



Mill Mead Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117297
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 280034
Inspection dates 3 May 2006 to 4 May 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. Martin Beale LI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Port Vale
School category	Community		SG14 3AA
Age range of pupils	3 to 11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01992 582776
Number on roll	240	Fax number	01992 503356
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs. Carol Huffinton
Date of previous inspection	3 April 2000	Headteacher	Mrs. Sue Nesbitt-Larking

Age group 3 to 11	Inspection dates 3 May 2006 - 4 May 2006	Inspection number 280034
-----------------------------	---	------------------------------------

© Crown copyright 2006

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Mill Mead is an average-sized primary school with a part-time nursery, situated close to the centre of the county town of Hertford. The school has a relatively stable pupil population with a well-below average proportion who qualify for free school meals or who have learning difficulties and disabilities. The proportion with a statement of special educational need is also below average. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is slightly below average and almost all pupils speak English as their first language. Attainment on entry to the school varies but is broadly average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with some outstanding features, which provides good value for money. It is a harmonious and purposeful place. Pupils are polite, friendly and proud of their school. They behave well and participate enthusiastically in all that is offered to them. They are cared for well. They also care for each other and develop a keen sense of responsibility. The school provides an exceptionally rich curriculum that extends considerably beyond the school day and the classroom. Pupils and their parents justifiably speak highly of the clubs, visits and opportunities to help in school and in the community. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities benefit from good support and a curriculum that successfully caters for their needs. They receive thorough guidance to help them make good progress. These factors also support the good progress of the few pupils learning English as an additional language. The school has experienced a period of considerable staff turnover. This affected pupils' progress in the past and the school's capacity to introduce new developments. This situation is now stabilised. The new headteacher has the support of parents and governors in the action she has introduced to improve provision. The school has made steady progress since its last inspection, but with more rapid improvement in the last few terms. The headteacher's strong leadership and the developing staff teamwork mean it is strongly placed to get even better. The school's self-evaluation is rigorous and accurate. It provides a secure platform for future planning. Children in the Nursery and Reception Class get off to a good start. Teaching is good and the children have a wide range of stimulating activities and interesting things to do. They make good progress and their skills are developed well. By the end of the Reception Year, most have reached the standards expected for their age, with some exceeding them. Any slowing of pupils' progress in recent years has been reversed. Pupils are now making good progress. Standards are average by Year 2 but are above average and rising by Year 6. Successful action to improve the quality of teaching, to raise expectations and to improve the pupils' writing is a significant factor in the pupils' better progress. Teaching is now good. There is much imaginative teaching, although more able pupils are not sufficiently challenged in Years 1 and 2, where they make slower progress. Writing targets have been introduced to give pupils a clearer understanding of how to make their work better. The school recognises the need both to refine these targets so they become even more helpful to both teachers and pupils and to introduce similar processes in other subjects.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching and challenge in Years 1 and 2 with the aim of getting more pupils to higher levels by the end of Year 2. - Develop the use of targets across all subjects, so that pupils are clearer about what they need to do to improve and teachers and pupils can track their progress towards meeting them.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress during their time at the school. The attainment profile of year groups varies from year to year but is broadly average when pupils join the school and above average by the time they leave. Children in the Foundation Stage make good progress. By the end of the Reception Year, most have reached the standards expected for their age, with some exceeding them. Progress is satisfactory in Years 1 and 2, although standards have fallen to broadly average over the last five years. This is largely because teaching lacks consistent challenge and as a result fewer pupils than nationally reach the highest levels in reading, writing and mathematics. Most recent year groups made satisfactory progress in Years 3 to 6. Standards, although above average by Year 6, had changed little since the previous inspection. This is not the case now. Progress is now good across all groups of pupils in Years 3 to 6 and standards are rising. The reasonably challenging targets for pupils were not quite met in 2005. The school recognises that some of the more-able pupils did not always make the progress expected of them in the past. The action taken to deal with this is having a significant impact and Year 6 pupils are now on course to achieve their more demanding targets. Improving pupils' writing has also been a priority for the school in response to disappointing test performance. The subsequent action taken is leading to substantial improvements in writing, and standards are now much higher.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development is excellent. Attendance is above average. An enthusiasm for learning and good behaviour helps pupils to enjoy school tremendously. They are very positive about all it offers, saying 'This is a friendly, cheerful school where all the children mix well'. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. Social development is excellent, particularly when pupils meet those from different classes in the 'friendship circles'. Pupils are polite and considerate and say that bullying is not a concern. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the community through participation in local events, including fund raising for charities. They talk enthusiastically about the recent soup lunch which raised substantial funds for their link school in Uganda. Older pupils take on a wide range of responsibilities and the school council officers take their duties extremely seriously. These include meeting and greeting visitors and attending governors' meetings. They know their views are considered and they are proud of the recently painted murals that they requested to improve the toilet areas. The way that healthy living is encouraged is excellent, with many and varied sporting opportunities and an emphasis on healthy eating. The exciting activities available at playtimes contribute positively to the pupils' physical and personal development. Pupils have a good grounding for the world of work through the strong emphasis on literacy, numeracy and computer skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The school has an accurate view of the quality of teaching and takes action to make it better. As a result, most lessons are at least good. Pupils learn well because they respond to this good teaching by working hard. Teaching in the Foundation Stage is good. Children in the Nursery and Reception class learn well because they have a wide range of interesting things to do. Teaching effectively challenges most pupils, but this is not always the case in Years 1 and 2 where expectations are not consistently high enough. Lesson planning is a strong feature of the best lessons. Plans are based on an accurate assessment of the next steps in learning for individual pupils. Teachers tell the pupils what they will learn and check that these aims have been achieved. Reference is regularly made to individual targets for improving writing, and advice given about how these can be achieved. Teaching is lively and interesting. Pupils are encouraged to participate through skilful questioning that makes them think carefully about their responses. Teaching assistants support learning effectively, particularly where pupils have learning difficulties or speak English as an additional language. Activities are varied and moved on rapidly. This generates a sense of purpose in lessons. Resources are used imaginatively, but more use could be made of new technology to enliven teaching and support learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The excellent curriculum is planned well to meet national requirements and the full range of pupils' needs. It has a firm focus on English, mathematics and science and is enriched by an outstanding range of lunchtime and after-school clubs, including Brazilian soccer, nail art and orienteering. There is a strong focus on music, and a wide range of specialist instrumental teaching is offered. All pupils from Reception learn French, and German is taught in Years 4 and 5. Residential visits start in Year 2, offering a range of different experiences. All of these contribute very effectively to pupils' personal development and give them a broad and well rounded education. By the time pupils leave, they have taken responsibility for many environmental areas of the school, giving them an understanding of issues such as conservation and recycling.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care and support provided is good. A breakfast club and after-school care both contribute significantly to the pupils' development. They feel safe and know there is an adult to turn to if they need help. All adults know the pupils very well. Links between home and school are strong and many parents help in school. Parents are very positive about the school. The school shows good concern for the safety and protection of the pupils. Risk assessments are very thorough and the school makes all the required

checks on adults working in the school. Pupils have targets to work towards to improve their writing but these have not yet been developed for other subjects. As a result, pupils do not always know what they have to do to reach the next level.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

A key to recent improvements is the very effective leadership of the new headteacher. She gives the school a very clear direction focused on raising standards, while successfully maintaining the strong emphasis on the pupils' personal development. She has high expectations of the staff and provides support for these to be achieved. There is a strong and successful commitment to meeting the learning and personal needs of all pupils. The strong team work that has developed as staff turnover has lessened is a further significant feature in the school's improving performance. Other teachers are taking on a more effective leadership role in many areas. Subject co-ordinators are beginning to play an important part in the school's cycle of review. They are starting to monitor provision and provide support and guidance for their colleagues. The school knows itself well, consults others and keeps them informed. Effective systems have been introduced to make sure that all staff do their jobs as well as possible. Governors know the school well through their regular visits. They challenge the school to do better and help to plan for its future. Priorities for improving the school are clear, appropriate and are already having an impact in many areas. Finances are managed well and targeted towards supporting these priorities. Their impact is checked more to make sure that the school achieves good value for money in its spending.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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
--	-----------------------	--------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	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	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

I am writing to thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school. We really enjoyed talking to you and your teachers and watching you learn. There are very many aspects of your school that we liked. You and your parents are right in thinking that you go to a good school. What we liked about your school: - You are cared for and looked after well in school. - You really enjoy your work and do well in the different subjects. - Your written work is getting better and more adventurous all the time. - You enjoy taking part in all of the exciting additional activities. - You all behave very well around the school. You play nicely with your friends at lunchtime and speak very politely to your teachers and visitors. - You support each other well and contribute much to improving both the school and the local community. - Your teachers and teaching assistants work very hard to make sure that you all get the right sort of help you need to help you learn. - Your headteacher runs the school very well. We are very pleased to see how all of your teachers and governors are trying hard to make the school even better. We are suggesting to them that some of you in Years 1 and 2 could do even better if the work was harder, and that the targets you now have for writing could be usefully introduced in other important subjects. We wish you well for the future.