



# Stephenson Lower School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 109502  
**LEA** BEDFORDSHIRE LEA  
**Inspection number** 278210  
**Inspection dates** 3 May 2006 to 4 May 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Mrs. Joyce Cox LI

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

<b>Type of school</b>	First	<b>School address</b>	Canvin Way
<b>School category</b>	Community		MK42 0HL
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3 to 9		
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01234 261683
<b>Number on roll</b>	385	<b>Fax number</b>	01234 213572
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mr. Tim Thomas
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	18 September 2000	<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr. Robert Harris

<b>Age group</b> 3 to 9	<b>Inspection dates</b> 3 May 2006 - 4 May 2006	<b>Inspection number</b> 278210
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## **Introduction**

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

## **Description of the school**

This is a larger than average sized first school serving an area with considerable social and economic disadvantages. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is well above average. Just under half of the pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds with the largest proportion being Bangladeshi. Just under a quarter of pupils speak English as an additional language. An above average number of pupils have learning difficulties or disabilities. Children start in the Nursery at four years old with very limited knowledge and skills. In January 2006 the school became the pre-school base for the Kingsbrook Children's Centre, which will provide a host of services for the local community. The school also has a provision for hearing impaired children. The school is a member of the Excellence Cluster. It also has a Healthy Schools Award.

## **Key for inspection grades**

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

The school judges its effectiveness as satisfactory and inspectors agree. It gives satisfactory value for money. Pupils make satisfactory progress from a low starting point. Children make good progress through Nursery and Reception because they are taught well and enter Year 1 with below average standards in most areas of learning. Standards in the Year 2 and Year 4 assessments, although starting to rise slowly, remain below the expected levels. This is particularly true in the case of pupils' attainment in writing. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory but very variable. Pupils' personal development is good. Children are happy at school and behave well in lessons and around the school. Attendance rates had improved since the last inspection to broadly average levels, but dipped this year due to very poor attendance by a few children and because some parents took their children on extended holidays abroad. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Leadership is not yet sufficiently rigorous in driving up standards or in improving the quality of teaching and learning to raise pupils' achievement. There is also scope for subject leaders to be more involved in raising pupils' achievements. Parents think the school is doing a good job and appreciate the open and caring ethos the headteacher has established. Although governors are fully supportive, they are not all confident or experienced enough yet, to hold the school to account for its performance. The school has recently begun to slowly improve standards and to tackle the issues for improvement from the last inspection. It receives good support and advice from local authority advisors and therefore demonstrates a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' attainment and achievement in writing by giving them more chances to practise their writing in all subjects.
- Make sure that the leadership of the school is more clearly focused on raising standards and pupils' achievement.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning through more rigorous monitoring and evaluation.
- Develop the role of subject leaders so that they play a fuller role in improving standards in their subjects.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 3

Many children start school at an early stage of learning and have much ground to make up. In particular, there are weaknesses in their personal and social development, and language and literacy skills. Children achieve well in the Nursery and Reception classes because they are completely absorbed in a range of very skilfully planned practical and enticing activities. Nevertheless, by the time they join Year 1, not all have reached the expected levels and attainment is still below that normally found at this age. After several years of exceptionally low scores in Year 2 assessments, pupils' results improved in 2005 as an increased number of pupils met their targets and reached the expected levels. Test scores in reading and writing rose because of an increased

focus on teaching pupils to recognise sounds in words and to use them in their writing. Standards at the end of Year 2 and at the end of Year 4 are below average, but not exceptionally low. The progress pupils make from Year 2 to Year 4 is satisfactory, but it is better in reading and mathematics than in writing. The school's many lower attaining pupils and those with learning difficulties achieve satisfactorily. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and those at an early stage of speaking English make equally satisfactory progress overall and good progress in acquiring spoken English.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Pupils of all ages enjoy school, behave well and get on well with others. They have positive attitudes to learning. The school makes effective use of its multi-cultural setting to promote a good understanding of the diversity of modern Britain, giving pupils experiences of aspects such as Asian dance and foods, and festivals from a range of faith traditions. Pupils from all backgrounds mix well together. Attendance is satisfactory. Up to 2005, attendance rates had risen to broadly average levels, but have fallen again this year because of the very poor attendance of a few of the youngest pupils and extended holidays abroad. The school is acting urgently to improve this situation. Pupils are well informed about how to lead a healthy lifestyle. They take part in regular exercise and include fruit and water in their breaktime snacks. They are developing a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, for instance on the roads or when playing during the holidays. They contribute well to decision making via the school council. This is currently developing their responsibility to the wider community through recycling and energy saving initiatives. Pupils' satisfactory achievement in literacy and numeracy, combined with their good attitudes to learning and social skills, place them in a sound position to take advantage of the next stage of their education, in preparation for the future world of work.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Within this overall picture there are notable strengths as well as key areas for improvement. Teaching in the Nursery and Reception classes is good and as a result children make good progress. Teachers and support staff prepare exciting activities that capture children's imaginations. There is a strong emphasis on developing language and communication skills by encouraging children to talk about the stimulating work they are doing. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 1 to 4 is satisfactory, but there are significant inconsistencies. Where teaching is good, pupils rapidly master new skills and their achievement is accelerated. Pupils in Years 1 and 2, for example, quickly learnt how to break numbers into parts in order to solve equations due to skilful teaching. Unsatisfactory teaching was seen where pupils spent too long in recalling what they already knew. Here the amount of new

learning was insufficient and progress was slow. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve vary. Older pupils in particular are sometimes given tasks which are too easy, such as colouring in worksheets. The school has recently introduced a new system for teaching pupils the basic skills they need to help them to read. The system is taught well throughout the school and is having a strong impact on improving literacy skills. Teachers are becoming increasingly skilled at measuring the amount of progress pupils make in reading, writing and mathematics. This helps them to make sure that pupils are achieving at least satisfactorily.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 3**

The curriculum in the Nursery and Reception classes is very well matched to children's learning needs. There is a strong emphasis on encouraging children to talk about their feelings and the work they are doing. In the Nursery, the class puppet, Daffy Duck, is a key member of the community and children like to confide in him. Children enjoy an excellent range of outdoor activities, including bricklaying, digging and van driving. In Years 1 to 4, the curriculum is satisfactory. It is becoming increasingly relevant and more closely matched to pupils' needs. There is a strong emphasis on developing literacy and numeracy skills. However, pupils have too few opportunities to practise their writing skills in purposeful ways. Also they do not write enough in subjects such as history, geography and religious education in order to broaden writing experiences. Good attention is paid to teaching pupils about healthy eating and the need for regular exercise. There is a satisfactory range of after-school activities and the school choir is especially popular.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

There is good provision for pupils' care. Day-to-day pastoral support and guidance is good and appreciated by parents and pupils. Pupils say they are confident that adults will help them if they have a problem. There are effective systems to ensure pupils' safety and security, including attention to child protection arrangements and the vetting of adults who work in school. Staff and governors carry out systematic risk assessments. Pupils know that good work and behaviour are valued and recognised, for example in the 'Pupil of the Week' assemblies. The ways teachers mark work and set targets for improvement are satisfactory and help to support academic progress. There is good support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. The school maintains effective links with parents and relevant external agencies that promote pupils' development. Pupils who have a hearing impairment are supported extremely well by skilled communicators who use signing very effectively to paint visual pictures. This high quality support enables pupils to happily and successfully mix with other children in lessons and in the playground.

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## Leadership and management

### Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The senior leadership team is effective in improving their particularly areas of responsibility. For instance, the deputy headteacher has devised good systems to track pupils' progress through the school. The Foundation Stage leader has been very effective in improving provision for the youngest children. The headteacher successfully promotes pupils' personal development and well-being and has worked hard to improve pupils' behaviour. He has also instigated considerable improvement to the buildings to create a bright, fresh learning environment. However, there is not sufficient focus on raising standards through sharp monitoring and rigorous evaluation of teaching and learning. In addition, subject leaders do not yet have a complete understanding of ways to improve achievement in their subjects. Parents and pupils are beginning to be consulted about school improvement. The vast majority of parents are very happy with what the school provides and it enjoys a good reputation locally. The governance of the school is satisfactory. While governors are very supportive of the school they are not yet experienced enough to get fully involved in checking its performance and asking staff challenging questions about how well the school is doing. Many of the strategies currently in place to improve the school are relatively new but are beginning to have a steady impact on raising standards and pupils' achievement. Therefore the capacity to improve is satisfactory.

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## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	3	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3	NA
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	NA

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	NA

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	3	NA
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	3	NA
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2	NA

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	NA
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

### **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for welcoming us to your school when we visited. It was a pleasure to talk with some of you and to watch you working and playing. This letter is to tell you about some of the important things we saw. You are lucky at your school because the headteacher, teachers and all the other adults look after you well. They encourage you to be happy at school, to be healthy and to stay safe and they make sure you learn new things. It was brilliant to see that the Nursery and Reception children are so happy and settled in school and enjoying lots of exciting things such as maypole dancing. Your behaviour is good and this makes it easier for the teachers to teach and for you to learn. Older pupils told us you all enjoy school and how much you like taking part in clubs, trips, assemblies and being on the school council. Your headteacher and all the staff are keen to make the school even better for you. We think that to do that they need to carry on improving your writing. It will also be good if all the staff make sure that you do as well as you possibly can in all lessons and if the headteacher checks to make sure that all teachers teach really good lessons. It was so good to find out that all of you are happy at school and that your parents are happy too. Keep working hard and being good at Stephenson.