

The Mary Bassett Lower School

Bassett Road, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 1AR

Inspection dates

2–3 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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.

- Strong leadership and management by the headteacher, with the effective support of senior and middle leaders, have led to improvements in teaching and achievement since the last inspection.
- Standards at the ends of the Early Years Foundation Stage, Year 2 and Year 4 are rising steadily.
- By the end of Year 4, standards in reading, writing and mathematics are above the expected levels.
- Overall, pupils make good progress because much of the teaching is good. There are some examples of outstanding teaching.
- The pre-school provides children with an excellent start to their schooling.
- Pupils behave well and have a good understanding of personal safety and feel safe in school.
- The school offers a wide range of activities which enhance pupils' experiences and help them make good progress.
- The governing body has a good overview of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all teachers consistently make it clear what they expect children of different abilities to achieve in every lesson.
- Marking is not routinely followed up to make certain pupils have acted on the advice offered.
- Children in the Nursery do not make as rapid progress as others in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- The measures by which the impact of the actions identified in the school development plan are not sufficiently precise.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 18 lessons, of which two were joint observations with the headteacher. In addition, the inspectors made a number of shorter visits to lessons and attended an assembly. They heard some pupils in Year 2 and Year 4 read.
- Meetings were held with members of the governing body, staff, groups of pupils and a local authority representative.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation, including the data the school has collected on pupils' attainment and progress, procedures for keeping pupils safe and the school development plan.
- Inspectors took account of the 53 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in making their judgements and 28 questionnaires returned by members of staff.

Inspection team

David Wynford-Jones, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Carolyn Wood	Additional Inspector
Sheelagh Barnes	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is similar in size to the average-sized primary school.
- The large majority of the pupils are of White British heritage. The remaining pupils come from a number of different minority ethnic backgrounds.
- A very small minority of pupils speak English as an additional language, very few are currently at the early stages of learning English.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is broadly average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, who are looked after by the local authority or whose families are in the armed forces) is above average. Currently there are no pupils in the care of the local authority.
- The pre-school, Nursery and the before and after-school clubs were visited during the inspection because they fall under the direction of the governing body.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all teachers consistently:
 - make certain that pupils of different abilities know precisely what they are expected to achieve in every lesson
 - use teaching assistants more effectively at the start and end of lessons
 - encourage pupils to assess their own learning
 - follow up on earlier marking to check that pupils have acted on the advice to help them improve their work and reach their targets.
- Make sure that children in the Nursery make as rapid progress as other children in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - sharing and building on the effective practice in the pre-school
 - strengthening links with the Reception classes
 - ensuring that planning is sufficiently detailed so that all staff know exactly what the children are expected to learn in each session.
- Refine the school development plan to include precise measures, linked to pupils' attainment and progress, by which the impact of the actions can be checked.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Most children enter the pre-school with skills and knowledge below those expected for their age. They settle quickly and grow in confidence in a safe and secure environment. The well-organised classroom and the effective use of the outdoor area help them to make good and sometimes outstanding progress.
- In the Nursery, the children's progress slows because the effective systems and the opportunities for the children to learn are not as well established as those in the pre-school. Links with the Reception classes are not sufficiently well embedded so that there is a natural progression in the children's learning. Nevertheless, children in the Nursery enjoy their experiences and get on well with each other. They are learning to co-operate and some help with routine tasks such as putting things away.
- In the Reception classes, children's learning begins to accelerate. This is because teachers make good use of opportunities to develop the children's basic language and mathematical skills and provide them with a wide range of stimulating activities to develop their understanding and skills in the other areas of learning. As a result, outcomes at the end of the Reception year have risen steadily over the last four years. In 2012, the large majority of the children reached the expected levels in all areas of learning.
- In the past, standards at the end of Year 2 have been broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics. However, current data suggests that the pupils are on track to reach above average standards by the end of the year. Outcomes at the end of Year 4 are also rising steadily. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics are above those expected. Pupils are reaching higher standards and making good progress because of improvements in teaching and better use of assessment information to set challenging targets for each pupil.
- Pupils are developing their reading skills well. Year 2 pupils have a secure understanding of phonics (the sounds that letters make) and use their knowledge to help read unfamiliar words. By the time they leave, pupils are reading confidently. They can talk about their favourite books and recommend books to each other. They read regularly at home and write book reviews.
- Pupils write for a range of purposes and in different styles. For example, pupils in Year 3 drafted a number of open and closed questions and went on to use them effectively in a later role play interview activity.
- In mathematics, pupils have a good understanding of number and are developing their knowledge of mathematical terminology well. Pupils are able to explain how they have worked out the problem. For example, older pupils carefully analysed a word problem and identified the information and steps needed to find the answer.
- Pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium make good progress because the school has used this additional funding sensibly and effectively to provide additional support staff, further support for reading and more extra-curricular activities. In 2012, pupils in Year 4, generating the additional funding, reached similar standards to their peers in reading, writing and mathematics. Current performance information shows that pupils entitled to pupil premium in Years 2 and 4 are making slightly better progress than the others. The gap in attainment between the two groups in Year 2 is closing rapidly. There is no significant difference in either English or mathematics in Year 4.

- Pupils who speak English as an additional language, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make better progress than their peers nationally. This is because regular checks are made to see how well they are doing and they receive additional support to move learning on when necessary.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Most of the teaching is good with some examples of outstanding teaching. There is no inadequate teaching.
- Teachers encourage pupils to read on a regular basis. As a result, pupils are developing their reading skills well.
- At the end of lessons teachers regularly ask pupils how well they think they have done but there is limited evidence in the pupils' exercise books of them self-evaluating their own work. The marking of pupils' work is good. There are many good examples of marking which help pupils towards their targets. Some pupils are responding well to these comments. However, when pupils do not take on board the advice offered this is rarely followed up in later marking.
- Teachers strive to ensure that all pupils, including potentially vulnerable pupils, pupils who speak English as an additional language, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are fully included and have equal access to the same learning opportunities as other pupils.
- Most lessons are well planned. The work is pitched mainly at the right level across the full range of ability but in some lessons the level of work produced is not high enough. This is because the teachers do not make clear what pupils working at different levels are expected to achieve.
- Nearly all lessons proceed at a quick pace. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour well and encourage them to share their ideas with each other and with the adults. They use questioning strategies skilfully build on pupils' earlier learning. Teaching assistants support group work effectively and help the pupils to make good progress. However, they are not always deployed to make best use of their skills at the start and end of lessons.
- Learning opportunities in the pre-school are meticulously planned. Staff know exactly what is expected of them and what the children are expected to learn. As a result, the children make rapid progress. This level of organisation is not as evident in the Nursery. Planning is not as sharp and the deployment of staff not as precise.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

- Pupils' good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning help them to make good progress. Their attendance has improved steadily and is now average for primary schools. This is because pupils enjoy coming to school and lessons are more interesting.
- Lessons are very rarely interrupted by incidents of inappropriate behaviour. Pupils are polite and routinely demonstrate good manners as they move around the school.
- Pupils are proud of their school. They treat equipment and the building with respect and contribute to the school by taking on a range of responsibilities.

- Pupils from different ethnic backgrounds get on well together. They value and respect each other's heritage. This contributes effectively to their cultural development.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves and others safe and have a good understanding of potential dangers, for example when using computers to access the internet, moving around the school's complex site and when leaving the school premises.
- Pupils say that there have been no bullying incidents, such as name-calling, fighting, racial, religious or cyber-bullying. They are confident that if an incident occurred, it would be dealt with quickly and fairly.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher is working effectively with senior leaders and staff to bring about improvements. All staff are very positive and keen to see the school move forward. They have attended courses and whole staff training sessions to improve their professional skills.
 - The headteacher sets high expectations. She monitors teaching and its impact on pupils' learning closely. Pupils are set challenging targets and their progress is assessed several times during the year. Teachers are asked to explain if any pupil is not on track to achieve their target and what the teacher intends to do about it. This information is used to recommend to the governing body if individual members of staff should be paid more.
 - In all classes, there is an appropriate focus on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. All subjects of the national curriculum are taught and, where appropriate brought together through a theme or topic approach.
 - The wide range of activities promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils are given many opportunities to enrich their education, for example by playing a musical instrument, undertaking various responsibilities such as looking after the school pets, taking part in educational visits and attending the well organised before- and after-school activities.
 - Equality of opportunity is promoted effectively and discriminatory practices are not tolerated.
 - In accordance with the local authority policy, officers have monitored the school's performance. As the school has demonstrated good outcomes there has been no further support offered.
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■ The governance of the school:

- The governing body is developing well. Governors undertake regular training and are increasingly effective in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities. Some of the governors are relatively recent appointments and bring additional expertise to the governing body. Governors share the vision for the development of the school and have contributed to the development plan. This is based on an accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The actions are appropriate. However, the measures by which the impact of the actions can be checked are not sufficiently precise and are not linked closely enough to pupils' attainment and progress. As a result, the governing body is not able to challenge the leadership team robustly about the school's development. Nevertheless, the headteacher's detailed reports give governors a good understanding of the quality of teaching and how well pupils are doing compared with similar schools. Following the recent review of the school's Appraisal Policy, governors know where teaching is good, have a good understanding of how targets are set for teachers to improve it and the process for rewarding good teaching. The school's finances are monitored well. This has resulted in the school's overspend being eliminated. The governing body makes sure that pupil premium funding is being spent appropriately. However, the governing body has yet to receive an in-depth analysis of the impact of each activity. The governing body makes sure the school meets requirements for safeguarding pupils.
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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	109508
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	412573

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	2–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	328
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Graham Banfield
Headteacher	Deborah Pargeter
Date of previous school inspection	20 October 2009
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