

The Mary Bassett Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109508
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE
Inspection number	288403
Inspection dates	23–24 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Geof Timms

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	124
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Beryl Hales
Headteacher	Mrs Mary Phillips
Date of previous school inspection	11 February 2002
School address	Bassett Road Leighton Buzzard Bedfordshire LU7 1AR
Telephone number	01525373017
Fax number	01525854048

Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The school is smaller than most primary schools. Pupils come from across Leighton Buzzard, and from largely below average socio-economic backgrounds. An above average proportion of the pupils is entitled to free school meals. There is a small number of pupils from a range of different minority ethnic backgrounds, although few have English as an additional language. A well above average proportion of the pupils have learning difficulties or disabilities, and an above average number have statements of special need entitling them to extra support. Although there is a range of attainment on entry to the school, that of most children is well below that typically found.

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 which is working very hard to provide an effective education for all pupils. It provides good value for money. Staff work well to ensure that most pupils make good progress and become effective learners. There has been a recent increase in the number of pupils who come to school with challenging behaviour but the school ensures that this does not have a negative impact on other children's progress.

Pupils achieve well and the older ones reach standards in line with those expected for their age. Those with learning difficulties make good progress, as do most of those from minority ethnic backgrounds. Standards have improved since the last inspection. Many of the children in the Reception class have low personal, social and communication skills. They make good progress, although, by the end of the Reception year, most are still at a level below that expected. Good progress continues throughout the school and, by the time they leave the school at the end of Year 4, pupils have achieved well and standards are broadly in line with those expected. However, fewer pupils than might be expected reach the higher levels and boys' attainment, requires further development

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Most are well behaved and have positive attitudes towards their work. The school works very hard to support and include all pupils so that they make good progress. Where it feels that pupils' personal development is not being successfully provided for, support and expertise from outside agencies and the local authority are sought. Children enjoy being at the school. They say there is no bullying and one parent commented that the school has provided a 'Safe, happy and stimulating environment'. Attendance remains below average, although the school is working hard to improve it. The school has responded to any pupils with challenging behaviour by finding extra training for teachers and funding for support staff. This appears to be having a positive impact but more needs to be done to support these pupils to ensure that they make appropriate progress. Pupils have a good knowledge of how to keep themselves healthy. They take part in school activities willingly, and take responsibility seriously. They have satisfactory skills in literacy, numeracy and using computers by the time they leave the school.

The progress pupils make is good because the teaching is good overall. Teachers work hard to plan and deliver lessons that interest and challenge pupils. The curriculum is satisfactory and staff offer a good number of clubs and other enrichment activities. The school provides a good level of care and support for pupils. Appropriate targets for academic progress are set and teachers' marking helps pupils understand what they need to do to improve.

The leadership and management of the school are good and strongly focused on pupils' well-being. Self-evaluation is effective and accurate. Where the need for improvement has been recognised, the headteacher has been willing to look outside the school for support and expertise and this has had a positive impact on provision. The governing body is very supportive of the school. They struggle to recruit members, especially parents. Governors do not monitor the school's strengths and weaknesses in sufficient depth to help them hold the school to account. The issues raised at the last inspection have been successfully addressed and this, together with other improvements such as those to the grounds, shows that the school has a good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in literacy by helping more pupils reach the higher levels and improving the quality of the boys' writing.
- Further develop the school's provision for supporting the more challenging children, and make sure that the curriculum is appropriate for these pupils.
- Enable governors to monitor the work of the school more closely in order to evaluate the outcomes of their decisions and the effectiveness of provision.
- Improve attendance by further developing reward systems and communication with parents.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good. Although there is a range of attainment when children enter the Reception class, many of them have little pre-school experience and low levels of basic skills. This is particularly true for their personal and social skills, and for their communication skills, including speaking and listening. The good provision in the Reception class ensures that they do well and many are close to achieving the expected levels by the end of the year, although overall standards remain below average. A major focus of the work is aimed at developing children's learning skills and attitudes towards school, and this is largely successful. In Years 1 and 2, the good progress continues and, in the 2006 national assessments, standards continued the pattern of recent years in being broadly in line with the national average. Standards in mathematics rose in 2006. This good achievement continues in Years 3 and 4, and standards are broadly average by the time pupils leave the school. The school has a well above average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities. These children make good progress towards the targets set for them. Overall standards in reading were above average in 2006. However, fewer pupils than expected reach the higher levels and boys' attainment, especially in writing, remains too low. Pupils from most minority ethnic backgrounds achieve well, although in 2006 the achievement of the small number of pupils from Traveller families was unsatisfactory due to their prolonged absences or their arrival late in the academic year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The majority of the pupils have good attitudes towards school, are keen to learn and enjoy the activities provided for them. Not all parents support the school's efforts to encourage full attendance and, especially among the younger pupils, attendance is below average. Part of this has been due to the school's use of exclusion to deal with a small number of challenging pupils who have caused a disproportionate number of problems for the staff. The school largely deals with these pupils effectively but recognises that more effective strategies are needed in the long term. Even so, the overall behaviour is satisfactory and the school has positive reward systems in place which pupils enjoy receiving. Pupils willingly accept responsibility and enjoy carrying out a range of jobs. Parents also say that their children enjoy school. Their overall spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The success of the teaching and learning is shown in the good progress made from pupils' often very low starting points. Teachers work hard to provide good activities which are suitable for pupils' needs and which offer sufficient interest and challenge. Where pupils have learning difficulties, teaching assistants provide good support and help these pupils make good progress. Teachers mark pupils' work diligently, often making clear what they have done well and how they can improve in the future. This is also reflected in the individual targets set for pupils, especially for their written work. On the whole, teachers manage the more challenging pupils well, but willingly ask for and accept extra support as appropriate. Teachers' good questioning skills in lessons help reinforce the learning that has taken place.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum meets the needs of most pupils and covers all statutory requirements. Planning is satisfactory but activities are not always appropriate for those pupils with more severe emotional or behavioural needs. Sufficient time is given to each subject. The school offers a good level of enrichment through trips and visitors to school. A residential visit in Year 4 helps pupils extend and develop their confidence and self-esteem as well as providing excellent opportunities for outdoor and adventurous activities. Teachers give their time generously to offer a good range of clubs and extra-curricular activities, and of opportunities to take part in team games and sports activities with other schools.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

This aspect is good because the school makes every effort to support the pupils in its care. Adults work hard to ensure the safety of the pupils and the requirements for checking the backgrounds of those helping or working in school are met well. There are good procedures for child protection, first aid and health and safety, and appropriate training has been provided for staff. Academic and personal guidance is good. The setting of targets to help pupils improve is new but pupils are already more aware of what they need to do next in their learning. There are effective and extensive relationships with a range of outside agencies and these provide good support for many pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is well led with a clear focus on the well-being of all pupils. The headteacher and senior staff have spent a lot of time over the past two years developing behaviour management strategies. This has put pressure on the time available to develop other aspects of the curriculum, teaching and learning. Even so, staff have ensured that standards have risen since the last inspection and a number of important developments have taken place. Data analysis is much more effective and the tracking of individuals and groups of pupils has improved. This has enabled early intervention where needed. Subject leadership is good in the core subjects and

leaders are aware of the important priorities for their subjects. The Foundation Stage has been particularly well led, managed and resourced. The governing body struggles to recruit sufficient members, especially parents. Even so, the governors offer the school good support and are effective in dealing with building or health and safety issues. They are yet to develop their monitoring role so that they can evaluate more accurately how well the school is doing.

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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	3
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	3
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
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	3

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?	3
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	3
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

25 April 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of The Mary Bassett Lower School, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 1AR

I am writing to tell you how much I enjoyed my recent visit to your school. I want to thank you for the friendly way you made me welcome and for the help you gave me. I would like especially to thank the school council for the discussion we had, and the children I talked to in the playground or joined for lunch.

The questionnaires sent back by your parents said that you enjoy school, and you told me that as well. The teachers and other adults all work hard to make lessons enjoyable and interesting. You work hard and make good progress, learning lots of new things and getting ready for moving to middle school. Even so, I think more of you, especially the boys, could get better at reading and writing.

Most of you are well-behaved and this helps your learning. Some of you need more help to settle and get on well at school, and I have asked the school to look at more ways of doing this. Some children do not attend school regularly enough to make good progress and the school will try to encourage them to be at school every day and on time.

The school works hard to care for you and keep you safe. The school council said there was no bullying in school and that is excellent news. The governors find it difficult to get your parents to join their group and help them run the school. I have asked the governors to spend more time checking on the work of the school to see what the strengths and weaknesses are. In this way they can support the teachers even more than they already do.

Thank you again for your help during the inspection. Enjoy your time at Mary Bassett and keep working hard!

Yours sincerely

Geof Timms

Lead inspector