



Southlands Lower School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109525
Local Authority BEDFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 288413
Inspection dates 18–19 September 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. Declan McCarthy

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Kitelands Road
School category	Community		Biggleswade
Age range of pupils	4–9		Bedfordshire SG18 8NX
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01767 312372
Number on roll (school)	269	Fax number	01767 220030
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr. Kevin Wallis
		Headteacher	Mrs. Jennifer Morgan
Date of previous school inspection	11 June 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors

Description of the school

Pupils join the school with below average attainment. There are fewer pupils who have learning difficulties or are eligible for free meals than in most other lower schools. Pupils come from mixed social backgrounds and there are a small number of pupils from minority ethnic heritage.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Southlands Lower is a good school with some outstanding features and gives good value for money. The school has judged its effectiveness accurately, and all the staff with responsibilities make a good contribution to pupils' academic achievement. It has a very good reputation with parents who are pleased with the education provided for their children. Pupils love their school and their personal development is outstanding. They speak with great enthusiasm about their school and enjoy excellent relationships with one another and with staff. Pupils respond extremely well to the calm, caring purposeful atmosphere in the school. Children in the nursery and reception have a good start to school, settling in very quickly to their routines because the staff work effectively together to take account of the needs and feelings of individual children. The quality of care guidance and support provided to pupils is outstanding. All adults ensure that every child really matters by providing for the needs of each individual. Nearly all parents know that pupils are safe and secure at school and that staff do all they can to protect the interests and welfare of each individual pupil. Pupils make good progress, achieve well and reach above average standards because teaching is good overall. The curriculum is matched well to their needs and interests. Teachers captivate pupils' interest in learning through a very good range of varied activities. Pupils also learn effectively because teachers have good knowledge of their subjects. The very good support pupils receive from experienced teaching assistants and from members of the local community, who regularly help in the classroom, has a very positive impact on pupils' personal development and their academic progress. Basic skills of literacy and numeracy are promoted well across the curriculum. The school is making increased use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support teaching and learning in all subjects but this is not done to a consistently high standard in all year groups. Pupils achieve well in other subjects such as history, art and physical education (PE). A strong partnership with the Bedfordshire Music Service enhances pupils' progress in music. Parents are actively involved in helping the school to maintain high quality resources. The school has received the Healthy Schools Award for the work of its school council. The school is also actively involved in the Global Learning project enabling Year 4 pupils to establish links to schools in other countries and to make regular contributions to the on-line newspaper. The school is led and managed very well. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership. She has, with the support of the senior management team, created a productive, calm and caring ethos in the school where the contributions of the whole school community are valued. Teams working in each key stage are well established and efficient. During the last year effective teams have been created to co-ordinate subject development across the key stages. The work of these teams is having a positive impact and successfully raising standards. Staff morale is high, teamwork is strong and everyone is committed to school improvement. The school uses its performance data effectively in order to bring about improvements in provision and raise standards. For example, in 2005 it identified writing as an area for improvement and has put in place effective strategies to deal with this; resulting in raised standards in 2006. It has also recently put in place more

support to raise standards of achievement still further in mathematics by the end of Year 4, but it is too early to judge the impact of this on learning and achievement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the achievement of those pupils who currently only make satisfactory progress in mathematics. - Strengthen the use of ICT to support teaching and learning within subjects

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve very well because teaching and the curriculum are good. Children make good progress in all areas of learning in the nursery and reception classes. In Years 1 and 2 pupils make outstanding progress in reading and good progress in writing and mathematics. By the time they leave school in Year 4, pupils' achievements are good overall. In Years 3 and 4 they continue to make outstanding progress in reading and good progress in writing and science. Although higher attaining pupils achieve well in mathematics, the achievement of a significant minority of other pupils is only satisfactory because new support arrangements have not yet had a full impact on their progress. Pupils with learning difficulties and those of minority ethnic heritage achieve well towards their individual targets as a result of the very good support they receive. Pupils' achievement is good in other subjects. Having joined the school with below average attainment, in the 2006 national assessments, year 2 pupils reached standards in reading which were well above average. Standards in writing, mathematics and science were above average. Consistently high standards have been maintained in recent years. In the 2006 Year 4 optional tests pupils continue to achieve well reaching well above average attainment in reading and above average in attainment in writing and mathematics.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' enjoyment of school is shown clearly in their extremely positive approach to learning, their good attendance and their very good behaviour. Pupils take increasing responsibility for themselves and for others; a Year 4 pupil commented that 'we have to ensure that the little ones are happy!' Pupils adopt safe practices extremely well and know how to keep safe. They make every effort to stay healthy, through for example choosing fresh fruit at break times and exercising vigorously in physical education and games. The strong focus on pupils' key basic skills and their social development helps them to transfer smoothly to the nearby middle school. The influential school council contributes very successfully to school improvement, for example, by creating the quiet garden. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. It helps them to value each other and get on very well together.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers have particularly good subject knowledge and provide a wide range of methods to engage and motivate pupils in their learning, so that they make very good progress. Very good relationships in classes provide a very supportive learning environment for pupils. Skilled teaching assistants make valuable contributions to pupils' learning, particularly for those pupils who lack confidence to complete tasks independently. Marking is good. Teachers' written and verbal comments help pupils to understand what they have done well and what they need to do next time to make their work better.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Teachers supported by teaching assistants provide a good balance of activities in nursery and reception classes that make learning fun and promote good progress. Teachers plan subjects effectively. There is a strong emphasis on the development of literacy and numeracy skills which is raising pupils' achievement, especially in writing. A good range of visits, visitors and club activities brings subjects to life. Literacy skills are practised well in all subjects. In some lessons, opportunities for pupils to refine and improve their information communication technology skills are missed.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Outstanding care and support are valued highly by pupils and their parents. Very careful attention is given to ensure that pupils are safe and well protected. Staff are prepared to 'go the extra mile' to enable every pupil to be involved fully, for example resources are adapted to meet a variety of individual needs to ensure that all pupils can access the curriculum. This encourages pupils to be more confident in their learning and helps them to achieve very well. Very good guidance helps pupils to improve their work, through for example, the effective use of individual targets in literacy.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The outstanding leadership of the headteacher has led to strong partnership between staff, governors and parents so that they all work together for the benefit of the pupils. The headteacher receives very good support from the deputy head and her other senior managers. Together they ensure that pupils make very good academic progress and outstanding progress in their personal development. There are effective systems for identifying where pupils are not doing as well as they could, and effective action is

taken to support those who need extra help. Staff are well trained and their performance is managed effectively. Teachers' work is checked regularly to improve the quality of teaching still further. The school is well resourced and provides good value for money. The governing body is very supportive of the school. They visit regularly on an informal basis and know what is happening in the school. The school has made good improvement since the last inspection and it has a good capacity to improve further, as demonstrated by improved standards in writing.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	1
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	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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?	1

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.

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

20 September 2006 Dear children The Children, Southlands Lower School, Kitelands Road, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire. SG18 8NX I want you to know how much we enjoyed visiting your lovely school. This is what we most liked about it: - You do well in school, especially in your reading. - You enjoy learning very much because your teachers give you new and interesting things to do. - All the adults in your school take great care of you. - You all get on so well together which makes your school a very happy place to be in. - Mrs Morgan and the staff make sure that your school keeps getting better and better. We think your school could be even better if staff could help you to use computers more in some of your lessons and if some of you could be helped to make better progress in mathematics. Thank you for telling us all about your school. Keep on enjoying your learning at Southlands. Mr McCarthy Lead inspector