

Derwent Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109457
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE
Inspection number	288381
Inspection dates	11–12 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Martin Beale

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

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	129
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Cathy Bailey
Headteacher	Mrs Caroline Howell
Date of previous school inspection	15 October 2001
School address	Hitchin Road Henlow Bedfordshire SG16 6BA
Telephone number	01462812047
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Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This small school serves the Royal Air Force base at Henlow Camp and families from the surrounding area. Pupil mobility is very high as service families move in and out of the base often at very short notice. Free school meal eligibility is very low but is not representative of the pupils' broad range of backgrounds. Few pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Attainment on entry is wide but generally below that expected of four-year-olds, although the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is low.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The inspection confirms the judgement of the headteacher and governors that this is a good school. It provides good value for money and copes well with the challenge of high pupil mobility. Parents mostly support what the school is trying to do for their children, and are pleased with the caring environment it provides. The thoughtful support for children under pressure because loved-ones are abroad in what may be conflict situations is much appreciated by pupils and parents. Communication with home is regular, including through the school website, which contains many contributions from the pupils themselves.

Pupils make good progress from whenever they join the school. Their achievement is good. The youngest children benefit from an interesting environment and good teaching in the Foundation Stage. Staff carefully identify children's needs and plan activities that support the children's good progress. Effective teaching and learning in the rest of the school help to maintain this good progress. Standards are rising and are above average by the time pupils leave at the end of Year 4. Pupils make slower progress in writing than in reading and mathematics, and test results for writing are lower, particularly for boys. The pupils also benefit from the good curriculum, which provides many opportunities for them to develop their information and communication technology (ICT) skills.

The good care, support and guidance help to provide a stable environment for all pupils because members of staff understand their individual circumstances and needs. The school sees the pupils' previous experiences as an opportunity to build on. This places them in a strong position to be successful wherever they move to. Pupils say they feel safe and have an adult to turn to if they are worried about anything. Their personal development and well-being are good and contribute to the happy sense of purpose in the school. Pupils settle in quickly, enjoy looking after newly arrived children and develop strong friendships that last after they have left.

Very effective systems are in place to assess pupils' level of attainment, track their progress towards quite challenging targets and identify any underachievement. The school has become skilled at the early identification of where pupils have fallen behind rather than having a specific learning difficulty. Successful intervention programmes then help them to catch up before the problem becomes serious. As a result, pupils make good progress even if they are only at the school for a short time. This has also led to a considerable reduction in the number of pupils with learning difficulties. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress because their needs are rigorously identified, outside help sought where appropriate and their progress carefully monitored.

The headteacher, appointed three years ago, has built on the school's strengths while bringing fresh impetus to its development but does not have others with leadership roles to share the burden of monitoring and evaluating the school's performance. In spite of this, leadership and management are good and have secured many recent improvements. She is supported by an increasingly effective team and a well organised governing body. Self-evaluation is developing and accurate. It helps to identify clear priorities for action, placing the school in a secure position to deal with its future challenges. The school has a good capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing by consistently exploiting opportunities for pupils to develop their writing in a wide range of activities and subjects.

- Develop the role of other teaching staff in supporting the headteacher in monitoring and evaluating the performance of the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage. Most meet, and many exceed, expected goals by the time they leave Reception. Teachers build on this good start in the rest of the school and pupils generally meet their targets. Pupils from all backgrounds achieve equally well. Year 2 test results improved in 2006 in all subjects, having fallen in 2005. Results were significantly above average and were best in reading. There have been further improvements in 2007 in reading and mathematics. Standards are also above average in English, mathematics and science by the time the pupils leave for middle school at the end of Year 4. Writing is the weakest of the basic skills, particularly for boys, and continues to be the focus of attention. Developing the pupils' speaking and using materials to stimulate the interest of boys is taking time to feed through into better standards of writing. Pupils have highly developed ICT skills, and can apply these skills in many areas of their work.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school, attend regularly and have positive attitudes to their learning. They work well together in groups. Most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school even if the self-discipline of some lets them down at times. Pupils are proud of developments they have been involved in through both the school council and their contributions to the school website. They understand how to adopt a healthy approach to exercise and diet. However, their knowledge is not always used to help them make food choices at lunchtime. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They show respect for the customs of others and reflect on the plight of those less fortunate than themselves. The pupils' good academic progress, including their ICT skills, along with their well developed personal skills place them in a good position for the future and prepare them well for success at middle school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Consistently effective teaching across the school is the main key to the pupils' good progress. Teachers are skilled at using rigorously gathered assessment information to plan the next steps in pupils' learning and to adapt methods to meet individual needs. Pupils generally understand the purpose behind their work but they are not always clear about how to judge their success. Teachers make good use of computers to extend the pupils' learning and make lessons more interesting, although they have not yet fully exploited the potential of the recently introduced interactive whiteboards. The highly skilled teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning through their close working relationship with the class teacher. In seeking to develop the pupils' language skills, teachers have started to adopt a range of interesting methods such as drama and role-play into lessons. These also help to make lessons exciting and retain the pupils' attention.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum is planned carefully and adapted where necessary to meet the academic and personal needs of the pupils throughout the school. Basic skills are developed well across many subjects as the school seeks ways of engaging boys more in writing. Pupils develop their ICT skills in many contexts, but skills of enquiry and investigation are not consistently developed across subjects. Art makes a very considerable contribution not just to the pupils' experiences but also to the vibrant displays around the school. Their understanding is broadened through pupils of all ages learning together in teams during 'skill days', most recently on the customs of the major world religions. Events such as the 'Viking Day' for Year 3 and 4 pupils are much enjoyed and help to bring history to life. Pupils value greatly the range of clubs available, some of which were added at their request.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Ensuring the well-being of the pupils is a high priority for the school. Child protection, health and safety and other welfare arrangements are thorough and understood by all staff. Procedures for safeguarding the welfare of children are in place. Well planned arrangements support the smooth transfer of pupils into and out of the school at whatever time in the year this happens. Staff and pupils also take great care to support pupils who may stay for only a short time. Links with the base and other organisations greatly support the pupils' well-being. Target-setting has improved but does not consistently involve pupils in assessing their own progress or the next steps they need to take. Marking is regular but does not always help pupils by identifying for them what is needed to improve their work and meet their targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher gives a strong steer to the school and has sharpened its focus and direction. Staff and governors share a total commitment to ensuring that pupils of all backgrounds can achieve their best both academically and personally. The school sets challenging targets and uses these well to measure the success of action taken. Procedures to monitor the work of staff are more systematic and lead to action to improve their performance. However, although members of staff are taking responsibility for developing key areas of the school, much of the burden of monitoring and evaluation falls to the headteacher because the leadership roles of others are not clearly defined. Governors have a good understanding of the school and share in strategic planning, but are also not sufficiently involved in evaluating its performance. Prudent financial management has dealt well with changes in funding resulting from the variation in pupil numbers. A deficit budget has been eliminated while maintaining staffing levels and introducing new ICT resources.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

12 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Derwent Lower School, Henlow, SG16 6BA

I am writing to thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave to me when I visited your school. You were all very helpful. I enjoyed talking with you and your teachers and watching you learn. There are many aspects of your school that I judged to be good. You, your parents and teachers are right in thinking that you go to a good school.

You make good progress during your time at school. Most of you meet the standards expected by the time you move on to middle school, particularly in reading, mathematics and science. Your computer skills are also of a high standard and I liked looking at your contributions to the school website. You enjoy school, attend regularly, work hard and behave sensibly. You clearly enjoy the clubs, trips and visits provided for you. The care and support you receive is good, particularly for those of you who arrive during the year school. You are learning how important diet and exercise are for a healthy lifestyle. You take your responsibilities seriously and make a considerable contribution to the life of the school.

Your teachers and governors are trying hard to make the school even better. There are some areas where I think that improvements could be made. Your written work is improving but there is still more to be done if this is to be maintained. Other teachers need to help Mrs Howell more to identify what works best in the school and how to improve it even more. I am sure that you and your teachers will work hard to make this all happen.

We wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Martin Beale

Lead Inspector