

Cotton End Lower School

High Road, Cotton End, Bedford, MK45 3AA

Inspection dates 13–14 February 2013

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.

- Children make good progress in the Nursery and Reception Years because of consistently good teaching and outstanding assessment.
- Standards are above national expectations in English and mathematics by the end of Year 4 and all groups of pupils achieve well, especially those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- Teaching involves pupils well in practical activities that they find interesting and enjoyable.
- Pupils behave well and say the school keeps them safe. Parents agree with this view.
- The new headteacher has successfully won the support of staff and governors in speeding up the pace of improvement. As a result, achievement has improved and more teaching is good or better.
- The governing body knows the school well and is effective in planning for its future.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough teaching is outstanding.
- Pupils do not do enough writing in Years 1 and 2 and their handwriting is often untidy.
- Pupils do not have enough opportunity to check the quality of their own or others' work.
- Pupils do not always have the chance to respond to marking and act upon teachers' advice.
- The school building is not used well enough to promote pupils' learning.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed 10 lessons or parts of lessons, most of which were joint observations with the headteacher. All teachers and most support staff were seen working with the pupils.
- The inspector heard pupils read, attended two assemblies and, with the headteacher, looked at examples of pupils' work.
- The inspector looked at a wide range of school documents, including development plans, policies, self-evaluation reports, monitoring files, safeguarding and curriculum materials, evidence of the school's partnership work and information for families.
- Meetings were held with pupils. Discussions were held with the headteacher, class teachers, the Chair of the Governing Body and other governors, and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector consulted the Parent View website, although only nine parents and carers had posted responses to the online questionnaire. He also spoke with several parents on the playground.
- The inspector also considered 12 staff questionnaires.

Inspection team

Nick Butt, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is much smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Just over half the pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, which is high in relation to the national average.
- A large proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- There are three mixed-age classes, one with Nursery and Reception children, one with Years 1 and 2 and the other with Years 3 and 4.
- No pupils are based in the actual school building. All of them are in mobile classrooms on the small playground.
- An above-average proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in local authority care, those known to be eligible for free school meals and pupils with a parent in the armed forces.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The school is not measured against the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for progress and standards in English and mathematics, because there are no pupils in Year 6.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision for its pupils at any other educational establishments.
- The headteacher took up her post in December 2011.
- There are plans for the school to become an all-through primary school in September 2014.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Move teaching and progress to outstanding by:
 - making sure that all pupils write at length and neatly, especially in Years 1 and 2
 - giving pupils more opportunities to assess the quality of their own and others' work
 - making sure that pupils respond to the next steps teachers set out for them in their books and act upon the advice.
- Consider ways of making better use of the school building as a centre for pupils' learning and to link the two parts of the school together.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children make good progress in the Nursery and Reception because staff know them very well as individuals and plan exciting and interesting activities that fire their imaginations and stir their curiosity. For example, children loved fishing for balls in large 'pond' outside and counting how many they had caught.
- In 2012, standards were broadly average by the end of Year 2. Pupils made good progress from below-average starting points. Standards in writing are not quite as strong as those in mathematics because pupils do not write enough at length. There is not enough focus on developing a neat cursive style of handwriting. Pupils currently in Year 2 are on course to reach above-average standards. Small year groups mean standards change from year to year, but the trend is upwards.
- The many pupils who speak English as an additional language achieve well because the school adapts learning to suit their needs, with plenty of visual aids. A Polish-speaking teaching assistant helps new pupils from Eastern Europe to settle in well.
- Pupils develop the skills they need to quickly read unfamiliar words. They make good progress in reading throughout the school. Older pupils say they enjoy reading and can discuss their favourite authors and the sorts of books they enjoy. In the past year, the school has joined a special project to raise the achievement of pupils who are behind in their reading. This work is proving successful in speeding up these pupils' progress.
- In Years 3 and 4, pupils make good progress and their attainment is above national expectations. In mathematics, pupils achieve well because teachers build learning skilfully on what they already know and make sure that the work is demanding enough for them, especially the more able.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress because they are set stretching targets for improvement and receive good support from teaching assistants in reaching them.
- Pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium achieve well. They benefit from extra spending on small-group support. While all pupils make good progress, those known to be eligible for free school meals make faster progress than the others. There are no gaps in attainment between the different groups of pupils.

The quality of teaching is good

- In the Nursery and Reception, staff aim high and build on children's interests to plan purposeful activities that the children enjoy. Good questioning develops children's language and extends their understanding. There is a good balance of activities led by adults and those that the children choose themselves.
- Outstanding assessment in the Early Years Foundation Stage gives staff an excellent understanding of children's progress, and they take advantage of the latest technology to keep detailed electronic records of their achievement. Additional staff are well briefed and play an important role in supporting children's good progress.

- Teachers make good use of information and communication technology, including interactive whiteboards and tablet computers, to engage pupils and sustain their interest in learning. Pupils have plenty of opportunities to find things out for themselves and work at their own pace, so developing their independence.
- Learning is linked well across a range of different subjects and teachers use the class theme in a variety of stimulating ways. For example, in studying gravity and air resistance as part of topic on space, pupils in Years 3 and 4 planned an experiment to safely parachute an egg from a height to the ground, designing special packaging to make sure that it landed safely. This allowed them to practise a wide range of literacy, numeracy and creative skills.
- At times, too much time is spent writing out lesson objectives in books, especially during mathematics lessons, rather than focusing on getting on with the task in hand. While teachers set out next steps for learning when marking pupils' books, pupils do not routinely respond to these or act upon them. This means that they do not always make the improvements required. Pupils do not always have enough opportunity to assess the quality of their own work or that of their peers.
- The sounds that letters make are taught well throughout the school in short, regular sessions that move at a brisk pace. These give pupils the skills they need to tackle unfamiliar words. For pupils who speak English as an additional language, in particular, this gives a good grounding in reading and simple spelling.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils behave well and know what is expected of them. They are polite, friendly and eager to talk about their learning. They say, 'Everybody's friends.'
- Pupils are keen to learn and particularly enjoy finding things out for themselves, such as which surface has the most grip when exploring friction.
- They say there is no bullying and are confident adults will deal with any concerns they may have straight away. Pupils have a good understanding of different types of bullying, such as name-calling and cyber-bullying.
- They say they feel safe in school; a view supported by parents. The school makes sure that pupils have a good understanding about how to keep safe when using computers, and outside the home, around roads, railways and stretches of water.
- Pupils value taking responsibility such as operating the computer in assemblies, as play leaders, and helping younger children. They look forward to the headteacher's 'golden tea party' for pupils whose special achievements are written in the 'golden book'.
- Attendance is above average, reflecting pupils' enjoyment of school. They attend punctually, even though some come from quite a distance away.
- On very rare occasions, pupils who find behaving well difficult cause a distraction to others, but their behaviour is managed well by adults and this is kept to a minimum.

The leadership and management are good

- Since her arrival just over a year ago, the headteacher has raised staff morale and built a strong team who share her passion for raising standards and improving teaching. She expects the best of pupils and staff and has had a positive impact on school improvement.
- Training is particularly effective. Staff regularly visit other schools to observe best practice and reflect how they can do even better. They are set robust targets to help them improve their work, and given every support to tackle any areas of weakness.
- The school has an accurate view of itself and effective systems to check how well pupils are doing. Its plans identify the right priorities for improvement and clearly set out how these will be achieved and measured. Regular and rigorous checking of the quality of teaching gives a clear picture of teachers' performance and identifies areas to develop further.
- Subjects and topics are taught imaginatively, building on pupils' interests. A good range of visits, visitors and clubs enhance learning. Pupils spoke with enthusiasm about a recent trip to different places of worship in Bedford. Such experiences help to develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. All pupils are fully included in all activities and given equal opportunities to succeed. Discrimination is not tolerated in any way.
- Strong leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage means that children learn well, and staff work together extremely well as a team. Outstanding assessment includes using role-play activities at the end of each topic to find out how much children know. For example, children became 'fire-fighters' and tackled a pretend fire, each child taking on a different role based on their understanding of 'people who help us'.
- The school building is not used enough to promote learning. While it has a hall and a library, all pupils spend most of their time in mobile classrooms on the playground. No pupils are based in the school itself. It is not possible for the headteacher or office manager to visit the hall or the library without having to go out into the playground and enter the school through a different doorway.
- The local authority has given good support over time, and, as the school's effectiveness has improved, has reduced the input to a lighter touch. The local authority is helping the school to prepare for the change to full primary status.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have a good understanding of the work of the school because they visit often and are fully involved in its life. They know about the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement, and how this school's performance compares with all schools nationally. Governors are involved in setting targets for teachers and linking pay rises to pupils' progress. They know what the school is doing to reward good teaching and tackle any underperformance. Governors keep a tight rein on the budget, and make sure that pupil premium spending has a positive impact on eligible pupils' progress. They have clear views on the future development of the school and have been active in securing its change to an all-through primary. The governing body sees that all safeguarding requirements are met.

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	109446
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	405236

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

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	57
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sandra Thacker
Headteacher	Karen Headland
Date of previous school inspection	16 February 2011
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Fax number	01234 740100
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