



Inspection report

# Shefford CE (VC) Primary School

**Better  
education  
and care**

Unique Reference Number 109975  
LEA West Berkshire

Inspection number 275458  
Inspection dates 4 and 5 May 2005  
Reporting inspector Mrs C Munt HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

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Type of School	Primary	School address	Wantage Road
School category	Voluntary Controlled <i>Diocese of Oxford</i>		Great Shefford
Age range of pupils	5 to 11 years		Hungerford
			Berkshire
			RG17 7DB
Gender of pupils	mixed	Telephone number	01488 648657
Number on roll	47	Fax number	01488 649562
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Ms M Harwood
Date of previous inspection	June 2003	Headteacher	Mrs L Hankin

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Age group	Published	Reference no.
5 to 11 years	24 June 2005	275458

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## Introduction

When Shefford CE (VC) Primary School was inspected in June 2003, it was judged to require special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education. Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools (HMI) subsequently visited the school on five occasions to monitor its progress, and reinspected the school in May 2005.

### Description of the school

Shefford CE (VC) Primary School serves the village of Great Shefford and the surrounding area. The school is much smaller than average with 47 pupils on roll; far fewer than at the time of the last inspection. There are 3 mixed-age classes, none of which has more than 19 pupils. The pupils are predominantly from white British backgrounds and a smaller proportion than average is entitled to free school meals. On starting school, the pupils' attainment is generally below average. Ten pupils have been identified as having special educational needs and two of them have a Statement of Special Educational Need.

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## Overall effectiveness of the school

In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils.

The school has had three headteachers in the last two years. A permanent headteacher, who takes up her post in September, is working alongside the current, interim headteacher. The interim headteacher brought stability and a renewed sense of purpose to the school's work. Her supportive leadership boosted morale and channelled the industry and willingness of the staff to bring about improvement. Standards are close to national expectations and are rising; the pupils have responded well to the teachers' higher expectations. The quality of teaching is generally satisfactory, although the proportion of very good teaching is too small. There are some weaknesses in the teachers' subject knowledge and the pupils' achievements are not always as good as they should be in writing in all classes and in science in lower Key Stage 2. The curriculum meets statutory requirements. A broad range of extra activities engages the pupils' interest, encouraging them to be effective, responsible learners and confident members of the school community. Many pupils take part in these activities. The school has a warm, family atmosphere.

### Improvement since the last inspection

The inspection in June 2003 required the school to address key issues concerned with leadership, management and governance, standards, the quality of teaching, curriculum and assessment and management of the pupils' behaviour. There has been good progress in relation to leadership, governance, assessment and managing behaviour and sound progress in relation to the other issues.

### Capacity to improve

The school's capacity for further improvement is sound. The governing body, headteacher and staff, with the support of the local education authority (LEA) and the Diocese, are committed to raising standards and improving the school's profile in the local community. Carefully planned and appropriately funded arrangements for transferring the school's leadership to the new headteacher ensure that the momentum for improvement is set to continue. Securing appropriate provision for each class is a priority for the school. By reviewing staffing levels regularly, the governors have managed to achieve this despite fluctuations in the number of pupils on roll. There are robust, consistent systems to set targets and to track the pupils' progress which are used well to decide how best to meet the pupils' needs. Suitable systems to monitor the school's performance have recently been put in place, but require time to become fully established. There are growing strengths in the teaching in the Foundation Stage and in upper Key Stage 2. Effective teamwork has given the teachers increased confidence in identifying priorities for action, but there are gaps in their expertise in leading programmes of improvement. Rightly, the school is reviewing its organisational arrangements to make the most effective use of its budget.

## What the school should do to improve further

The key priorities for the school's development plan are to

- accelerate the rate of the pupils' learning, especially in writing and science;
- improve further the quality of teaching;
- strengthen the effectiveness of subject leadership;
- keep the school's financial and staffing structures under review.

## Achievement and standards

The pupils in the Foundation Stage have made rapid progress since January. Their personal, social and emotional development is good and most are working at the expected level for their age in the other areas of learning. This is a significant improvement, particularly in literacy and mathematical development. In Key Stages 1 and 2, the rate of the pupils' progress has increased and is at least satisfactory and sometimes good. Basic skills in language and mathematics are taught systematically. Consequently, gaps in the pupils' literacy skills and in their recall of number facts are being addressed appropriately.

Standards are rising because better focussed teaching motivates the pupils and is accelerating their progress. In most of the lessons, standards were close to what is expected for the pupils' ages. However, there are weaknesses in writing and some pupils have an insecure grasp of spelling and punctuation which prevents them from making as much progress as they should. In Key Stage 2, several groups of pupils were working at levels higher than expected for their age groups in some aspects of mathematics. Standards were above national expectations in geography and art and design.

The national test results in 2004 at both key stages were lower than the national figures and the results of schools with pupils of similar prior attainment or entitlement to free school meals. However, the very small number of pupils in each year group makes it difficult to make secure comparisons against national data. The school's pupil-tracking records show that this year most of the pupils made at least sound progress in reading, writing and mathematics; some, including those who have special educational needs, made very good progress, in some instances from a low starting level. In the lower Key Stage 2 class, gaps in the pupils' prior learning continue to hamper them. The school knows that despite recent improvements, standards remain too low, and the staff are working systematically and effectively to boost the attainment of all pupils. An example of this is the excellent provision for higher attaining pupils in Years 5 and 6. They are joined by pupils from four local schools each week for an afternoon of extended mathematics, language and logical thinking taught by a leading skills teacher. Challenging targets have been set for 2005 for the pupils in Years 2 and 6 and the school expects that they will attain them.

## Personal development

When the school was made subject to special measures, some of the pupils had a poor attitude to their work. Too many lessons were disturbed by misbehaviour. This prevented the pupils from making suitable progress. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour have improved significantly since then and generally they have acquired good work habits, because the teachers' demands are higher and they apply rules and routines more consistently. Many pupils worked diligently in lessons. High quality displays celebrated their attainment and also recorded work in progress. The pupils are increasingly confident when working independently or in groups. The effective strategy of 'response partners', where pairs of pupils share their ideas and rehearse their answers, has raised the pupils' confidence and improved their skills in speaking and listening. The quality of all relationships in the school is very good.

The improvement in attendance from 91.9% in 2003–04 to the current figure of almost 96% reflects the pupils' increased interest in learning as well as the school's efforts to promote good attendance.

The provision for citizenship and the pupils' spiritual, moral, social, cultural development is very good. The cultural diversity of society is celebrated and promoted well in lessons and in assemblies. Assemblies are based on the 'value of the month' and encourage respect and consideration for others and give the pupils time to reflect on important issues such as taking responsibility for their own actions. Key stage assemblies give the pupils good opportunities to think about their role in school and in the wider community. The pupils in Key Stage 2 listened quietly and sensitively when a pupil spoke movingly about issues of concern outside school and offered their support and friendship to the speaker. This made a positive contribution to the atmosphere of trust and to the pupils' personal development. The Key Stage 1 assembly was a moment of calmness and spirituality in the middle of a busy and exciting day.

Behaviour in lessons and in the playground has improved greatly and is good overall. The few pupils who find it difficult to concentrate in lessons were managed well by the staff and their behaviour did not interrupt the learning of others.

The pupils carry out their responsibilities enthusiastically. Older pupils run lunchtime clubs for younger ones under the watchful eye of responsible adults. They enjoy talking to visitors and are increasingly proud of their work and their school. The pupils understand right from wrong, know the school's rules and generally obey them without reminders. They are considerate towards each other and they treat their surroundings with respect.

The school takes very good care of the pupils' personal well-being. It also cares for them by providing a wide range of lunchtime and after-school clubs. The clubs, run by the teachers and by members of the local community, contribute most effectively to the pupils' social development and to their understanding of the wider world.

## Quality of provision

The headteacher and the LEA's development advisers have provided both support and challenge which have led to improvements in the quality of provision. Improvements in the quality of teaching have helped to accelerate the pupils' progress. The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in eight of the nine lessons and in three it was good or very good. Where the teaching was unsatisfactory, the lesson relied too heavily on a commercial scheme and did not take sufficient account of what the more able pupils already knew. Consequently, they did not make sufficient progress. In contrast, a lesson taught to the higher attaining pupils along with pupils from other local schools was outstanding; all of the pupils made exceptional progress.

Good aspects of the teaching included well-paced lessons that challenged the pupils' thinking, clear learning objectives and high expectations of the pupils' behaviour and application to their work. Good use was made of computer programmes to challenge the more able pupils and to support lower attaining pupils. Relationships were positive and the pupils enjoyed their learning. Teaching assistants made important contributions to lessons, particularly in leading groups. In all lessons, the careful deployment of adults meant that the pupils' individual and special educational needs were met well. The increased amount of specialist teaching for the older pupils has had a beneficial effect on their progress. Although the teaching was satisfactory overall with some good features the proportion of good and very good teaching is not yet sufficient to promote improved progress over time for all of the pupils.

The provision for the pupils in the Foundation Stage has been revised effectively this year and they are receiving a more relevant education than was the case at the last inspection. The pupils are making good progress. Exceptionally careful planning and the effective use of adults ensure that each age group experiences an appropriate range of adult-directed and independent work. The provision for outdoor play has been transformed.

There are systematic arrangements for assessing the pupils' attainment and progress. Assessment information is used well to identify those at risk of underachieving, to create suitably challenging end-of-key stage targets and to inform the teachers' planning. Test data has been used effectively this year to inform whole-school priorities.

The curriculum has improved and it is broad and relevant. Long and medium-term subject plans promote continuity and progression in learning, particularly for the pupils in Key Stage 1 and for the oldest, higher attaining pupils. In the foundation subjects the sequencing of units is logical and takes proper account of the wide range of ages and the previous experience of the pupils in each class. The increased provision for after-school activities, visits to diverse places of interest, and work with teachers from the LEA and other local schools have been effective in extending the pupils' learning in the humanities, performing arts and sports. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has improved and is satisfactory. Standards are rising steadily and the potential of ICT to support other subjects is being explored effectively.

## Leadership and management

Following the inspection in June 2003, the school had difficulty in developing sound, strategic, management structures; teamwork was ineffective and roles and responsibilities were unclear. Since then, the school's two acting headteachers revived the staff's flagging spirits and brought a sense of purpose. The current headteacher is working alongside the new, substantive headteacher and this arrangement has provided the school with a calm and efficient period of transition.

The current headteacher's positive attitude has been instrumental in creating an effective team with a strong commitment to improving the standard of the pupils' education. A happy and hard-working ethos has been engendered by her excellent leadership and management of the school. The Foundation Stage is led effectively: the leadership and management of other key staff has displayed great commitment and is sound with good features. Suitable support and training is continuing to improve the teachers' management skills. Sound practices give staff a clear understanding of the pupils' attainment and progress. The school has begun to review all of its procedures systematically. The approach is rigorous, but self evaluation is in the early stages of development and requires further time in order to become a useful management tool.

The chair of governors has led the governing body well. She has worked tirelessly to ensure that the governing body is effective and has a clear understanding of its function. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and governors are holding the school to account suitably for its performance. Planning at the strategic level is secure. The school improvement plan is linked appropriately to the school's needs and to the budget, and is being kept under review. The governing body has benefited from well-focussed training and from the expertise and practical support of Diocesan advisers. The strong partnership between the LEA and the Diocese has been an important factor in the successful improvement of the school. The support from the LEA has been outstanding and has enabled the school to make the required improvements and to develop sufficient expertise to manage future developments.

## Appendix – Information about the inspection

Shefford CE (VC) Primary School was inspected in June 2003 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in December 2003, in March, June and November 2004 and in January 2005 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of September 2003.

In May 2005, HMI returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Nine parts of lessons and an assembly were inspected. The pupils' conduct was observed around the school and on the playground at break and lunchtimes, and samples of their work were inspected. Discussions were held with the headteacher, the chair of governors, the senior management team, two representatives from the LEA, and informal discussions were held with other staff. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of June 2003 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.



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