



Mill Vale School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109663
LEA BEDFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 278236
Inspection dates 30 November 2005 to 1 December 2005
Reporting inspector Ms. Rhona Seviour LI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Wilbury Drive
School category	Community		LU5 4QP
Age range of pupils	9 to 14		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01582 523000
Number on roll	560	Fax number	01582 523010
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs. Pauline Hales
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Mr. Peter McCreadie

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Mill Vale Middle School is a large middle school with 560 pupils on roll. There is a growing number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, although the majority of pupils at the school are of white UK origin. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The number of pupils with special educational needs is below average. The social and economic circumstances of pupils' backgrounds vary but overall do not differ from the average for England. The school holds the 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: 4

Mill Vale School is experiencing a period of change. A new headteacher took up post in April, 2005 and has had a positive impact on the school. He has helped give the school a clearer view of what it needs to do to improve and work has begun on a number of areas, including improving the quality of teaching and learning. Parents comment that communications between themselves and the school have improved. The pupils have noticed improvements in behaviour. Standards have not shown sustained improvement since the last inspection and in some areas they have declined. The Key Stage 2 results are below the national average; there are variations between subjects in the number of pupils attaining the highest levels and standards in writing are significantly lower than those in reading. A significant number of pupils, including many boys, underachieve at Key Stage 2. Progress is better in Key Stage 3, and, at the time of transfer to upper school, standards are broadly in line with the national expectations. The school has not analysed its assessment data in sufficient depth to enable it to identify precisely the areas where pupils are underachieving. As a result, some of its actions have not had the impact anticipated. The school shows strong concern for pupils' personal development and is successful in developing their understanding of healthy lifestyles. Pupils feel safe and enjoy their time at the school. Standards of behaviour are good, and pupils have respect for their peers. Teachers enjoy working with pupils and are very committed to the school. Most teaching is at least satisfactory, and some is good. In some lessons the teaching does not engage pupils sufficiently and is not well matched to their individual needs. The school's leadership, including governors, was slow to identify the need for more vigorous action following the last inspection. The school has not provided value for money and the inspectors disagree with the school's view that it is now effective. However, with the involvement of the local authority, sufficient action has been taken to judge that the school has the capacity to improve. In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to pupils' achievement and standards.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards at Key Stage 2 by tracking pupils' progress systematically in relation to their targets.
- Analyse assessment data and ensure that this is used regularly to improve teaching and learning.
- Ensure that all the school's actions to improve achievement and standards are monitored and evaluated more rigorously.
- Continue to strengthen the process of self-evaluation so that the school is able to direct its energies to those areas requiring most urgent attention.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Inspectors judge pupils' achievement to be inadequate and disagree with the school's view that it is satisfactory. On entry to the school the pupils' attainment, based on their Key Stage 1 results, is broadly average. The Key Stage 2 results are below those found nationally and declined significantly in 2005. The percentage of pupils achieving the highest levels in English and mathematics at the end of Year 6 is well below the national average. The standards of the Year 8 pupils transferring to upper school in September, 2005 were broadly average. At Key Stages 2 and 3 there is wide gap between standards achieved in reading and writing; in 2005 nearly five times more pupils achieved level 5 in reading than writing at the end of Year 6. The school's success in raising boys' attainment, noted at the time of the last inspection, has not been maintained; boys' attainment is now below that of boys nationally and below that of the girls. In 2005 the school did not achieve its target for mathematics and weak performance in writing prevented it achieving the target for English. Standards at Key Stage 2 are lower than they should be because pupils' progress has not been tracked carefully enough and the school has not analysed its assessment data. As a result, actions have not been sufficiently well focused on what pupils need to improve and on reducing variations in achievement within and between subjects and between boys and girls. Pupils, including those with learning difficulties, do not make enough progress during their time at Mill Vale. They underachieve in Years 5 and 6 and although progress is better in Key Stage 3, it varies considerably between subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Pupils enjoy school, have good attendance records and appreciate the opportunities they are given to learn. Behaviour is generally good in and beyond the classroom and pupils display positive attitudes to learning, particularly in the lessons where teaching is active and well matched to their needs. Pupils' social and moral development is good. Most pupils show a sensitive awareness of the needs and feelings of others and demonstrate this through their work to support a range of charities. The school council is taking an active lead in dealing with bullying, looking at ways in which they, and other pupils, can act as mentors. The school is making very successful efforts to promote healthy lifestyles. The healthy eating options are popular and the positive impact of the school programme is also seen in the quality of the packed lunches brought into the school. Pupils know how to stay safe and formal safety procedures in the school are understood. Pupils respond positively to opportunities to take an active part in school life and, through the programme of personal, social, and health education and citizenship, are developing decision-making skills. Pupils' cultural development is supported through art and music but preparation for life in a multi-cultural society is not sufficiently explicit within the school's work. The governors know that the school does not fulfil the requirements regarding a daily act of collective worship.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Inspectors agree with the school that the quality of teaching and learning, although satisfactory overall, requires improvement in order to raise achievement. The school has already begun to work on this. The good working relationship between teachers and pupils creates a positive learning environment and pupils' behaviour in lessons is generally good. In the best lessons teachers motivate and inspire pupils so that they are engaged and challenged by the work. They maintain an energetic pace with a variety of interesting and enjoyable activities. Pupils understand the work and are able to move on to the next stage of the lesson. Marking of work is frequent and supportive so that pupils know how to improve their work. Some teachers are using information and communication technology (ICT) effectively as an additional teaching tool to support pupils' learning. However, in some lessons the pupils are passive learners and demonstrate no real enthusiasm or commitment to the lesson. In the weaker lessons pupils have few opportunities to be actively involved. Activities are not always well matched to their needs and sometimes lack sufficient challenge. The school uses targets within subjects; these sometimes give too much emphasis to the appearance of the work rather than helping the pupils to focus on ways of raising their level of attainment.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. ICT is now included at Key Stage 3 and the curriculum meets all statutory requirements, although pupils would benefit from more time for English in Key Stage 3. Good use is made of the national strategies in literacy and numeracy. Italian is provided as an additional subject in Year 6 for the higher attaining pupils and there is an increasing range of enrichment activities for pupils identified as gifted or talented. There are good examples of cross-curricular activities particularly in humanities, mathematics and science. Year 5 pupils experience nearly half their lessons with their form tutor in order to ease the transition from the first schools, although it is too soon to judge the effectiveness of this new arrangement. In other years pupils are taught in ability-based groups for most subjects. The school has not yet evaluated the impact of these groupings on pupils' achievement. The curriculum in personal, social and health education and citizenship is good. There is also a varied range of extra-curricular activities; pupils do not always exploit these opportunities fully.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Inspectors agree with the school that its care, guidance and support are satisfactory. All requirements for child protection and risk assessment are in place. The school has

achieved a Healthy School Award and actively and successfully promotes a healthy lifestyle to its pupils. There are very clear arrangements to deal with discipline problems and the school is an orderly environment. The pupils feel that any incidents, including bullying, are dealt with effectively. Vulnerable pupils are supported effectively and pupils with special educational needs are carefully monitored. However, teachers' planning does not always identify what learning support assistants are expected to do within individual lessons or the intended outcomes for the pupils. Parents are positive about most aspects of the school; a few have concerns about communication between home and school and how well the parents and children's views have been sought and taken into account. The parents' feedback to inspectors indicates that these aspects have improved since the appointment of the new headteacher.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management have only recently given sufficient emphasis to raising achievement. Although work has been undertaken on the key issues following the last inspection, actions have not had a significant impact on improving standards. The school's evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses has lacked rigour and insight but has improved considerably. The new headteacher, with the assistance of the local authority, has brought a greater depth of analysis to the school's process of review and has helped give the school a clearer sense of what it needs to do to improve. Recent changes, including an initiative to strengthen pupils' awareness of how well they are doing and a system to track their progress, are aimed in the right direction. Pupils and staff already notice that behaviour has improved as a result of the introduction of 'Golden Rules'. Parents are beginning to feel more involved in what is going on. Although, it is too early to judge the impact of these and other changes on achievement and standards, the school has begun to demonstrate the capacity to improve and leadership and management are now satisfactory. Nevertheless, the school acknowledges that it has much further to go in strengthening its management systems. Staff with leadership and management responsibilities have responsibility for monitoring and evaluating teaching, learning and standards. They are dedicated and hardworking but vary in their effectiveness. Data is not yet used consistently or rigorously to identify areas in which improvement is needed and the quality of line management is inconsistent. Governors are supportive but do not understand fully how the school needs to improve. They have not yet developed the role of a critical friend in challenging aspects of school life and holding the school to account for its performance.

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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>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	4	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	NA	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	No	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4	NA

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

¹ 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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	4	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
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	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
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
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
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
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
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	Yes
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

We would like to thank you for your helpfulness and courtesy during our recent visit to Mill Vale. We valued the opportunity to talk to you about your work, your experience of school life and the opportunities you have both in and outside lessons. We were pleased to learn that so many of you enjoy being at school. Mill Vale does many things well but we believe it needs to improve significantly in a number of important areas. We have told the school that it must focus on these areas and that inspectors will visit in a year's time to judge whether it has been successful. The main reason why Mill Vale needs to improve significantly is because pupils could achieve considerably more than they do. Also, we think your teachers should know more about what you are achieving (and have achieved) and check your progress more closely. This will help ensure that the work you do in lessons is matched to your needs and challenges you to give of your best at all times. Your behaviour during our visit was good. Many of you told us that the new 'Golden Rules' and motivators introduced by Mr McCreadie are working well and that you enjoy receiving rewards for your efforts. Most of you are considerate and understand the hurtful effects of bullying. We were impressed by the school council's work to combat bullying. In most lessons we noticed that you concentrate well and want to achieve. Your teachers are very committed to the school and care a great deal about your welfare - they want you to do well but have not always focused their efforts on the areas which are going to have the greatest impact on your achievement. You can help Mill Vale improve by being ambitious for yourself. This means pushing yourself in lessons by concentrating fully and completing all your homework. If you do this, your progress will improve and you will have more success now and in your future education. We hope you will accept this challenge and wish you success in the future.