

# The Firs Lower School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	109520
<b>Local Authority</b>	BEDFORDSHIRE
<b>Inspection number</b>	288411
<b>Inspection date</b>	15 March 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Keith Sadler

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	First
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–9
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	257
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Sandra Evans
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Adam JG Campbell
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	3 March 2003
<b>School address</b>	Station Road Amphill Bedford Bedfordshire MK45 2QR
<b>Telephone number</b>	01525 402735
<b>Fax number</b>	01525 755881

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

## Description of the school

This is an average sized lower school. It serves pupils from Reception to Year 4. The large majority of pupils come from the immediate area. Almost all are from White British backgrounds. Most pupils come from advantaged backgrounds and the proportion entitled to free school meals is very low. The percentage with learning difficulties and disabilities is at the national average. Attainment on entry is above expected levels.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

The Firs is a good school. It has some outstanding features and provides good value for money. There is an overwhelming atmosphere of care and support in which pupils thrive in their learning. They make excellent progress in their personal development. Behaviour is outstanding, pupils thoroughly enjoy school and they have very positive attitudes. Children get off to a good start in the Foundation Stage. They settle quickly and well, and develop rapidly in the nurturing and supportive environment. As a result of the good provision, a large majority of children attain the goals expected for their age and many exceed them, particularly in their personal, social and emotional development. This good progress continues in all year groups. Pupils progress particularly rapidly in their personal development. They develop mature and sensitive attitudes, have a strong sense of community because they are encouraged to take responsibility and delight in helping and supporting each other. Pupils make good progress in their academic development. From the above average attainment on entry to Year 1, they attain standards that are exceptionally high in the tests for seven-year-olds. This good achievement continues in Years 3 and 4 and, by the time that they leave, about a third of pupils have attained the standards expected of 11 year olds, particularly in English. Achievement is good for all groups of pupils, though the progress of some pupils who find learning hard - although good in reading, writing and science - is slower in mathematics. This is because, until recently, the school has not focused sufficiently well on ensuring that the work set for some of these pupils is targeted to enable them to make quick progress. However they are now well supported.

Parents are unanimously supportive of the school. One parent said, 'I feel very fortunate that my child attends a progressive and caring school.' All say that their children make good progress, enjoy school and are safe.

The good achievement is the result of the effective provision. Teaching and learning are consistently good and the quality of the curriculum and the care, guidance and support provided are excellent. Teachers work closely together as a team to ensure that work is generally challenging. They manage pupils exceptionally well and set exciting activities that capture interest and are motivating.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher is pivotal to the school's success and, in his two years of headship, he has built successfully on the many positive features found at the time of the previous inspection. He provides good leadership and management. As one parent said, 'Mr Campbell is an excellent headteacher who is loved and respected by the pupils. He has a genuine passion for the school.' Assisted by the effective deputy headteacher, he has ensured that the right improvement projects have been tackled at the right time and in the right way. Above all, he has ensured that parents, pupils, governors and staff have been provided with an opportunity to contribute to the school's vision and its development plan. This has cemented the good relationships and has aided the staff to work together in a close team in which all views are valued. In consequence, there is good capacity for further improvement. The school has good procedures in place for checking provision and achievement, though as yet, subject leaders do not contribute sufficiently well to this process.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Strengthen the role of subject leaders to enable them to develop a clear picture of provision and pupils' progress in the areas of their responsibility
- Quicken the progress of pupils who find learning in mathematics hard.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Children enter the Reception Year with standards that are above those expected, particularly in their personal, social and emotional development. Due to the good provision, they settle quickly and well and thoroughly enjoy lessons. As a result, they make good progress and, by the time that they enter Year 1, almost all attain the expected goals and a minority exceed them. For example, in a good lesson focusing on children's mathematical development when they were counting and ordering numbers, a minority of children were already meeting the goals expected of children at the end of the school year. Good progress in Years 1 and 2 leads to consistently exceptionally high results in the tests for seven year olds in reading, writing and mathematics. However, the progress of pupils that find learning hard in mathematics is slower than in reading or writing. Even though standards are always significantly above the national average, results in mathematics have been slightly behind those in reading and writing. Pupils continue to make good progress in Years 3 and 4. As a result, by the time that they leave school, a minority of pupils already achieve the standards expected at the end of Year 6.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

The pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. The high standards of behaviour reported in the previous inspection have been maintained, and pupils have very positive attitudes. This is reflected in the well above average attendance. One pupil said, 'I love coming to school, it is the weekends that I don't like'. Pupils know about staying safe, and have high levels of understanding of the need to adopt healthy lifestyles. They delight in taking responsibility such as in 'Eco Monday' when they operate a system of tokens. They also enjoy planning the healthy tuck shop. Their high level of basic skills, linked to their mature and confident attitudes, prepare them well for moving on to middle school.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good throughout all year groups. Teachers work closely with teaching assistants, who provide good support. Together they plan lessons well and teaching engages pupils and motivates them to learn. They link subjects successfully together to make learning interesting. In a good Year 4 English lesson for example, pupils were learning the skill of note-taking and the class teacher used good quality video clips of life in Egypt. This linked well to the history topic, and it provided a good reason for pupils to practise their note taking skills. Effective questioning by the teacher enabled the pupils to identify the key characteristics of note taking. Many opportunities are provided for pupils to develop their speaking and listening skills and activities are often organised so that pupils learn together, share their experiences and support each other.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 1**

The curriculum is very well organised and meets all requirements. It engages pupils very well and promotes enjoyment of school because it provides an excellent range of opportunities. The linking of subjects makes the curriculum more interesting and creative, and offers excellent opportunities for pupils to draw together a range of skills for the themes being studied. For example, pupils thoroughly enjoy the focus days in studying history topics such as the Romans, Saxons and Egyptians. In each of these, many subjects are planned together effectively and involve professional actors who take on appropriate roles. This helps to enliven learning and provide a strong context for the development of skills and understanding. The curriculum is well planned to ensure that pupils are provided with activities that meet their learning needs. In consequence, the most able, and those who learn in different ways, are all catered for well. Those that find learning hard are generally very well supported, particularly in developing their reading and writing skills. The outstanding range of educational visits and visitors to school add to pupils' understanding and personal development. Pupils enjoy the well attended and excellent range of extra-curricular clubs which extends their interests well.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

Care and support are outstanding and enable pupils to thrive. The school environment is clean and spacious and the high quality of display provides further stimulation. The procedures for safeguarding pupils are robust and comprehensive. The specific needs of the more vulnerable pupils are met well and the school has good links with outside support groups to assist in this. The systems for monitoring pupils' progress are also good and this means that those who might be at risk of underachieving are quickly identified and given the necessary support. Consequently, pupils receive excellent guidance and know very well what they need to do to improve. Parents are kept well informed by the school and pupils know their targets and how to achieve them.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good. There is a positive atmosphere of support for staff, and teamwork throughout the school is very strong. The headteacher has a collaborative style in which teachers' views are valued and this nurtures high motivation and staff morale. There are good systems in place for checking both the school's provision and pupils' progress, though at present too much reliance is placed on the senior leadership group to achieve this; teachers with subject responsibilities do not, as yet, use a sufficiently wide range of strategies for checking standards and progress in their subjects. Nonetheless, the school has a clear view of what needs to be done for further improvement. This is represented well in the development plan. This is a good tool because it is set firmly in a clear vision for the school's future. Governors play an important role in the school. They lead well and challenge the school in a positive way, as well as providing support. There is good capacity for further improvement.

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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>	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	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

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	1
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

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

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	1
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	1

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
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**

23 March 2006

Dear Pupils

The Firs Lower School, Station Road, Ampthill, Bedford, Bedfordshire, MK45 2QR

Thank you very much for making me so welcome when I visited your school recently. I was really impressed with your friendliness and excellent behaviour, your very sensible and helpful attitudes towards each other and how well you do in your work.

Here are some of the really good things I found about your school.

- Your behaviour is excellent, you thoroughly enjoy school and lessons and you play together exceptionally well.
- All the adults work hard to make sure that you are safe and you are outstandingly well cared for.
- Lessons are good and your teachers work hard to give you interesting and exciting things to learn about.
- Your headteacher is doing a really good job and he is helped very well to make your school even better by the other teachers and governors.

I have asked the school to work on two things in particular to make your school even better.

- Make sure that teachers who are in charge of subjects check your progress in those subjects.
- Help those of you that find learning hard in mathematics to make more progress.

You can all help by continuing to work hard and to meet the targets set for you.

With best wishes

Keith Sadler

Lead Inspector