

Maulden Lower School

Church Road, Maulden, Bedfordshire, MK45 2AU

Inspection dates 11–12 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils make good progress and achieve well.
- Children do well in most areas of learning by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Pupils' attainment is above average by the end of Year 2, and well above average by the end of Year 4.
- Teaching is good and pupils are keen to learn.
- Teachers keep a close and thorough check on pupils' progress, and use the resulting information well to set demanding targets across the school.
- Behaviour is good and pupils say that they feel safe in school.
- The subjects pupils study are matched well to their needs and interests, and make a good contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The school has improved well since its last inspection. Its leaders, supported well by the governing body, have succeeded in raising achievement and improving the quality of teaching from satisfactory to good.
- The school is well placed to improve further.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- At times, lesson introductions are too long, and teachers do not explain some tasks clearly enough or ensure that pupils extend their skills by thinking deeply or recording their ideas individually.
- While senior leaders are ambitious for the school's future, their plans for development are not yet focused clearly on moving the school towards being outstanding.

Information about this inspection

- All the teachers and the higher-level teaching assistant were observed teaching at least once. Of the 12 lessons seen, six were joint observations with the headteacher. Pupils were observed reading in class and two read their books to the inspector. Two playtimes and an assembly were observed.
- The inspector sampled pupils' exercise books in Years 1 to 4 and children's work and individual profiles in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Meetings were held with the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors. A telephone discussion took place with a representative of the local authority. Meetings were held with the headteacher and staff. A group of pupils met with the inspector and there were several informal discussions with pupils about their work.
- The inspector took account of the 36 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and talked informally with parents and carers when they dropped their children off at school. Questionnaires from 10 members of staff were analysed.
- Documents scrutinised during the inspection included the school's summary self-evaluation, the school development plan, performance data and tracking, and details of staff training.
- The inspector also looked at records relating to aspects of behaviour, teachers' planning, the systems used for assessment, and the partnership with parents in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Inspection team

Margaret Goodchild, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Maulden Lower is smaller than the average primary school.
- All the current pupils are of White British heritage and there are none who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below average.
- The proportions of pupils or who are supported at school action, or at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs, are below average.
- Pupils in Years 3 and 4 are organised into two separate mixed-age classes; they are then re-grouped according to ability for English and mathematics.
- A new headteacher took up post in April 2010. A teacher took over the role of acting deputy headteacher in September 2011 and this position was made permanent in May 2012. At the time of the inspection, the work of two teachers on maternity leave was covered by long-term supply teachers.
- Following the previous full Ofsted inspection in 2009 when the school was judged to be satisfactory, a monitoring visit in June 2011 found that the school had made good improvement and was well placed to improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching to outstanding by:
 - keeping lesson introductions sharply focused and fast paced, and making full use of teaching assistants during introductions to match learning to the needs of different groups of pupils
 - ensuring the key concepts that underlie written or practical tasks are fully explained to pupils before they move off to make a start on their work
 - increasing the opportunities pupils have to think deeply and to concentrate on recording their own ideas before discussing their work in pairs, groups or with the whole class.
- Strengthen the drive for improvement and focus leadership on moving the school towards being outstanding by:
 - defining in self-evaluation and development planning exactly what needs to be done next to move each aspect of the school's work from good to outstanding, then continuously working on these action points
 - increasing staff awareness of the difference between good and outstanding practice, including through exploring inspirational practice in other schools.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children's attainment on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage is better than expected for their age in personal and social development, but broadly matches expectations in most other areas. Children make good progress and attainment at the end of the Reception year has been above national expectations in recent years.
- At this early stage in the term, children are making good progress in learning to do simple calculation sums and in forming letters and numbers. Lessons are building effectively on their readiness to learn and their eagerness to contribute ideas.
- The school's efforts to raise achievement have resulted in a rising trend in attainment and progress in Years 1 to 4 since the last inspection. Attainment at the end of Year 2 has been significantly above average over the last three years in reading, writing and mathematics. Attainment at the end of Year 4 has risen from above to well above national expectations in reading, writing and mathematics, and has also risen in science.
- Nearly all Year 1 pupils who recently took part in the national test on the sounds that letters make (phonics) met with success. In lessons, pupils frequently produce work and undertake tasks in English and mathematics that reflect good skills for their age.
- Taking account of their different starting points, all groups of pupils make good progress. The school monitors pupils' progress carefully and intervenes swiftly if a pupil is in danger of falling behind. Records of pupils' progress show that nearly all pupils make at least the expected amount of progress from year to year and many exceed this, especially in English and mathematics.
- Teaching assistants provide good support to pupils who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium and those who are disabled or have special educational needs. Work and methods are matched closely to their learning needs. Expectations for these pupils are high, and staff make particularly good use of practical resources and specialist equipment to make learning clear and enable pupils to succeed.

The quality of teaching is good

- Inspection findings, records of pupils' progress and the school's own checks on teaching show that its quality has improved from satisfactory to good since the last inspection.
- Teachers have warm relationships with their pupils and there is usually a positive atmosphere for learning in classrooms. Pupils find their lessons interesting and say that teachers and other staff are helpful and encouraging. Activities are varied, and the teaching of communication, reading, writing and mathematical skills is good. Pupils have good opportunities to practise these skills in other subjects, for example when recording information in science and history.
- The substantial increase in the amount of teaching that is at least good is to a great extent the result of improvements in the way teachers plan work within their subjects and assess pupils' learning. Teachers all now follow the same unified system for planning, marking and assessing pupils' work, and for tracking their progress.
- Pupils are kept well informed about how they are doing and marking usually tells them how they

could improve a given piece of work. Very clear systems ensure they know at any given time exactly where they are in relation to their individual targets.

- Most lessons are matched well to the range of needs within a class and this enables all groups to make at least good progress. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children learned a great deal and had a very exciting time trying to work out what creature had left the 'paw prints' that kept appearing overnight in their classrooms. In an excellent lesson in Year 2 on the sounds that letters make, highly focused teaching ensured that pupils of all abilities made rapid progress in blending groups of letters.
- At times, teachers keep pupils together as a whole class for too long at the beginning of lessons. When this happens, the pace of learning tends to drop and teachers do not always make full use of teaching assistants to match the introduction of new skills closely to pupils' prior attainment. The work of teaching assistants is otherwise well planned on a daily basis.
- During lesson introductions, teachers make good use of 'talking partners', whereby pupils share their ideas for just a minute or two with the person next to them. In classes where teachers expect pupils to get down quickly to quiet, focused independent working once they move off to their tables, they produce a good amount of work. This was evident in the upper set in Years 3 and 4, where pupils produced a large amount of written work as part of the topic on the Second World War.
- In a few lessons, however, teachers use paired and group work too much so that pupils have limited time for independent thinking and for completing written work for themselves. On occasion in a few lessons, exciting tasks reveal teachers' high expectations but some information needed to complete the task successfully is not explained clearly enough.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils' good behaviour makes a significant contribution to their learning and good personal development. In lessons, when the teacher is talking to the whole class, pupils pay close attention. Even in the Early Years Foundation Stage, where children have been in school for only a few weeks, they listen with extreme care to the teacher's questions and explanations before eagerly sharing their ideas.
- Throughout the school, pupils are keen to learn and their behaviour in class is outstanding whenever teachers expect nothing less of them. Similarly, when pupils come together as a whole school for assembly, they behave in a very calm, orderly manner and exhibit a high level of self-control.
- Expectations for behaviour in class are generally high and most teachers manage behaviour skilfully. In the best lessons, teachers make clear at every point how they want pupils to behave and apply themselves, and they quickly remind them of any slippage. Pupils respond very well to this and readily work hard, doing their best and not wasting any time.
- Behaviour is not outstanding in the school as a whole, however, because there are a few occasions when teachers allow noise levels to rise, even when pupils have been asked to complete a written task. In these lessons, pupils continue with their work but do not complete as much as they could because they become involved in too much unnecessary chatter. A very few parents and carers expressed concerns about this, though most consider that behaviour is good.
- The school's records show that significant misbehaviour rarely occurs. Systems for following up

and checking for patterns in such behaviour are extremely thorough. Similarly, the school keeps very careful records of any arguments between pupils and quickly involves parents.

- As a result, pupils say that they are happy at school and feel very safe there. Parents and carers agree that their children are kept safe. Pupils interviewed said that they had 'never seen any bullying' in school. This is partly because a great deal of attention is given to the development of pupils' personal qualities through the school's involvement in 'Values' education. During the inspection, pupils listened carefully to an assembly on patience and tolerance and were able to apply this directly to their own experience.
- Pupils' enthusiasm for school is evident in the attendance rate, which is consistently above average.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, who is highly competent, has been well supported by the new deputy headteacher in moving the school from satisfactory to good. Senior leaders provide strong direction to the school's work and demonstrate a shared desire to make it as good as possible.
- The arrangements for checking teachers' work are thorough, and they have good opportunities for training. These are linked to school development priorities but also aimed at maximising staff potential. Monitoring is accurate, including the judgements leaders make about the quality of teaching, and the resulting information is used carefully when making decisions about teachers' salaries. Staff are clear about what is expected, teamwork is strong and staff morale is high.
- The establishment of clear and consistent systems that operate across the school has been key to raising achievement and improving the quality of teaching. The headteacher's insistence that all teachers use the same effective systems for planning, assessing and marking pupils' work, setting targets and checking their progress has made a real difference. This also enables temporary teachers to settle quickly into the expected routines.
- The school's awareness of its own strengths and weaknesses is accurate, and its development planning is suitably detailed. Subject leaders now make a greater contribution to school improvement and are held more closely to account for the progress pupils make in their areas of responsibility. However, moving the school securely from satisfactory to good has dominated leaders' thinking. As a result, they are at an early stage in making the transition to identifying what they could do to make this an outstanding school.
- The range of learning opportunities is matched well to pupils' different needs, including those of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Pupil premium funding has been spent wisely in providing extra support for pupils who need it. The effectiveness of this is evident in the good progress these pupils are making.
- Work in connection with the International Schools Award, the Silver Eco Schools Mark, involvement in 'Values' education and the extensive opportunities for pupils to learn to play a musical instrument all contribute to their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Productive partnerships with other local educational establishments help to broaden pupils' learning experiences, for example by extending sporting opportunities.
- The partnership with parents and carers is good. Most speak positively about the school and almost all who completed the online survey indicated that they would recommend it to others. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, the school makes good use of information from parents and

carers about the development of their children's skills and interests. It provides some high-quality advice about how they can help their children to develop their early mathematics and reading skills at home.

- The local authority has provided good support to the school since the last inspection. Its help has been particularly valuable in relation to the development of governance and subject leadership, and in strengthening senior leaders' skills in checking the quality of teaching.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- is motivated, well trained and actively involved in the school's work
- is well informed, based on a thorough programme of visits and the establishment of a working party to look closely at data about pupils' progress
- provides a good level of support and challenge to senior leaders, based on a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development
- ensures that the arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirements
- makes careful financial decisions, including ensuring that pupil premium funding is used well to increase the support provided by teaching assistants to the pupils concerned.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	109472
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	401058

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	143
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Caroline Gilby
Headteacher	Valerie Wang
Date of previous school inspection	16 September 2009
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