

Russell Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109495
Local Authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	377930
Inspection dates	8–9 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Michael Sheridan HMI

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	202
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Elaine Tebbutt
Headteacher	Jane Sealey
Date of previous school inspection	13 June 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. Inspectors observed teaching in 19 lessons taught by 9 teachers. Inspectors met with pupils, members of the governing body, leaders and staff. They observed the school's work, and looked at policy documents, tracking data, work in pupils' books and school improvement planning. Inspectors considered the views of staff, pupils and 84 parents and carers through returned questionnaires.

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

- How consistent is the quality of teaching throughout the school?
- How effectively is tracking data used to ensure boys and girls make equally good progress?
- How effectively do leaders at all levels plan and evaluate school improvement?

Information about the school

This is a smaller-than-average first school that is growing steadily. Children arrive in Reception class and leave at the end of Year 4. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is well below the national average. Most pupils are White British. The school has an after-school and breakfast club that are managed by the governing body and part of this inspection. A privately run pre-school is run from a separate building on the school site. This provision is subject to separate inspection arrangements.

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

This is a very happy school where pupils are exceptionally well cared for. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about their relationship with the school. Pupils say they feel very safe in school. Their ability to be able to talk about staying safe is impressive. The high-quality care provided is central to this school's success. Parents and carers feel fully involved in school life; a genuine partnership exists between the school and parents and carers. As the doors open in the morning, parents and carers are encouraged into school to talk with their children's teacher and the headteacher. This open approach means that the school day starts calmly and parents and carers are able to discuss concerns or queries quickly and efficiently. The school is at the centre of its community and pupils frequently take part in many events within the local community. Within school, pupils are exceptionally committed to meeting a set of clearly espoused values and these contribute well to the school's cohesiveness as a community, as well as to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils talk with pride about their school. They demonstrate maturity and thoughtfulness when discussing a range of issues. They enjoy learning and, partly because of this, attendance is consistently high.

Children get off to a flying start in the Early Years Foundation Stage where they quickly settle and develop very positive attitudes in their work and play. From starting points in line with expectations for their age, pupils make outstanding progress across all areas of learning, so they start Key Stage 1 very well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress overall, but this is somewhat uneven across year groups. In Key Stage 1, pupils make rapid progress, enjoy their work and apply themselves diligently. The quality of work in pupils' books is consistently good and the standards they reach are high. Teachers take great care to match work precisely to individuals' needs. The curriculum provides a strong focus on developing basic skills that are supplemented by a very good range of exciting and stimulating experiences.

Pupils make steady progress in Years 3 and 4 so they leave the school with above-average standards of attainment. However, in these year groups, pupils' progress in writing and mathematics is sometimes less impressive than earlier in the school and pupils' otherwise outstanding behaviour occasionally slips as they become less focused on working hard. In some lessons, the quality of feedback, both orally and in marking, is less focused on helping pupils to improve their work. For example, in

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writing, marking in some books focuses solely on spelling and simple punctuation errors, so opportunities to improve the breadth of vocabulary and sentence structures are missed. In a minority of mathematics lessons there is too much of a reliance on answering closed questions so pupils do not always have the opportunity to recognise the ways that they could apply their new knowledge to solve problems in a variety of situations. The broader curriculum in Years 3 and 4 remains highly engaging but there are missed opportunities to use this exciting curriculum to provide context for developing literacy and numeracy skills.

The capacity of the school to sustain improvements is good. Leaders have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the school. Action plans are clear and show that leaders are using information from data to prioritise further improvements. Recent actions have been taken to improve rates of progress in Key Stage 2. Middle leaders are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about their subject areas. They are able to talk convincingly about strengths and weaknesses and provide a rationale for the work that has taken place. Evidence in pupils' books and through tracking data show that boys and girls are performing equally well. Pupils engage in the range of activities with equal determination and enthusiasm.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that pupils continue to make brisk progress throughout Key Stage 2 by:
 - providing good-quality oral and written feedback that is useful and informs pupils of their next steps in learning
 - using targets and marking to help pupils become better writers by increasing their choice of language and sentence structure
 - discussing and applying mathematics more regularly so pupils learn how to use their understanding of calculation strategies in increasingly challenging situations
 - ensuring that the very best use is made of the exciting opportunities within the curriculum to develop literacy and numeracy skills.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils enjoy their learning a great deal and make good progress. They behave well around school and in lessons, showing a real hunger for learning in the many lessons that are designed effectively to capture their imaginations and make them think. Usually, these lessons are used productively so pupils develop their basic skills well. In the best lessons, pupils solve real-life problems that extend their knowledge and develop their basic skills confidently. In one such lesson, pupils designed a mix of cereals to make their own muesli. They learnt about healthy food and the importance of art and presentation in advertising. Further, they developed their understanding of three-dimensional shape and had opportunities to read and write for a purpose. Well-placed adult support meant that opportunities to guide pupils in these different areas were taken and pupils made progress at a rapid pace.

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Pupils have a very keen sense of right and wrong. The school effectively promotes a set of key values and pupils are able to point out with striking clarity how they strive to meet these. Pupils get on noticeably well with each other. They state, categorically, that they feel safe at school. They have absolute faith in the adults in school to keep them safe and feel very comfortable talking them about issues that worry them. Pupils learn effectively about staying safe in a variety of situations, including when using the internet. Behaviour around school is polite and courteous. In many lessons, pupils’ behaviour has a very positive impact on the quality of learning. However, in a small number of lessons, where teaching is less focused on individual needs, pupils take too long to settle and as a consequence, the pace of learning slows.

Pupils’ contribution to the school and wider community is outstanding. They are very proud of their school and value it a great deal. Pupils are regularly invited to offer their opinions and these are valued by leaders when making decisions. Members of the school council take their responsibilities very seriously. There are many opportunities for pupils to engage with their local community and the appreciation that organisations within the community express show that they hold the school in high esteem. It is clear, through pupils’ behaviour towards each other, their enthusiastic engagement in many curriculum opportunities and their highly-tuned ability to contribute to discussion about a range of issues, that their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils leave this school as well-rounded young people, ready for the next stage in their education.

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	1
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	1
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

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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The quality of teaching is good overall, but its impact is uneven across the school. The strongest teaching is found in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1 where it is consistently good and sometimes outstanding. This is because teachers are highly focused on developing individuals’ basic and personal skills in the context of an engaging curriculum. The strongest teaching misses few opportunities for pupils to improve their skills. In these lessons, pupils work hard, enjoy their success and make rapid gains. In Years 3 and 4, teaching remains good overall, but there are fewer examples of exemplary teaching and some that is satisfactory. In these lessons, assessment information is used less effectively to pinpoint pupils’ precise needs, so work is less well targeted so pupils struggle, or find it too easy. Occasionally, teachers give pupils interesting tasks but do not provide specific guidance to make sure they know exactly how to improve their work beyond spelling and basic grammar corrections.

There is an impressive range of enrichment activities in the curriculum. Visitors have included a sculptor, a leading conservationist and a helicopter on the school field. Theme days are regular and pupils speak fondly of these. Teachers creatively bring the curriculum alive. One example of this was seen during inspection when Key Stage 2 pupils re-enacted ‘Boudicca’s uprising’. In this lesson, pupils were very well motivated and their insight and understanding were greatly enhanced.

The care, guidance and support provided are a real strength and central pillars of this school’s success. Pupils are routinely very well guided pastorally so they develop very well socially and emotionally. Parents and carers are quick to point out the striking impact that the school has in supporting potentially vulnerable pupils. The school has very effective systems for making sure that pupils’ pastoral needs are made the highest priority. Transitions between different years are effective, as are the arrangements for transition from pre-school and on to middle school. Attendance has remained high for a sustained period of time and the school’s systems to maintain this are effective. The wrap-around care provided before and after school maintains this high standard of care and support. Staff in this provision liaise well with other school staff so information is appropriately shared and pupils remain well cared for. One parent caught the mood of many when stating, ‘We can’t praise and thank the school enough for the care given.’

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

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Senior leaders lead with a clear vision to achieve high standards of care and academic endeavour. They have a clear view of the school's current situation and their actions are based on improving the consistency of provision and maintaining the school's many strengths. Middle leaders are enthusiastic about their areas and have a clear understanding of how their subject is developing. Recently, leaders have sharpened their use of data so that pupils' progress is more tightly monitored than in the past. This is helping to identify areas for improvement more quickly and pick up where individuals may be in danger of falling behind so they can be supported rapidly. The governing body challenges and supports leaders effectively. Statutory responsibilities are met well. Individual members of the governing body are regularly in school and their monitoring of different aspects for the school's work is usefully focused and regular.

The school engages very effectively with parents and carers. Most parents and carers feel very much part of a partnership with the school. School staff make time to listen and speak to parents and carers whenever the need or opportunity arises. Communication between school and parents and carers is strong and the school is quick to respond appropriately to concerns or queries.

The school very effectively works in partnership with other schools and wider agencies. It has instigated very useful links with local schools so that headteachers offer each other support and advice. Part of this partnership is focused on the monitoring of standards and practice in each other's schools and this is very useful in enabling the school to self-evaluate and action plan with the benefit of a wider range of professional views and experience. Partnerships with other agencies are strong in supporting outstanding care for pupils. Partnerships with other agencies are exceptionally well used in providing high-quality support for potentially vulnerable pupils, so they thrive.

The school promotes equality of opportunity well. Racist incidents are very rare. The school has improved the use of data so it is able to monitor the performance of different groups. Lesson observations and the school's tracking data show that all groups of pupils are making similar progress. Community cohesion is good. Leaders have a clear understanding of the context in which the school works. The curriculum is highly effective at ensuring pupils have a secure sense of belonging to their school and the local community. There are effective opportunities for pupils to learn about cultures around the world and a range of visitors and visits ensures that their knowledge of the cultural heritage of the United Kingdom is developing.

Safeguarding procedures are strong and all statutory duties are met. The school has risk-assessed its access arrangements at the beginning of the morning effectively and suitable procedures are in place to keep pupils safe.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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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	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	2
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	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make a very positive start in this outstanding Early Years Foundation Stage. All children have their needs effectively met and, from a very early stage, know that they are valued and respected. Progress is rapid as children quickly become confident in this setting. Children engage very well with the excellent range of activities that are carefully matched to their needs and interests. A number of parents and carers say that their children cannot wait to get to school and have settled very quickly. Adults work seamlessly together to provide exciting focused activities that complement the imaginative range of opportunities for children to learn independently through play. Early literacy is developed effectively with pupils learning the sounds that letters make and using this knowledge to start reading and writing. The organisation of the unit is highly effective with adults working to enhance provision across the different spaces. Children who are working or playing independently of adults move between spaces sensibly, demonstrating excellent personal development.

Highly effective leadership sets high expectations, vision and drive. Other adults are exceptionally well motivated, working well together towards continued excellence. There is a strong quest for improvement and a culture of honest self-reflection. All of their plans are sharply focused on improving the already excellent provision for children further.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	1

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Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Views of parents and carers

Most parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive. Parents and carers are clearly very impressed with this school and the way that it works with them and their children. One captured the mood of the majority of comments in saying, 'I couldn't have picked a better school for my child. The caring, nurturing aspect of the school has really encouraged the development of his self-confidence and worth and has helped instil a love of learning.'

A very small number of parents and carers commented on the variability of teaching and leadership in Key Stage 2. Inspectors found that there is more variance in the effectiveness of teaching in this part of the school. A very few parents and carers expressed concerns about the safeguarding arrangements in light of the school's policy for dropping pupils off in classrooms. Inspectors looked closely at the arrangements when making the safeguarding judgement. Inspectors judged that the school's systems were sound; reasonable steps are taken to ensure pupils' safety while allowing parents and carers to accompany their children to classrooms.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Russell 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 84 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 202 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	67	80	17	20	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	63	75	21	25	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	54	64	27	32	3	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	57	68	24	29	3	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	59	70	23	27	2	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	56	67	24	29	3	4	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	53	63	29	35	2	2	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	55	34	40	3	4	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	55	65	26	31	3	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	46	55	34	40	4	5	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	48	57	29	35	6	7	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	54	64	25	30	4	5	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	60	71	22	26	2	2	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.



10 November 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Russell Lower School, Ampthill MK45 2TD

You may remember that I, with some other inspectors, came to your school recently. This letter is to let you know what we found out. We found that your school is a good school and there are some things that are outstanding. We were very impressed with how well you conduct yourselves around school and we were particularly impressed with how well you tried to behave in line with your school's values. I enjoyed hearing from your teachers in assembly about how you had been demonstrating the value of thoughtfulness this week. We found that you make good progress so you are well prepared for middle school. We found that you make the best progress in Reception class and Years 1 and 2. We have asked your school to do a few things to help you do even better in Years 3 and 4.

We have asked your teachers to make sure you always know how to improve your work, especially in maths and writing. We have asked your teachers to give you opportunities to practise maths by applying it to different situations. We have also asked your teachers to give you the opportunity to talk about your maths so you get better at understanding what you are doing. In your writing, we have asked your teachers to help guide you in making more grown-up decisions about the type of sentences you write and the type of vocabulary you use. We have also asked your teachers in Key Stage 2 to make sure you are given as many opportunities as possible to practise mathematics and literacy through some of the exciting events that take place in your school.

I am sure your teachers will want your ideas about how they can best help you learn. Perhaps you could talk to the school council about how the marking in your books could be more helpful in allowing you to improve your work.

It has been a real pleasure to meet all of you. You really are a credit to your school and the adults you live with at home. You have my very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Michael Sheridan
Her Majesty's Inspector

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