

From starting points that are broadly at the levels expected for their age, children make excellent progress in the Reception class in all areas of learning. They continue to make excellent progress in the older year groups and by the time they leave the school their attainment is consistently high in English, mathematics and science. Demanding work at just the right level ensures that all groups make excellent progress. Consistently high standards of reading, writing and work in subjects such as science, music, ICT and physical education were seen during the inspection.

Pupils really enjoy learning because lessons are very well planned and excellent relationships contribute to an exciting climate for learning. They are provided with challenging opportunities to solve problems and to think for themselves. Writing is excellent throughout the school and in subjects other than English. Excellent outcomes are contributing extremely well to pupils' economic well-being.

Year 6 pupils demonstrated excellent ability to solve problems and apply their skills and knowledge when preparing a business plan. Pupils' ability to evaluate their own work and suggest their own areas for development is extremely well developed throughout the school. Pupils take a pride in their work, handwriting is neat and well formed, spelling and presentation are excellent. Pupils enjoy their writing and Year 2 pupils used writing frames extremely well to plan a story about 'The worst witch'. Inspectors found no difference in the progress of girls and boys in Key Stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics. Average-ability pupils in Year 1 made excellent progress in learning to write more complex sentences, connecting ideas and using descriptive vocabulary such as 'cunning, determined, generous'. Progress in mathematics is equally impressive. Pupils in Year 4 showed real joy when learning about obtuse, reflex and acute angles because the teacher used cartoons to help the children learn the different types of angles. Pupils with special

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

educational needs and/or disabilities are extremely well supported. Inspectors found no significant difference in progress between pupils on 'school action' and 'school action plus'.

Pupils behave extremely well because they thoroughly enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in their high attendance. Some parents and carers felt that the school did not deal with unacceptable behaviour well. Pupils say they feel extremely safe because relationships are excellent and they can discuss any problems they have with adults. Pupils talk knowledgeably about maintaining a healthy lifestyle and the excellent range of clubs and activities are well attended. Pupils have extremely well-developed skills in working collaboratively.

Pupils have excellent awareness of other cultures, ethnicities and religions. They learn to make a very positive contribution to their school and local and global community by raising money for charities. Opportunities for links with schools in different locations to Mary Exton are less well developed. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupils think deeply about issues facing the world today and suggest what could be done to make the world a better place. Philosophy club is well attended and challenges pupils to consider, 'Is there a heaven and a hell?' 'Is it right to clone?' All pupils reflect regularly on why they are special. One pupil wrote, 'We respect everyone in the way they deserve. We are all different but we work as a team together.' This helps pupils to appreciate their own contribution to the school community and also that of others.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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

How effective is the provision?

Teachers use assessment information very well to plan work that precisely matches the needs of all groups of pupils. They use questions effectively and regularly to check pupils' knowledge and understanding, and pupils enjoy well-planned opportunities to discuss their ideas with others during 'talking partner' sessions. Teachers give good oral feedback to pupils on how to improve their work and marking is good. Teaching assistants support pupils with additional needs very well, so they make the same excellent progress as others.

A very strong personal and social education programme assists pupils' outstanding personal development. Pupils enjoy the curriculum and this contributes to their growing enthusiasm for learning. Skills developed in literacy, numeracy, science and ICT are used extremely well in other subjects. Year 6 pupils are challenged to use their mathematical skills extremely well to estimate the number of daisies on the school field. Physical education and music are taught by specialist teachers and are a strength. Curriculum enrichment is excellent and the wide range of visits, clubs and activities are popular and well attended.

The extremely caring school ethos results in very happy pupils who thoroughly enjoy school life. All adults are effective in helping children and their parents and carers to get the best from learning through excellent communication. The school works extremely well with external support agencies to support all pupils in need of additional help. Many parents and carers commented on the exemplary pastoral care provided for pupils and their families at difficult times. Induction and transition arrangements for children entering the school in the Early Years Foundation Stage and when moving on to other schools are excellent.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher's skilful management and outstanding leadership have permeated the school. Senior and middle managers communicate drive and ambition very effectively and they have a very thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Tracking of pupils' progress is extremely thorough. Senior leaders quickly identify any dips in performance and swiftly apply sensible strategies and interventions to overcome them. The headteacher and the senior management team lead the school with competence and compassion, valuing the work of others and encouraging them to take responsibility. The leadership and management of teaching are excellent, and this has ensured that teaching

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

is excellent. There is an excellent commitment from all staff to provide each pupil with the very best possible education. Equality of opportunity and the elimination of discrimination are pursued determinedly.

The governing body supports staff most effectively in their work to improve the school, and challenges skilfully to ensure initiatives are successful. It monitors and evaluates the work of the school extremely well. All safeguarding policies and checks on adults are exemplary, and the school has well-advanced plans to improve its good procedures so that it can be a leader of high-quality practice in safeguarding procedures. Most parents and carers feel that the school takes account of their suggestions and views but some said that the school does not listen to their suggestions and concerns. The school promotes equality expertly, as reflected in the profile of high achievement across different groups.

The senior leaders make the most of cultural diversity within the school and this, along with very good focused provision within the curriculum, ensures that pupils develop a strong awareness of local and global communities.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Parents and carers appreciate the excellent links with the school. Teaching is excellent so all children make outstanding progress in all areas of learning. Staff are skilled in providing a wide range of enjoyable and challenging activities both indoors and outdoors. They expect children to be independent, share, consider others and develop their communication skills. Phonics is taught extremely well and most children gain confidence in their ability to sound words clearly and read challenging text. Children make excellent gains in developing their writing skills using neat, well-formed letters, punctuation and description. One child wrote, 'I love writing.' They are starting to use description well. For example, one child wrote, 'I went into the gloopy mud. I hovered all by myself and I

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

hovered in the living room.' They make excellent progress in learning to recognise and use numbers. In a music lesson children managed to double the ladybird spots up to 20, and the more-able children knew that 10 is half of twenty. They learn simple songs and learn to take away numbers from ten. Their ability to recognise rhyming words is impressive. During a reading session the teacher challenged the children to recognise the word that rhymed with Spain, and the average-ability children recognised 'aeroplane'. Children learn about the wider world and different languages because the teacher seizes every opportunity to share language knowledge with everyone. In one session children who spoke different languages led the class in counting up to 10 in Welsh, Polish, French, Italian, Spanish, German and Italian.

Care and welfare are exemplary. Induction arrangements are extremely well considered. Tracking information is used well in the Early Years Foundation Stage to plan challenges for all children. The provision is led and managed extremely well.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers who returned questionnaires was well above average for a primary school. Most are very happy with the school and feel it is welcoming and friendly. The overwhelming majority say that their children enjoy attending and most say that they make good progress. Parents and carers regard the school as extremely caring and supportive and say the staff are approachable. They identified a number of strengths in the school including the activities, the relationships with staff, the excellent start children receive in Reception, the school ethos and the pupils' enjoyment. Most parents and carers felt that the school meets individual needs extremely well and they are equally well informed about their child's progress. Some parents and carers however, felt they were not well informed and the school did not meet individual children's needs effectively. The majority of the criticisms made were offered constructively and were mainly concerned with behaviour and supervision on the playground. However, inspectors found that the supervision on the playground during the inspection was very good. Behaviour seen during the inspection and procedures to deal with unacceptable behaviour were exemplary.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Mary Exton Junior Mixed and Infant 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 160 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 225 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	87	54	70	44	3	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	111	69	44	28	2	1	2	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	48	30	92	58	14	9	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	58	36	86	54	11	7	3	2
The teaching is good at this school	66	41	88	55	4	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	53	33	90	56	14	9	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	73	46	82	51	3	2	1	1
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)	59	37	86	54	2	1	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	58	36	83	52	15	9	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	53	33	75	47	16	10	10	6
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	43	27	82	51	18	11	10	6
The school is led and managed effectively	70	44	73	46	7	4	5	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	78	49	75	47	4	3	2	1

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.



4 July 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Mary Exton Junior Mixed and Infant School, Hitchin, SG4 0QA

Thank you all very much for welcoming us to your school. We enjoyed talking with you and your teachers. We will remember how extremely polite and considerate you all were and how well you all behaved. You and your parents and carers told us that Mary Exton is an excellent school, and we agree. These are the things I found that your school does well.

You get off to a flying start in the Reception and make excellent progress through the school. You reach much higher standards than most pupils of your age by the end of Year 6 because teaching is outstanding.

You all enjoy learning very much and your attendance is high.

Your behaviour is excellent and you are extremely sensible and know how to keep safe.

You really enjoy and benefit from the many fun activities, clubs, visits and visitors.

Your school cares for you extremely well and teaches you a lot about how to be healthy and to care for others.

There are excellent opportunities for you to take responsibility, evaluate your own work, help others and contribute to helping your school improve even more through acting as play leaders and monitors, or being on the ECO team and school council.

Your headteacher, senior teacher and governing body are superb and lead the school extremely well. All the staff work extremely effectively together as a team to make sure that Mary Exton is a safe and secure, fun place to learn.

There is one thing I have identified for staff and the governing body to improve.

Make sure that your teachers make links with other schools very different to yours in the United Kingdom, and track and record more rigorously how well you learn from these experiences.

Thank you for a very enjoyable and memorable visit to your school and best wishes for your future. You can all help by continuing to work really hard.

Yours sincerely

Marion Wallace

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.