

Inspection of Dunstable Ickniel Lower School

Burr Street, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU6 3AG

Inspection dates: 14 and 15 November 2023, and 6 February 2024

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Outstanding

This school was last inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 12 years ago and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between graded inspections under section 5 of the Act. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Expectations of pupils' behaviour are improving. Some pupils behave well and understand how to follow the rules. However, there are some pupils whose behaviour disrupts the learning of others. Pupils try hard to concentrate, but they become frustrated when they cannot learn as well as they should.

More recently, pupils are becoming increasingly confident that behaviour is getting better. Pupils say that they feel safe and that bullying is not common. There are some pupils who get extra support with their behaviour. This helps them to make the right choices about their behaviour and understand the impact this has on others.

Expectations of pupils' achievement are not high enough. The school has made recent changes to the teaching of reading for older pupils and writing for all. These changes are not yet fully developed but are making some differences to pupils' learning.

Pupils have opportunities to extend their experiences beyond the curriculum. These include sporting and other clubs that develop pupils' talents. Pupils like to take on extra responsibilities. Some of these are new, while others are not developing pupils as much as they could. For instance, the school council is keen to have a more significant role.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school has recently reviewed the curriculum. Leaders have carefully chosen the vocabulary pupils need to learn from the early years to Year 4. As a result, pupils learn the subject-specific language they need. However, the school has not fully developed curriculum plans for the foundation subjects. The plans do not make clear the skills and knowledge that pupils need to learn from the early years. As a result, it is hard for the early years staff to know what to teach the children so that they are fully ready for Year 1.

Early reading is a priority. Pupils are introduced to the foundations of phonics in Nursery and begin to learn phonics as soon as they start in Reception. However, there is a variation in the quality with which teachers ask the children to recall letter sounds. Children successfully read books that match their phonics knowledge. In key stage 1, staff check pupils' progress at regular points. Where needed, pupils have 'keep-up' sessions. These help pupils who struggle with reading to catch up before they enter Year 3. The school has made recent changes to the teaching of reading for pupils in key stage 2 to promote a love of reading. This is supporting many pupils to become confident and more regular readers.

In the early years, staff design tasks that develop children's early mathematics skills effectively. Children can practise and improve their basic skills. Tasks link well to the class learning, and children are keen to try them out. However, experiences in other

areas of learning do not develop children's knowledge well enough. As a result, children are not being prepared as well as they should be for learning areas of the curriculum in Year 1.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are identified accurately. However, the school does not seek the support some pupils need quickly enough. The school does check pupils' progress. However, these checks do not precisely and consistently focus on the needs of pupils. This means that teachers' expectations for what pupils with SEND can achieve are not always high enough.

The school has focused on improving behaviour. The existing behaviour systems have been revised. Staff have received additional training. Leaders have successfully put in place various individual plans to support pupils to behave and learn well. Staff, parents and pupils have mixed views about behaviour at the school. The school is focusing on getting this right. However, it is taking time for everyone to feel more confident about the actions being taken and their impact on improving behaviour.

Leaders take care of pupils and consider well their emotional and well-being needs. The school provides a broad personal development programme, which supports pupils' social and emotional development needs. The school ensures that all pupils have access to various interesting experiences, such as theatre visits. Pupils remember these well. Leaders have considered carefully how to develop pupils' character.

Governors have pupils' best interests at the heart of their work. They visit the school regularly to find out what is happening. However, their oversight of the school's work is not precise enough for them to hold leaders to account rigorously. Governors' knowledge and understanding of key aspects, such as behaviour, are not secure enough. They cannot gather the right information to give them an accurate view of the school's provision. This limits the challenge and support that governors can provide to improve the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Governors do not have the depth of knowledge and understanding required to be able to support and hold leaders to account for key aspects of the school's work, such as the quality of education and promoting positive behaviour and attitudes. The school should ensure that governors can gather and evaluate the information needed so that they can provide appropriate support and challenge to hold leaders fully to account for improving the school.

- Curriculum plans for some foundation subjects do not begin in the early years. Consequently, it is unclear exactly what knowledge and skills children need to learn in the Reception class to be fully ready for the key stage 1 curriculum. The school needs to develop the subject plans further and identify the key developmental knowledge that children should learn.
- The early reading programme is not taught consistently in all classes. Some staff do not make sure that all pupils have listened carefully to the sounds and then repeat them back accurately. This slows pupils' progress. The school needs to monitor the effectiveness of the teaching of early reading and ensure that staff are supported to improve their practice where needed.
- The school does not carefully develop the academic knowledge of pupils with SEND carefully enough. Teachers' expectations for pupils with SEND are not always high enough. Systems that create targets for pupils are not individual or specific enough. The school should ensure that all support for pupils with SEND accurately meets their specific needs and that all staff have high expectations so that pupils with SEND achieve well.
- Some pupils do not meet the school's expectations for behaviour. Some pupils, parents and staff are not confident in the changes taking place to secure better behaviour. The school needs to ensure that it continues to provide further training, guidance and support to ensure that everyone can contribute to improving behaviour.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	109444
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10288418
Type of school	First
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	328
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Rowena Harrison
Headteacher	Glynn Stirling
Website	www.dunstableicknield.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	June 2011

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, there have been significant changes to staffing. While the school has been going through the process of recruiting permanent staff and covering long-term absence, there has been a period where temporary staff have been in place.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND has increased recently.
- The school uses the services of one alternative provider.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Inspectors first visited the school on 14 and 15 November 2023. Ofsted deemed that further evidence was required to secure the inspection judgements. As a result, this

inspection was deemed 'incomplete.' Two of His Majesty's Inspectors visited the school on 6 February 2024 to gather more evidence about behaviour and attitudes.

- Inspections are point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, computing, physical education and geography. For each deep dive, the inspectors held discussions with the curriculum lead, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspectors also carried out further explorations into the mathematics curriculum, writing curriculum and their curriculum for personal, social, health and economic education by looking at workbooks and carrying out some lesson visits.
- The inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at lunchtime and in lessons.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, middle leaders and other school staff.
- The lead inspector spoke with a representative from the local authority.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of staff, leaders and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspectors considered the 67 responses and 37 free-text responses made by parents to the survey, Ofsted Parent View. The inspectors also considered the 37 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire.
- The inspectors examined a range of documents provided by the school, including leaders' school development plans and the school's self-evaluation document.

Inspection team

Jessie Linsley, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Helen Jones	Ofsted Inspector
Laura Hewer	Ofsted Inspector
Tracy Fielding, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Peter Stonier	His Majesty's Inspector

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