

Ardley Hill Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109517
Local Authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	377935
Inspection dates	4–5 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Martin Beale

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	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	219
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Darren Fletcher
Headteacher	Jonathan Smith
Date of previous school inspection	6 February 2007
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Age group	4–9
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They visited 14 lessons, observing 10 teachers. They held meetings with staff, groups of pupils, and members of the governing body. Informal discussions were held with parents and carers as they arrived with their children at the start of the day. Inspectors observed the school's work, and scrutinised assessment information, pupils' books, records of pupils' progress and school improvement plans. Inspectors analysed responses to questionnaires from 72 parents and carers, 83 pupils and 34 staff.

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

- What impact is the creative approach to the curriculum having on the pupils' enjoyment and independence in learning?
- How well do pupils develop their writing through the topic themes?
- How successfully is the school fostering better behaviour among the pupils?

Information about the school

Most pupils are from White British backgrounds in this average-size school. The proportion of pupils identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average. Their needs are mostly associated with learning difficulties related to literacy. Fewer pupils than average are known to be eligible for free school meals. Pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in two Reception classes. The school has recently received the International Schools Award at Intermediate Level. The headteacher has been in post for one year having previously been the deputy headteacher. The school hosts a privately run pre-school, which is inspected separately.

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

Ardley Hill Lower is a good school. It is improving strongly under the decisive leadership of the new headteacher. He gives a clear direction and has driven forward several improvements over the past year with strong support from other senior leaders. Members of staff are becoming increasingly self-critical and reflective of their performance. Parents and carers are pleased with the school and all that it does for their children, particularly the attention paid to keeping them safe.

- Children make good progress in Reception in a stimulating environment that meets their needs well. This good progress continues across the rest of the school and attainment is above that nationally expected for their age, and rising, by the end of Year 4.
- Within a pattern of good teaching there is some that is outstanding and drives learning forward at pace and challenges the pupils' thinking. The most effective lessons engage pupils through expert questioning, which helps to draw out their ideas and check their understanding. However, not all teachers have perfected this skill.
- Pupils learn through a wide range of interesting experiences in carefully planned topic themes that make creative links between subjects. The recently developed outdoor classroom and the 'virtual learning environment' are both becoming increasingly effective and stimulating resources.
- Pupils develop their writing in a wide range of engaging contexts through their topics, which accounts for the good quality of their work and the way boys are stimulated to write. However, there are fewer planned opportunities for pupils to apply their numeracy within the themes they are studying.
- Teachers use their careful assessment of the pupils to plan activities that are closely matched to the next steps in their learning. Specific programmes are provided if they fall behind their targets, but the school has not developed systems either to identify or extend pupils with particular gifts and talents.
- Marking and other feedback gives pupils clear guidance on how successful they have been, but they are not always given the opportunity to respond to their teachers' comments and so improve their work.
- The school has responded robustly to some concerns expressed by parents and carers that behaviour was not good enough. The consistent approach by staff to encourage better behaviour are paying off, so that pupils know where they stand, and as one boy put it, 'strict and kind is nice'. Pupils are more willing to share and to be tolerant of each other. Behaviour is now good as pupils try to fulfil the school's motto of 'Is it fair, is it kind, is it right'

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- The circumstances of pupils and their families are known well so that support can be focused on their specific needs. This and the exemplary attention paid to safeguarding the pupils' welfare means pupils feel very safe and trust adults to deal sensitively with any concerns they raise.
- Pupils enjoy the responsibilities they are given to help and make a difference in school. They undertake charitable activities but there are relatively few opportunities for them to support initiatives in helping the local community to become more cohesive.

The school tackles shortcomings head-on and has a good record of improvement. Better teaching, a more interesting curriculum and the pupils' considerate behaviour have all led to improved achievement. Through incisive self-evaluation based on rigorous monitoring procedures, senior leaders and governors have a clear picture of the school's qualities from which to plan action in order to tackle sharply focused priorities. Given this and the progress it has made in recent years, the school has good capacity for further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate the pupils' learning further by:
 - developing teachers' questioning skills
 - planning for pupils to develop their numeracy through topic themes
 - identifying and providing activities to challenge gifted and talented pupils
 - providing time for pupils to respond to their teachers' guidance on how to improve their work.
- Plan and provide opportunities for pupils to make a greater community contribution, particularly locally.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

When learning is most effective, pupils are attentive and show interest in what they are doing. They respond well to their teachers and try hard even if they find work difficult. They work independently and collaborate well particularly when sharing their ideas in discussion. They greatly enjoy practical activities and the chance to apply their skills to new learning. They also apply their well-developed information and communication technology skills to support their learning, such as when Year 4 pupils researched weather conditions around the world for their 'Ships and Shipwrecks' topic. Learning is less effective on a small number of occasions when the pupils spend too long listening to explanations of ideas they have mastered rather than getting on with more challenging activities.

Pupils are prepared well for the next stage of their education. Most reach and many exceed expectations for their age by the end of Year 4 in English and mathematics. Year 2 assessments had fallen slightly in recent years but rose in 2011 to above average in reading and writing. There is no pattern to any difference in achievement

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by gender or ethnicity. Skilled and focused support for pupils identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities enables them to participate fully in lessons and in many cases work at least at expected levels for their age.

The pupils’ enjoyment of school is reflected in their above-average attendance. Pupils have a strong sense of right and wrong and engage well with each other regardless of their backgrounds. They take responsibility for their own safety, and encourage each other to act with care. They are considerate and kind but some boys in particular, need reminding at times how to meet expectations for their behaviour in lessons. Pupils willingly take on responsibilities to support the school and each other by acting as play leaders. The school council has some influence on school life, but the headteacher recognises that there is scope for this to be strengthened. Pupils show they understand how to stay fit and healthy through their sensible choices at lunchtime and their enthusiasm for sports and other vigorous exercise. They greatly enjoy participating in artistic activities, but their limited first-hand experiences of the lifestyles of other communities, means they have a patchy understanding of cultures other than their own.

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	1
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	2

How effective is the provision?

Much of the most effective teaching seen was lively and teachers used resources including new technology creatively. Their accurate assessment of each pupil’s understanding is used to design activities that grab their interest and are closely matched to the next steps in their learning. This was particularly effective in a Year 2

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

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mathematics lesson as the pupils undertook different tasks to help them learn about the value of coins in our monetary system. Well-chosen practical, research and investigative tasks often making use of computers and other resources find the pupils engrossed for long periods. The most skilled turn the pupils’ responses and misconceptions into learning opportunities and so help to deepen their understanding. However, at times teachers spend too long in their explanations causing some pupils to lose concentration.

The much improved curriculum contributes greatly to the pupils’ enjoyment and achievement. Teachers focus sharply on developing key skills through guided reading sessions and lessons where they teach the sounds letters make. The themed approach for much of the school day brings learning to life and enables the pupils to hone their writing in styles and situations that grab their imaginations. Their experiences are further enriched by a wide range of additional activities, many of which are made possible through partnerships with other providers and bring in additional expertise such as that of sports coaches. The International Schools Award reflects developing links with schools abroad and activities such as looking through the eyes of a German child during World War 2.

Pupils rightly say the school is a safe, caring and happy place. Typical of the care provided is the breakfast and after-school club where pupils have varied and enjoyable activities and where they say ‘staff treat us kindly’. The precise identification of targets for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities leads to carefully planned support from within the school or from external agencies. Well thought through arrangements help to smooth the pupils’ transition to the next stage of their education and help them to settle confidently into their new schools.

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 headteacher’s clear vision of continually seeking ways to drive up attainment while making school life enjoyable for the pupils is shared by staff at all levels. Strong teamwork, high staff morale and effective senior leaders make a vital contribution to the drive for improvement. Through a wide range of strategies to monitor performance, senior leaders have a clear picture of the qualities of staff, but there is scope to use the expertise available to coach and further improve the performance of their colleagues. The harmonious atmosphere and lack of variation in performance of different groups of pupils are testament to the commitment to

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ensuring equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination.

The well-led governing body has a clear understanding of the school’s qualities and is challenging senior leaders to raise achievement further. It is very supportive of the school and is systematic in establishing its performance from first-hand evidence. The governing body also ensures that procedures for safeguarding pupils are robust, and their impact is frequently monitored, reviewed and updated to reflect changing conditions and requirements. Assemblies and other activities provide pupils with the chance to learn how to stay safe when using the internet.

The school has developed plans to foster greater community cohesion. While the school offers a cohesive environment, it is at an early stage of forging stronger links within the local community and beyond. The school uses new technology to keep parents and carers well informed about school activities and their children’s progress. Their views on improving the school are welcomed, and they were instrumental in the development of the outdoor classroom. The headteacher is strongly committed to partnership working by bringing in expertise not otherwise available to extend the opportunities provided for the pupils and to support their welfare.

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	1
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

Regular contact with home and thoughtful induction arrangements help children settle in extremely well. Parents and carers feel welcomed by staff and are confident that they are able to support their children’s learning. Because of the care provided and the emphasis on health, safety, hygiene and being kind to each other, children feel exceptionally safe in school and confident to share any worries with adults. Children enter Reception with overall skills below those usual for their age. By the

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time they enter Year 1, most have reached average levels across all areas of their learning. Particularly impressive gains are made in their personal development and in literacy which are weaker elements on entry.

Strong teamwork and regular observations of the children’s progress ensure they benefit from a wide range of challenging and interesting activities. Consistently effective teaching responds quickly to the children’s development so that activities are tailored well to their interests and individual learning needs. Children are focused on their work and share sensibly. They make thoughtful choices when selecting resources, such as when producing rubbings of different textured surfaces. They become independent and also readily help each other to solve problems relating to the task in hand.

By carefully identifying the qualities of the setting, leaders have secured year by year improvements in provision and outcomes. They are aware that the outdoor area is not as strongly developed as that inside. Its use is limited in inclement weather and activities outside do not always develop and complement those taking place indoors. However, adults do their utmost to ensure that this does not impede the children’s learning and progress.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire is in line with the average for primary schools. The level of satisfaction is above average in response to almost all of the questions. Inspection evidence endorses the very positive views of parents and carers about the school, particularly that teaching is good, individual needs are met well, leadership is effective and their children are helped to adopt a safe and healthy lifestyle. Inspectors investigated through observations and discussions with pupils the concerns of a small number of parents and carers about whether unacceptable behaviour is handled well. Inspectors found that behaviour is good and improving. Inspectors also investigated concerns expressed by a few about whether the school provides information about their children’s progress. However, they concluded that the school provides appropriate information about pupils’ progress, as is the opinion of the large majority.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ardley Hill 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 72 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 219 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	51	71	19	26	2	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	44	61	28	39	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	27	38	35	49	5	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	35	49	28	39	3	4	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	39	54	28	39	2	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	37	51	28	39	5	7	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	34	47	36	50	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)	31	43	32	44	5	7	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	37	51	30	42	3	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	29	40	30	42	4	6	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	30	42	29	40	4	6	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	40	56	26	36	4	6	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	49	68	20	28	3	4	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 08 April 2011 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.



6 October 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ardley Hill Lower School, Dunstable, LU6 3NZ

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We saw that you work hard and are proud of the part you play in school life. Inspectors were particularly impressed by your confident answers to their questions. These are the things we liked most.

- Ardley Hill Lower School good and improving because the headteacher, staff and governors do their utmost to help you all to succeed.
- Almost all of you reach the level expected for your age by the time you go to middle school and many of you do better than this.
- Members of staff take good care of you and make sure you are kept safe.
- Your improving behaviour contributes significantly to the atmosphere in school.
- Topics provide many enjoyable experiences for you. We enjoyed watching your 'Ships and Shipwrecks' work and the visit of 'Captain Jack'.
- Those of you who find learning difficult are given good support so that you can make the same progress as others in your classes.
- Teaching is good and effective use is made of assessment data to support your learning and progress.
- You develop an excellent understanding of how to keep yourselves safe and try hard to stay fit and healthy.

We have asked the school to improve learning further by ensuring that teachers use questions to make you think more deeply, give you time to respond to their marking, provide opportunities for you to use numeracy in topics and extend those of you with particular talents. We also want you to make a greater contribution locally. You can all help the school to get even better by continuing to improve your behaviour.

Yours sincerely

Martin Beale
Lead inspector

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