

Caldecote VC Lower School

Manor Place, Upper Caldecote, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire SG18 9DA

Inspection dates

10–11 November 2015

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Safeguarding is ineffective because statutory requirements have not been met and advice in the statutory guidance *Keeping children safe in education* has not been followed closely.
- Processes for recruiting new staff are not rigorous enough.
- Pupils' outcomes have not been monitored closely enough and the school is unable to provide assessment information to demonstrate the progress pupils make.
- Attainment in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 1 has fallen since the last inspection and is below the national average.
- Over time, leaders have not monitored the quality of teaching closely and, as a result, there is too much inconsistency across the school.
- The spending of additional government funding is not monitored effectively. School leaders are unable to describe in any detail how either the pupil premium or the physical education and sports grant is spent and what impact this has had on pupils' learning and development.
- The quality of work in pupils' books is variable. Pupils are given too few opportunities to develop their writing at length, or to carry out mathematical investigations.
- Governors have not ensured that statutory responsibilities are met and have not monitored teaching, learning and outcomes well enough to ensure that this school is an improving one.

The school has the following strengths

- The part-time interim headteacher is a knowledgeable and experienced leader who is already having an impact on the school in the very short time that she has been in post.
- Pupils are polite and well mannered. They like coming to school and feel safe there.
- Attainment in phonics has risen year on year and was well above the national average in 2015.
- At the end of Key Stage 1, standards in English have risen over the last three years and compare well with the national average.
- Children in the early years make a good start. They make good progress during the Reception Year and the proportion who reach a good level of development is similar to the national average.

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve safeguarding practice so that it is fully effective by ensuring that:
 - the single central record meets all statutory requirements and that all staff, volunteers and contractors connected with the school are included in it
 - guidelines and requirements for ensuring the safe recruitment of all new staff are correctly implemented and procedures for working with volunteers are strengthened so that either a disclosure and barring service check (DBS) has been obtained or a suitable risk assessment carried out before that person is allowed to work directly with pupils, whether supervised or not
 - a designated safeguarding lead is available in school at all times and that anyone who is named as a designated safeguarding lead has been trained to the appropriate level within the last two years
 - procedures for dealing with child protection concerns are strengthened so that meticulous records are kept and held securely by the designated safeguarding leads.

- Improve the quality and effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - the quality of teaching is monitored regularly and thoroughly so that weaker teaching is tackled promptly and the strongest teaching is used to develop best practice throughout the school
 - subject leadership is developed so that individual leaders have a direct impact on improving outcomes and the quality of teaching in their subjects
 - leaders, including governors, monitor the spending of additional government funding and its impact on pupil outcomes, to evaluate whether it is used effectively
 - governors focus sufficiently strongly on the strategic leadership of the school so that they are able to hold leaders fully to account.

- Improve outcomes for pupils so that:
 - individuals and groups of pupils make demonstrably good progress from their starting points
 - attainment in mathematics is raised to at least the national average.

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - there is a system in place to allow pupils' progress to be tracked regularly and accurately
 - staff have consistently high expectations so that the work in pupils' books is of good quality in all subjects and all year groups
 - pupils are given sufficient opportunities to develop their investigative skills in mathematics and to write freely and at length across the curriculum
 - teaching in all classes and all subjects engages and motivates pupils so that their interest is maintained throughout lessons.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is inadequate

- Leadership of safeguarding is ineffective and statutory safeguarding requirements are not met. The advice given in the statutory guidance for schools, *Keeping children safe in education*, July 2015, has not been followed closely enough.
- The single central record does not meet statutory requirements. The record does not include all the required checks, and does not include all staff. In addition, other regular visitors to the school, such as contractors responsible for grounds maintenance, were not listed.
- Recruitment processes are not rigorous enough. The school's approach to obtaining adequate references when appointing support staff is too lax.
- The school's approach to working with volunteers has not been good enough. Until very recently, the school allowed volunteers to work with pupils without first making all the necessary checks or carrying out a risk assessment to ensure that appropriate control measures are put in place.
- Procedures for dealing with safeguarding concerns are inadequate. Although the interim headteacher is appropriately experienced and trained to take on the role of designated safeguarding lead, the part-time nature of her contract means that she is not in school for the majority of the week. A member of staff has been identified to deputise in the interim headteacher's absence but she has not been trained to the appropriate level and the timing of suitable training is not imminent. The school's approach to dealing with safeguarding concerns, and maintaining records of concerns, is neither thorough nor rigorous enough.
- Parents are rightly concerned about safeguarding practices in the school. However, parents also feel that their children are happy and feel safe at school and inspection evidence supports this.
- Inspection evidence does not support the accusation made by a group of parents that communication is poor or that information has been hidden. Following recent media reports, connected to the school by association, the school's leaders and governors, supported by the diocese and the local authority, have been as open with parents as is appropriate. They have made suitable efforts to communicate with parents, including several letters and an open meeting, and have made it clear that parents can speak to the part-time interim headteacher should they have further concerns.
- School leaders have not monitored the quality of teaching and learning closely enough. They were unable to provide any evidence of monitoring activity carried out since the last inspection. Where teaching is best, there is no evidence that this is in any way as a result of the quality of leadership rather than simply through, and because of, the intrinsic skills, efforts and abilities of individual members of staff.
- The school was unable to provide evidence that the additional funding it receives is spent effectively. Spending of the pupil premium grant has not been monitored and the school is unable to show the impact that this additional funding has had. Similarly, school leaders were unable to account for how the primary physical education and sport premium has been spent and what the impact of this spending has been.
- Leaders are now in place for all core subjects and special educational needs. They are keen, well-motivated and eager to develop their subjects further. However, leadership is underdeveloped because leaders are inexperienced, have received very little training and have not had the opportunity to monitor their subjects thoroughly, and so their impact on school improvement is limited.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and pupils enjoy their learning. The school uses a commercial package as a basic structure but this is enlivened and developed through teachers' own planning. The curriculum takes a thematic approach and teachers use a variety of interesting topics to link subjects together. For example, the Year 3 topic 'batteries included', although science based, includes the full range of National Curriculum subjects.
- The daily 'Kids Club' offers a range of extra-curricular activities to pupils. Although the primary purpose of the club is to provide before and after-school care, pupils can opt to attend specific sessions that interest them. The club offers a wide-ranging programme of activities during the year, including: drama, football, dance, science, craft and cookery.
- The part-time interim headteacher has been in post for a matter of days but her impact on the school is already clear. For example, although the single central record remains unfit for purpose, she has overseen significant improvements to it. Similarly, although systems around the use of volunteers are not yet strong enough, the part-time interim headteacher has brought about demonstrable improvements. Joint observations of lessons and discussions around the quality of pupils' work show clearly that the part-time

interim headteacher is able to judge the quality of teaching and learning accurately and knows what needs to be done next to improve it.

■ **The governance of the school**

- Governors are committed to the school and work diligently in their roles. Over the last four terms, governors have had to manage a number of very challenging situations. Each of these has required a good deal of time and attention.
 - As a result, the strategic leadership of the school has not been as strong or effective as it needs to be. Governors have not ensured that statutory safeguarding responsibilities are met and they have not checked thoroughly enough that the school's leaders have led and monitored the quality of teaching, learning and assessment effectively.
 - The Chair of the Governing Body acted immediately and appropriately upon learning of a serious safeguarding incident connected to the school by association. There is absolutely no evidence whatsoever that the governing body had any knowledge of this incident before it was reported in the local media.
- Although there have been recent improvements, the arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- The quality of teaching and learning is too variable; there is not enough good teaching. Weak leadership has led to a lack of focus on improving the quality of teaching in the school.
- The quality of work in pupils' books is variable and not enough is of a good standard. Too often, work is scruffy and does not show enough care and attention. Handwriting is often poorly developed and expectations of what pupils can produce are not high enough. Pupils sometimes lose concentration when teaching is weaker.
- There is little written work in some pupils' books. Where there is more work, this is frequently limited to restrictive exercises to be completed. This means that in English, pupils have too few opportunities to write freely or at length. In mathematics, pupils do not have enough opportunities to investigate and to develop their ability to think through wider mathematical problems. As a result, they do not extend their learning or make progress as quickly as they could do.
- Assessment practices are underdeveloped. The school continues to assess pupils using National Curriculum levels that have now been withdrawn. However, the part-time interim headteacher has put processes in place to introduce new assessment arrangements that have been introduced successfully in her other schools.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly and conscientiously, but too often teachers' assessments do not help pupils to improve. Comments such as 'well done' and 'check' do little to show pupils what is good about their work and how to improve it.
- Where teaching is strongest, teachers' explanations are very clear and their delivery engaging. As a result, pupils understand very clearly what they are learning and what is expected of them, and their interest and concentration is maintained. For example, in a Year 2 literacy lesson, pupils made rapid progress in learning to spell words with added suffixes because the teacher made the lesson interesting and explained the spelling rules particularly clearly.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Although the leadership practices around safeguarding are inadequate there is no evidence to show that these have had any impact on pupils' safety. Although policies and procedures have not ensured pupils' safety, the staff team's vigilance and commitment has done so.
- Pupils are polite and well mannered. The school is a welcoming place and pupils talk confidently and respectfully to visitors.
- Pupils feel safe at school. They feel free from bullying and they are confident that staff would be able to

help them if a problem should arise. Pupils' understanding of bullying, and the different forms it can take, is limited.

- The school teaches pupils about values such as tolerance, humility and forgiveness explicitly. Each month, the school focuses on a specific value and pupils are well aware of this. Information on values is readily available to parents on the school's website.
- Pupils usually show good attitudes to learning. They enjoy their lessons and like coming to school. However, they do not always try as hard as they could because teachers' expectations are not always high enough.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils get on well together and show caring attitudes towards each other.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and during less structured parts of the day. Disruption in lessons is rare.
- Attendance is below the national average, particularly for some groups including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs. The school has introduced new procedures to follow up absence more quickly; it is too soon to see the effect of these measures.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- The school was not able to provide assessment information during the inspection to demonstrate that pupils make good progress at school. Similarly, leaders were unable to provide information on the attainment and progress of specific groups of pupils. Information from the school's most recent assessments does not show that Year 4 pupils have made good progress when the standard of their current work is compared with their attainment at the end of Key Stage 1.
- The work in pupils' books is variable and frequently below age-related expectations. Overall, it does not provide sufficient evidence on its own to conclude that pupils make good progress.
- At the end of Key Stage 1 in 2015, the proportion of pupils who attained the expected level was in line with the national average in reading and above it in writing. Similarly, the proportion reaching the higher levels was in line with the national average in reading and above it in writing. For both subjects there has been a gentle rising trend in attainment since the last inspection. Mathematics, on the other hand, is weaker. Fewer pupils reached the expected level or the higher levels than the national average and overall attainment has fallen since the last inspection.
- Pupils make good progress with phonics (the sounds that letters represent) and achieve well. In 2015, all Year 1 pupils reached the expected level in the phonics screening check. The check is a statutory assessment of pupils' phonics knowledge, undertaken towards the end of Year 1.

Early years provision

is good

- Children join the Reception class with skills and abilities broadly typical of their age. They settle quickly and make good progress during their time in the early years. The proportion of pupils who reach a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year is similar to the national average.
- The early years provision is well led. The leader knows what needs to be changed and developed in order to improve it further. Staff have a good understanding of the needs of very young children and plan activities appropriately. The quality of teaching is good and meets children's individual needs.
- Transition arrangements are good, both as children enter the Reception class and as they leave it. The early years' leader liaises with the local pre-schools and parents are provided with regular opportunities for their children to 'stay and play' before they start school. Similarly, children have the opportunity to visit their new class before they join Year 1. Their learning journey books are passed on to their new teacher and the early years' leader liaises with the Year 1 teacher to ensure that children are ready to start Year 1.
- Children play well together and are learning to cooperate with each other. Staff continually model how they want children to speak to each other and they set high expectations for children's behaviour.
- Staff take children's behaviour and safety very seriously. They teach children rules as soon as they join the class and the children follow them because they know that they are expected to. Staff take opportunities to teach safety messages when they arise, such as reinforcing fire safety messages while lighting diya candles during a lesson about the Hindu festival of Diwali.

School details

Unique reference number	109596
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10009082

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	89
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Madeline Russell
Headteacher (interim)	Mandy Reddick (part-time)
Telephone number	01767 316206
Website	www.caldecotelowerschool.co.uk
Email address	caldecote@cbc.beds.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	4–5 December 2013

Information about this school

- This lower school is much smaller than average. It has one class per year group from Reception Year to Year 4. As a result, class sizes are much smaller than is typical in most primary schools.
- The school's substantive headteacher has been absent from the school since April 2015. An interim headteacher led the school, part time, during the summer term. The current part-time interim headteacher joined the school in September 2015 for one day per week.
- The Chair of the Governing Body joined the governing body in September 2014. Four governors have left the governing body during the last year and there are currently two vacancies.
- Children join the Reception class, full time, in the September following their fourth birthday.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium is much lower than the national average. The pupil premium provides additional government funding for specific groups of children including those who are known to be eligible for free school meals and children in the care of the local authority. The social deprivation indicator for the school is much lower than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is about half the national average. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is below the national average.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out following concerns brought to Ofsted's attention.
- The inspector gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment over time. The inspector observed parts of nine lessons, all jointly with the part-time interim headteacher. The inspector looked at pupils' exercise books, listened to pupils reading and talked to them about their work. The inspector examined the school's documentation on pupils' outcomes.
- The views of parents were taken into account including: informal conversations on the playground; 21 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire; paperwork presented by a parent on behalf of a 'parent action group'; and two letters from parents.
- Meetings were held with pupils, staff, governors, a representative of the local authority and a representative of the Diocese. The inspector spoke with the assistant director, school improvement manager and the senior human resources manager for Central Bedfordshire Council, and the Director of Education for the Diocese of St Albans by telephone.
- The inspector looked at a range of school documents including information about safeguarding, the school's self-evaluation summary, and behaviour and attendance records.

Inspection team

Wendy Varney, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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