

Russell Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109495
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE
Inspection number	288399
Inspection dates	13–14 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Joanne Harvey

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	191
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Mallett
Headteacher	Mrs Jane Sealey
Date of previous school inspection	14 January 2002
School address	Queen's Road Amphill Bedford Bedfordshire MK45 2TD
Telephone number	01525 755664
Fax number	01525 755666

Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Very few pupils in this average size school are known to be entitled to claim free school meals. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and there are very few pupils whose home language is known to be other than English. A much lower proportion than in most schools have learning difficulties or disabilities or have a statement of special educational need. Most pupils start school with skill levels that are broadly typical of most pupils of their age.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Russell Lower School rightly judges itself to be a good, and improving school. It has some important strong features and some areas for further improvement. It offers good value for money. The determination and commitment of the very effective headteacher and her hardworking and able team contribute to the school's success. Staff believe that children cannot learn effectively without strong foundations to support their personal, social and emotional needs.

Good care and guidance are given to pupils. The pastoral care and support provided to each individual is a particular strength. The warm and nurturing atmosphere and the sense that everyone is prepared to go the extra mile to help pupils achieve are evident on setting foot in the school. Consequently, pupils feel valued, secure, and ready to learn. It is no surprise that pupils' personal development, including their social, moral and spiritual development, is good and that their cultural development is particularly strong. Behaviour is mostly very good. Pupils develop a sense of responsibility through the roles they are proud to take on, within and outside their immediate community. An emphasis on physical activity has helped them to develop a sound understanding of this aspect of keeping healthy. Pupils enjoy healthy school lunches, though too many continue to choose unhealthy snacks despite the efforts of the school council to persuade them otherwise.

Good teaching, based on positive relationships and an enriched and effective curriculum, helps to ensure that pupils are interested and learn well. Adults know the pupils well, using assessment increasingly well to match activities to their needs. Pupils settle happily into their Reception year and make good progress to reach above average standards before entering Year 1. This good progress continues through Years 1 to 4 where an increasing number reach very high standards in English, mathematics and science by the time they leave the school. Skilled teaching assistants work closely with teachers to ensure those who need extra help also do well.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher, supported by staff and governors, is developing more robust systems for checking how well the school is doing and maintaining the drive for school improvement. New curriculum leaders, who are enthusiastic and able, are being supported to develop their leadership role but are not yet able to demonstrate their full impact on school improvement. Relationships with parents are mostly warm and positive because of the way the partnership between them and the school is valued and encouraged. Consequently, most parents who responded to the questionnaire are highly supportive of the school. One parent volunteered that: 'children have a real sense of belonging to school and thoroughly enjoy taking part in everything. There is a real sense of community and friendship which I applaud'.

The success the school has had in the past, for example in addressing the issues raised at the last inspection, coupled with a determination to do even better, demonstrates that there is good potential to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the role of curriculum leaders to enable them all to play their full role in self-evaluation, school improvement and ensuring challenging targets are met.
- Improve the extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles by securing their commitment to healthy eating and drinking.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils settle well into school life and make good progress in their Reception year, with the majority reaching above average standards by the time they enter Year 1. They continue to progress well in Years 1 and 2. In the national teacher assessments at the end of Year 2, the school has been successful in maintaining above average and sometimes better standards for the last five years in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2006 pupils reached well above average standards in reading and mathematics and exceptionally high standards in writing. Pupils also do well in Years 3 and 4, generally reaching standards that are above, and often well above those expected in English, mathematics and science. In 2006 standards were above expectations. The school has continued to build on its success. Progress is continuing to quicken across school and pupils are currently on target to achieve extremely well. Pupils with learning difficulties are supported well to make similar progress to their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy their time at school and behave very well. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. There are particular strengths in pupils' understanding of cultures other than their own, which is well promoted through an interesting range of activities including 'Around the World' days. These are then celebrated in 'Show and Tell' assemblies where pupils illustrate with pleasure some of the things they have learnt. They also take pride in making a positive contribution to the school community, as illustrated in the many enthusiastic comments from members of the school council. Through growing confidence and the development of a good range of skills, pupils prepare well for their future. They know how to keep themselves safe, think there is little bullying and understand their responsibilities to others at playtimes. However, while pupils recognise the benefits of exercise, there is further work to be done to improve their commitment to making other healthy choices, for example, in snacks, packed lunches, drinking plenty of water and protecting them from the sun. Attendance is outstanding.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching is good. It enables pupils to learn well and make good progress in all areas of their development. Teachers manage pupils well, promote excellent relationships and ensure that lessons are conducted in a calm and purposeful manner. The teaching of literacy and numeracy skills is organised in ability groups for the older pupils. This, alongside well considered planning, ensures that there is a good level of challenge in most lessons. However, there are occasions when too many worksheets are used, limiting pupils' progress. Teachers use questions well to check pupils understanding and to prompt the development of further ideas. While staff indicate that pupils are also given the chance to discuss and develop their ideas with a partner, opportunities were seen to be missed during the inspection when this would have been suitable for extending their involvement in their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. A real strength is the way in which staff place a high priority on enriching pupils' learning. They plan regular and lively theme days which have recently included opportunities to learn about a wide range of other cultures, food, language and customs. Other topics have included 'no pencil days', an art focus and opportunities to dress as literary characters. These provide lasting memories and pupils speak about them with enjoyment. The school also organises visitors who share their experiences and a series of visits to places of educational interest. There is a good range of after school activities and clubs that include sport. Planning for the teaching of basic skills is mostly good, although several older pupils say they do not think some activities are as interesting as they could be and state that they enjoy practical activities much more.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils receive good care and guidance. The pastoral care for the pupils is a particular strength and a high priority for staff who get to know individuals very well. This is appreciated by parents and pupils who know there is always someone to talk to if they are unhappy. Academic guidance is increasingly effective because staff have worked hard to improve systems so that a careful eye is kept on what pupils know and can do. This ensures a quick response when pupils need additional support or more challenge. Teaching assistants provide a good level of support for pupils with learning difficulties which enables the pupils to grow in confidence and make good progress. Child protection procedures, the checks on those who help in school and risk assessments are satisfactory. When the school is aware of identified concerns it acts quickly to address these.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Very effective leadership from the headteacher, supported by hardworking staff and committed governors, has ensured the school has continued to flourish. For example, there is the trend of rising standards, despite a period of staffing change and falling rolls. With the support of colleagues, the headteacher has ensured that systems for assessment and tracking pupils' progress have been given a sharper focus. As a result, there is a clearer picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. She is quite rightly determined to share the leadership of the school. However, it is early days for the new and enthusiastic curriculum leaders. There is more work to be done to enable them to play their full role in self-evaluation, school improvement and ensuring challenging targets are met. Effective leadership of the Foundation Stage has ensured that standards and progress have been maintained during the reorganisation of age groups. A remarkable number of parents come to help in school and staff are skilled in making full use of their talents to enhance pupils' learning. Governance is good. The governing body are very supportive and provide a high degree of challenge to staff.

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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	2
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	1
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
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

15 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Russell Lower School, Ampthill, Bedfordshire, MK 45 2TD

We were pleased to meet you and all the staff and very much enjoyed the time we spent with you. Thank you for making us feel so welcome, talking to us and helping us to find out so much about you and your school.

We think you are lucky to go to such a good school where the headteacher and all the other grown-ups do their very best for you. They look after you and care for you well. Your teachers make learning interesting and enjoyable and they work hard to help you make good progress in lessons. Your very good behaviour in class, around school and in the playground really helps you to learn well. It is clear that you are happy at school. Your teachers and your friends help you to feel important and safe there. In your tests, you often do much better than pupils in most other schools. The school is very keen to find more ways to help you do as well as you possibly can so we have asked them to do the following.

- Make sure that everyone who has been given a role in leading the school can play their full part in checking on its work and making it as good as it can be
- Make sure that you learn how to keep yourselves as healthy as you can by choosing to eat healthy food and drink lots of water

We are sure that Mrs Sealey and all the other adults will continue to do all they can to help you. You can play your part by continuing to behave extremely well and working really hard.

We would like to wish you the very best for the future.

Joanne Harvey

Lead Inspector