

INSPECTION REPORT

Eversholt Lower School

Eversholt, Milton Keynes.

LEA area: Bedfordshire

Unique reference number: 109449

Headteacher: Mrs H Hofton

Reporting inspector: Mrs J Spouse
10028

Dates of inspection: 18th January 2000

Inspection number: 188912

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Lower
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	4 to 9
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Church End Eversholt Milton Keynes
Postcode:	MK17 9DU
Telephone number:	01525 280298
Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Caroline Adams (Acting)
Date of previous inspection:	11 th -13 th June 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	
Jane Spouse	Registered inspector
Julia Steward	Lay inspector

The inspection contractor was:

Quality Assurance Consultants
The Hucclecote Centre
Churchdown Lane
Hucclecote
Gloucester
GL3 3QN

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Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The school has 66 boys and girls aged from 4-9 years. The number on roll has risen from 27 in 1991 to the current figure of 66 because of its popularity. Children on entry have a higher-than-average profile of ability than for Bedfordshire as a whole, although the school's profiles of ability changes from year to year. Fourteen children are identified by the school as having special educational needs, which is in line with the national average. There are no children with statements of special need. There are no children eligible for free school meals, which is well below the national average. Only one child does not have English as a first language. The school serves the village of Eversholt and neighbouring villages which are characterised by high quality housing and low unemployment. Parents show a strong commitment to working in partnership with the school. The school is much smaller than the great majority of primary schools. It is organised into three classes and children are taught by three full-time teachers and one part-time teacher.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school. The pupils achieve high standards in all aspects of their education. The strengths of the school greatly outweigh its weaknesses.

What the school does well

- Promotes high attainment in English, particularly reading, mathematics, science and information and communication technology.
- Provides good teaching, with much that is very good. Teachers are keen to learn from others.
- Promotes attitudes which lead to children enjoying and valuing every opportunity to learn.
- Provides very well for children's personal development and prepares children effectively for the next stage of education.
- Has an outstanding partnership with parents, which underpins children's good progress.
- Has very effective leadership at all levels, focused on sustaining and improving very high standards.

What could be improved

- Aspects of the accommodation. The size of the hall restricts curricular opportunities, particularly in physical education.
- Standards in writing, which are slightly lower than other aspects of English.
- The link between strategic and financial planning.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has raised standards even further since the last inspection in 1996, in particular those of the more able. Reports to parents now fulfil the statutory requirements. New facilities and a single class for the under fives have improved the range of their learning. Standards of attainment are now very closely monitored through a range of assessments linked to curricular requirements. Information from this process is used to identify very precisely what needs to be taught, leading to higher standards for all pupils. The school is well placed to sustain current performance and to continue to improve.

STANDARDS

The table shows the grades achieved by seven year olds in the National Curriculum tests from 1997-1999. Grades are based on the average points achieved by pupils in comparison with all schools and in comparison with similar schools.

Key Stage 1 National Curriculum tests/tasks	In comparison with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
Reading	A*	A*	A*	A
Writing	A*	A*	A	B
Mathematics	A*	A*	A	A

Key	
Very high	A*
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

At Key Stage 1, standards are very high in reading and well above average in writing and mathematics. In comparison with similar schools standards are well above average in reading and mathematics and above average in writing. Standards in the teacher assessed science tests are also well above average. The work seen during the inspection reflects these standards. Over half of the five year olds achieve higher standards than expected for their age in language, literacy and in numeracy. At the age of nine standards remain high in reading and mathematics and are above average in writing.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Children are highly motivated and enjoy school. They know the value of learning. They are self-assured and face new experiences with confidence.
Behaviour in and out of classrooms	Children are very well behaved, open and responsive. They enjoy and contribute to the rich community of the school.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Children have a strong sense of responsibility for their own learning, and towards the school community as a whole.
Attendance	Very good. Children enjoy coming to school. Lessons start promptly and no time is wasted.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged up to 5 years	aged 5-7 years	aged 7-9 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good	Very good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

Teaching in the school is good. In literacy it is very good in Key Stage 2. In numeracy it is very good in both key stages. The teaching of ICT is carefully integrated into other subjects. The best teaching is enthusiastic and uses imaginative strategies to capture pupils' interest. Teachers are very clear about what individuals need to learn and how best to move them on. Teachers constantly challenge pupils with astute questioning, which probes and deepens their understanding.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. There is an appropriate emphasis on literacy and numeracy. The curriculum meets the statutory requirements, and the school has the confidence to adapt these to suit its needs.
Provision for special educational needs and pupils with English as an additional language	Early identification and analysis of need leads to children with special needs or English as an additional language making good progress. The school involves parents well and expects and gains their support.
Provision for pupils' personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. The excellent rôle models provided by adults and the expectations of the whole community secure children's sense of their rights and responsibilities. Children learn to reflect on the experiences and traditions of others.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school gets to know its pupils quickly. It keeps careful track of their development, ensuring pupils' welfare. Appropriate support is given promptly when needed.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher leads with flair and optimism. There is a determination to seek and obtain the best for all pupils. There is a strong drive for maintaining and improving standards.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are strong and effective advocates for the children at Eversholt. Their high level of skills is used effectively to secure the best possible provision.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Rigorous evaluation of standards leads to the identification of appropriate emphases in teaching and learning. The school energetically and confidently seeks ways to improve all aspects of its provision. It monitors progress and makes adjustments where necessary.
The strategic use of resources	The school makes very good use of staff, learning resources, time and the available accommodation. They are striving to improve the cramped hall-space which limits physical education. Expenditure is well focused but links between financial and strategic planning are not sufficiently clear.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the expectations that children will work hard and do their best. • good teaching. • the way the school deals with their questions or problems. • the leadership and management of the school. • the behaviour of children. • that their children like school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the range of activities outside lessons.

The inspectors agree with parents' positive comments. Given the size of the school, the range of extra-curricular activities is appropriate. Support from parents and from the local cluster group of schools has recently widened the scope of the opportunities available. Teachers' time outside lessons is well focused on curriculum management.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The school promotes high attainment in English (particularly reading), Mathematics and Science

1. The pupils achieve particularly high standards in reading, mathematics and science in National Curriculum tests. Standards in writing are now improving from an already high level.
2. These results are echoed in previous years' tests. A slight dip in last year's results can be attributed to the small number of children taking the test and a change in the composition of the class. The school carried out a thorough analysis of strengths and comparative weaknesses in pupils' performance in the tests. This has led to a careful emphasis on those areas that could be improved, such as mental number work and writing. The drive and expectations of all staff to improve standards is equalled by the children's own awareness and confidence that they can meet those expectations.
3. In the reception class, children's interest in books is captured early. They begin to recognise the sound and shape of letters and to build up their phonic knowledge. They join in enthusiastically with their teacher when she is reading a class book with them.
4. This emphasis on reading continues into the next stages of the school. By Year 2 the most able children use their good knowledge of phonics to break down words such as 'sympathetically' and 'successfully' and can explain their meaning. They read regularly at home and at school. Some are able to express their preferences for different types of books, such as those about adventures, and can read excerpts with expression and fluency. In Year 4 their enjoyment in books extends to an awareness of how helpful reading can be to other areas of learning.
5. Writing skills are emphasised across the school. Children know precisely what needs to be improved in their spelling and handwriting, for instance a five year old remembered her targets of writing capital 'I's and smaller 'w' and 's' in words within the class target of neater handwriting. By the age of nine some pupils use their knowledge of characterisation and wide vocabulary to produce vivid and sophisticated work – 'suddenly a huge hand shot out of the trees and grabbed him...he yearned to scream, but knew better'. Presentation of different forms of writing is clear, fluent and attractive, such as the delightful work on pirates displayed in the classroom. Older children have acquired technical vocabulary about language which they use confidently when discussing text, but are less secure in applying to their own writing.
6. In mathematics children's mental agility with numbers is good. In Year 2 they can identify and explore which units make 10 within a 3 figure addition and some move quickly on to identifying those which make 30 and 40. Working with these high numbers would not normally be expected until Year 3. They can explain why this makes adding quicker and use mathematical terms accurately to do so. Teachers continue to challenge children to explain their thinking. In Years 3/4 questions such as 'How do you know?', 'Are you sure?', 'Explain your thinking?' peppered the numeracy lesson. This led to children thinking for themselves, for instance when checking rounding to the nearest ten, or when using doubling of 8 or 7 to add 8 and 7.
7. Standards in information and communication technology are high. Children use information technology confidently to follow up their work, to share ideas with peers in other

primary schools, and to find a range of information. The oldest use e-mail and the internet, both within lessons and in their lunch breaks.

8. Central to the drive to sustain and improve high standards are the commitment and interest of all the school community. Targets are set for all children so that they know precisely where their work can be improved and learn quickly how they should go about doing so.

The school provides good teaching, with a high percentage which is very good. Teachers are keen to learn from others.

9. Throughout the school teachers teach well. As a group they discuss what has worked and what hasn't, and look for ways to develop. They learn about new national strategies and are prepared to work hard at adapting them to suit the mixed-age groups and particular learning needs of their pupils. They have high expectations of themselves as well as of the children in their class. They acknowledge that teaching is hard work but find the rewards high.

10. A key factor in the success of the teaching is the care with which teachers get to know children. Whilst the overall analysis of standards shows particular strengths and weaknesses, prompt assessments of children and their work are used very carefully to tailor the teaching and demands made. Children who have special educational needs or English as a second language are well-supported as a result of these strategies. This is reflected in day-to-day work in the way in which children are assessed and challenged. For example, the general assistant in a numeracy session was asked to note 'who uses their fingers, the number line or can do without to work out problems' to help with assessment. In the marking of written work the feedback to one child was 'don't let all the details muddle the story' and to another 'now read your work through carefully before putting in the commas'.

11. Teachers move the lessons on at a brisk pace and vary activities so that children experience a range of ways of learning. Within these are incorporated key opportunities to reflect what children enjoy. For instance, the majority of children are very keen to talk and give their views, so their teacher makes effective use of partnered discussion work; a few of the very youngest children find concentrating on activities for any length of time difficult so they can select a favourite learning activity for themselves once their task is completed.

12. The high ratio of adults to children means that greater attention can be given to all. General assistants make a significant contribution in lessons, working under the guidance of teachers but sharing in the commitment to learning. This shared drive was encapsulated by the most recently appointed member of staff when she said, 'I don't feel like a new person, I'm a member of the team'.

13. Teachers believe strongly that parental help is crucial, and give homework regularly. Details about homework requirements are made very clear, to the extent that they are on the school's website. Parental support with reading has been a significant factor in the high standards achieved, and the guidance provided by teachers has been helpful.

The school promotes attitudes which lead to children enjoying and valuing every opportunity to learn.

14. From the moment they enter school, children begin to learn 'the Eversholt way'. There is a culture of working hard, valuing education, and doing their best. They quickly become part of this culture. They know what is expected of them, both in general behaviour and in their learning. All, including the youngest, have personal targets. They know what

these are and work hard to achieve them. When, in Key Stage 1, a child achieves his target 'to write sentences that begin with capital letters and end with full stops' he proudly gains a merit mark, and moves on to work towards his next target. Each child is therefore directed very carefully to take that exact step which will move him or her on. Because their progress is so carefully guided, children soon gain confidence in their own abilities.

15. In lessons they respond well to the expectation that they will work hard. They enjoy mental mathematics sessions, particularly when they play games which test their mental recall. If tripped up by these games, they react with humour even, on one occasion, identifying what homework was necessary to prevent it happening again. The excellent relationships in classrooms help to promote enjoyment of learning. Teachers value children's ideas, challenge their thinking and use their mistakes for the benefit of all. This gives children the perseverance, confidence and determination to strive for success. The 'Eversholt way' was captured during the inspection by a child in Year 2 who confided to an inspector 'I have a computer in my brain. What we find hard now, later on we'll know it. The best thing about school is things getting harder'.

The school prepares children effectively for the next stage of education and provides very well for their personal development

16. Eversholt's emphasis on fostering independence and a sense of personal and collective responsibility prepares children well for moving on to their next school. In the reception class they learn the social skills which facilitate learning. Interruptions in lessons are skilfully handled to maintain the contributor's enthusiasm, while reminding him or her of the importance of taking turns and listening to one another. The teacher encourages independence, expecting the most able to use word books to check spellings. Children begin to take responsibility for their own learning and development. Their personal targets posted on the wall act as a reminder. This approach is built on in Key Stage 1, where each child knows and works towards his or her own targets. Children in Key Stage 1 have tasks, such as opening programmes on computers, which they carry out conscientiously. They offer to fetch books or chairs for one another when necessary. In lessons they work without direct supervision. They are polite to adults and considerate of one another, even though their enthusiasm occasionally gets the better of them when talking in a group.

17. The oldest pupils are expected to take on responsibilities which would often be denied them in a school which includes Years 5 and 6. They operate music equipment for assembly, and work on computers at lunch-times without direct supervision. They are expected to come to lessons with the equipment they need, and are constantly reminded that this will be an expectation of their middle school when they move on. They are expected to complete thirty minutes of homework each night, and most do so, with many insisting that their parents also play their part. The work ethic, both at school and at home, is very well established.

18. Adults provide excellent rôle models. They work together to provide the best for the children. They are thoughtful and reflective in their practice. Children mirror this approach. They work and play well together, have a clear focus on learning, and make good use of the opportunities provided to reflect on the experiences and traditions of others. Their 'Millennium Heroes' display shows an understanding of the impact of outside events on others' lives.

19. The school takes measures to prevent children in small year groups feeling isolated. They sometimes join with children from other schools for specific activities. By the time they reach Year 4, most children have a mature attitude to school. They want to succeed and know that they have the prime responsibility for ensuring that this happens. When asked why he works hard, even when the subject is difficult, one child responded, 'I shall leave soon and I want to be able to look back on something good.'

The school has an outstanding partnership with parents which underpins children's progress

20. When children enter the school, their parents become 'Eversholt parents'. The school expects parents to take an interest in their children's learning, and to give them every support, and most parents do so. The partnership goes well beyond the simple rhetoric of a home/school agreement. Parents are caught up in the commitment of the school community to put children's learning ahead of everything else. Parents at the pre-inspection meeting talked of their own children insisting that they should help with homework. Sometimes, they felt, it gets in the way of other things, but were prepared to support their children because they want them to do well. The school provides them with the information they need to direct efforts most productively and parents have the ability to use this information constructively. Their children benefit. Homework is purposeful and aids children's progress. In the case of pupils who have joined the school late, involving parents in what has been missed at a previous school has been the key to helping children to catch up with their peers. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are contacted early to gain their support in helping their children with specific programmes of learning. Parents say that they find the school approachable, though some at the pre-inspection meeting spoke of the difficulty of contacting a headteacher who is necessarily in the classroom sixty percent of the time.

21. The strong demand from the acting chair of governors that the pre-inspection questionnaires should be returned is illustrative of the school's expectations of parents. The fact that ninety-five percent of questionnaires were returned speaks loudly of the parents' commitment. Parents are also prepared to use their talents for the good of the school. There have been many self-help projects and some regular after-school clubs. There are frequent fundraising activities. The most recent raised £7,000 towards the cost of the new reception class.

22. Eversholt is reportedly a community where people become involved. The involvement of parents in their children's schooling is a significant reflection of their willingness to support their community. It has a considerable impact on the standards achieved.

The school has very effective leadership at all levels, focused on sustaining and improving high standards.

23. There is a very strong commitment at all levels, headteacher, governors, staff and parents, for maintaining and improving standards. In particular, the headteacher has a clear and confident drive for quality. The corporate focus on the main purpose of the school, the teaching and learning, generates a high level of interest and enthusiasm. The school faces challenges with optimism and flair. National initiatives, such as the literacy and numeracy strategies, are welcomed but adapted with a flexibility to suit the school rather than interpreted as a straightjacket which might confine or restrict it. Links with a group of local schools are used to pre-empt any potential isolation and extend the available opportunities for both staff and children. The headteacher is quick to identify ways in which shortcomings of space could be overcome, and governors excel in following these through.

24. The headteacher makes very good use of the expertise of others. For instance she has benefited from working productively with the LEA to develop the computerised programme which tracks pupils' progress from reception to Year 4. This ensures that information about individual rates of progress, trends in boys', girls' or class progress can be analysed and acted upon - and it is. Such lack of complacency in a school which is doing so well is impressive. A similar commitment is seen in the high percentage of expenditure

targeted on staff development and training which takes place both within and outside school. As a result, staff are informed, skilled and up to date.

25. The relationship between the headteacher and governors is strong. Governors contribute significantly to the success of the school. They are actively recruited to provide appropriate expertise which will be helpful. Their commitment to improvement gives them the courage to tackle what others might regard as sensitive issues. For instance, the headteacher has had performance targets for the last four years. Their determination for the future of Eversholt School was manifested in the highly strategic manner in which both a classroom and a teacher for the Reception children were secured.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Standards in writing, which are slightly lower than other aspects of English

26. Standards in writing, whilst high, are slightly lower than in other aspects of English. The current emphasis on raising standards in writing needs to be sustained. The skills and knowledge gained in looking at texts and developing reading need to continue to be considered in modelled, shared and guided writing opportunities. In particular, time for writing complete stories or accounts needs to be given so that these skills can be purposefully applied. An emphasis on the endings of stories would also help to guide the organisation and content of paragraphs which determine the story's final form.

The link between long-term strategic and financial planning

27. Governors are very clear about the strategic direction of the school. Their ability to plan the use of their finances to support this is limited by the current content of the school development plan. The need for greater attention to strategic financial planning has been recognised by governors and the school is well placed to take this forward.

Aspects of the accommodation, particularly where it restricts curricular opportunities such as physical education.

28. The hall is inadequate for physical education. There is insufficient space for children to move freely and safely and this limits the work which can be undertaken on apparatus. The hall is cramped when all children are assembled for collective worship. It has been recognised as an area for development, but plans have yet to be implemented. Similarly, the staff room, whilst reportedly an improvement on past provision, remains cramped and belies the school's concern for staff welfare.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

The school should now:

give the necessary attention to the details of improving writing;

improve the link between strategic and financial planning;

continue to press for and secure improved accommodation.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	6
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	10

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
	33%	67%				

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Nursery	YR – Y4
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)		65
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals		0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery	YR – Y4
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs		0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register		14

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	1

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	4
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	5

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	3.8
National comparative data	5.4

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0
National comparative data	0.5

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	5	8	13

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	5	5	5
	Girls	7	7	7
	Total	12	12	12
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	92	92	92
	National	82	83	87

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	5	5	5
	Girls	7	7	7
	Total	12	12	12
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	92%	92%	92%
	National	82%	86%	87%

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	
Black – African heritage	
Black – other	
Indian	
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	
White	65
Any other minority ethnic group	

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y4

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	3.4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.3
Average class size	21.7

Education support staff: YR – Y4

Total number of education support staff	3.0
Total aggregate hours worked per week	64

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	0	0
Other minority ethnic groups		

This table gives the number of exclusions of pupils of compulsory school age, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Financial information

Financial year	1998-9
	£
Total income	121,834
Total expenditure	122,483
Expenditure per pupil	1,976
Balance brought forward from previous year	15,773
Balance carried forward to next year	15,124

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	61
Number of questionnaires returned	58

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	64	34	2		
My child is making good progress in school.	54	42	4		
Behaviour in the school is good.	60	34	5		
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	42	49	9		
The teaching is good.	64	34	2		
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	47	40	9	4	
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	64	26	9	2	
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	72	28			
The school works closely with parents.	41	47	9	2	2
The school is well led and managed.	68	21	2	2	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	51	46	2		2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	13	40	24	16	7