



Dunton VC Lower School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109599
Local Authority BEDFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 288444
Inspection dates 21–22 November 2006
Reporting inspector Nichola Perry

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

Type of school	First	School address	High Street
School category	Voluntary controlled		Dunton, Biggleswade
Age range of pupils	4–9		Bedfordshire SG18 8RN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01767 312154
Number on roll (school)	57	Fax number	01767 312154
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Susan Myler
		Headteacher	Mrs Heather Curry
Date of previous school inspection	2 July 2001		

Age group 4–9	Inspection dates 21–22 November 2006	Inspection number 288444
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Nearly all pupils attending this small village school are from White British backgrounds. They start school with skills in all areas of learning which are generally higher than those of most children of their age. There are lower proportions of pupils with learning difficulties, entitled to free school meals or with English as an additional language than in most schools. The school works closely with another local village school; these operate as one federated school. The recently appointed headteacher shares her time between the two schools.

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 an effective school with some outstanding features. There has been substantial improvement since the last inspection with outstanding improvement in information, communication and technology (ICT). There is good capacity to improve. Whilst part of the school building is a barrier to learning, the headteacher and governors make excellent use of resources to provide a pleasant and stimulating learning environment. Pupils love school, feel safe and enjoy learning and parents are overwhelmingly pleased with the school.

Good progress is made across the school. Very good provision in the Reception class builds effectively on the skills the children enter the school with. All pupils achieve at least expected levels by the time they enter Year 1 and a good number exceed these. Pupils at the end of Year 2 teachers' assessments indicate that above average standards are reached in reading, writing and mathematics. By the end of Year 4 pupils achieve exceptionally high standards in reading and writing. Average standards are reached in mathematics due to a lack of systematic teaching of problem solving skills across the school.

The needs of the whole child are at the heart of the school's work and this reflects the Christian ethos of the school community. Pupils learn and achieve well because the curriculum and teaching are good. Assessment in English and mathematics is good, although is still developing in other subjects. Learning needs are quickly identified and effective support provided. Teamwork is good and staff plan well for all groups of pupils. The tracking of pupils' progress provides valuable information to identify trends in performance.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. Behaviour is extremely good, attendance is above average and pupils are very positive about learning. Good personal guidance results in pupils knowing well how to lead healthy lives and how to stay safe. There is good provision for developing skills needed in later life. For example, the excellent internet links with pupils in other countries with very different life styles, faiths, cultures and art forms. Pupils are eager to participate in community activities and make good use of opportunities to express their ideas and views both in lessons and through the school council. Pupils are encouraged to be independent and become very confident individuals who are well prepared to listen to and help others. The care of, and support for pupils is outstanding. Pupils receive some academic guidance on how well they are doing but pupils do not always have the opportunities to assess how well they have learned in lessons.

The headteacher's leadership provides very clear direction. Effective management systems guide the school forward and lead to very accurate school self-evaluation. The role of subject leaders has improved since the last inspection but without well focused action plans they remain unclear about strengths and weaknesses in their subjects and action required. Governors are very supportive of the school and know it well. Their views and those of parents are sought and action taken.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop systematic teaching of problem solving skills in mathematics across the school so as to raise standards to match the high standards achieved in reading and writing.
- Further develop subject leaders' roles so that they have a clearer knowledge and understanding of strengths and weaknesses in their subjects and the action needed to bring about improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement across the school is good for all pupils. The school has sustained high standards in national tests and assessments over recent years - a significant improvement since the last inspection. Attainment at the end of Year 2 in 2005 shows little difference between boys and girls when pupils' learning difficulties are accounted for.

Results in writing and mathematics fell slightly in 2006 and are just above average overall. Standards in reading are high. Pupils in all groups make good progress. Assessments at the end of Year 4 indicate exceptionally high standards in reading and writing but these are largely average in mathematics. The school has identified the need to provide more focused teaching which develops pupils' skills in problem solving. Children in the new Reception class make good progress and all achieve at least the goals expected by the time they enter Year 1.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Pupils are happy, feel extremely safe and secure and thoroughly enjoy school and learning. They behave exceptionally well at all times. Healthy eating is very important to everyone and pupils enjoy well-balanced lunches and fruit and vegetable snacks at other times. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development are very good and reflect the Christian ethos of the school. Their cultural development, including multi-cultural awareness, is outstanding because of the stunning range of activities and experiences provided for them to learn about their own and different cultures. These include very strong links with schools and people from Africa, America, Canada and Australia. Pupils are also fully involved in the local community. They are acquiring skills for later life when working in pairs or groups and of particular note is the enrichment work done in mixed age groups and the delightful model of the school made by one group from junk. Opportunities for listening to the views of others, sharing ideas and decision making are well provided for in lessons and through the school council.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Some teaching is outstanding. Teachers assess pupils regularly and the headteacher has established rigorous tracking of their progress in English and mathematics. This informs planning and meets pupils' needs well. Assessment in other subjects is developing but remains a focus for improvement for subject leaders. Pupils do not always have the opportunity to contribute to the assessment of their learning in lessons.

Teachers are confident and knowledgeable. Well focused questions provide good challenge and the very good links across other subjects ensure that learning is a meaningful and enjoyable experience. Very good attention is given to developing pupils' independence and confidence across the school. Well trained teaching assistants effectively support pupils so that they learn and make good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum across the school is good. It has been well developed to ensure the needs of the whole child are met. The richness of the curriculum brings lessons alive so that pupils enjoy learning thoroughly and participate enthusiastically. Using the expertise of the headteacher, provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has improved exceptionally well since the last inspection and now contributes strongly to the quality of pupils' experiences. Pupils do not have enough planned opportunities to solve problems in mathematics.

Aspects of learning are very well enriched by a range of well attended out of hours clubs, input from specialist visitors to the school and visits to local areas as well as those further afield. Pupils also have opportunities to learn musical instruments and French, which prepares them well for the future. Their knowledge of safety issues and the need to lead healthy life styles is very good.

Provision in the Reception class is very good. Staff work together and plan an excellent range of activities across all areas of learning which meet pupils' needs from the outset.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides outstanding care and support for its pupils and has robust systems in place to ensure their safety. The school is a community where pupils and adults alike are valued and treated with respect. Parents are very supportive and are delighted with the school. Excellent use is made of others in the community to enhance learning and ensure pupils' well-being. Particularly strong work with the pre-school group ensures that pupils are well known to staff before they enter Reception and parents are well involved. Starting in Reception, strong emphasis is placed on developing self

esteem, effective communication and independence so that by Year 4 pupils are able to undertake caring for younger or more vulnerable pupils without being asked to - they just do it. Systems to inform pupils how well they are doing are developing, although there is not enough emphasis on teaching pupils how to decide if they are achieving well.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher is using her very effective leadership skills to build on the established team spirit and positive ethos of the school. She has developed good management systems which enable the school to carry out detailed analysis of performance at all levels. Strategic planning documents are evaluative and well focused so that they are effective in guiding the school towards continued improvement. This ensures good evaluation of the school's overall performance and increasingly involves governors and others. The headteacher has undertaken initial work with subject leaders in developing their leadership roles. However, they do not have detailed action plans and are not sufficiently clear about strengths and weaknesses within their subjects. Whilst there is still work to be done in strengthening governors' role in holding the school to account, they work very hard and are highly supportive of the school. The governing body is ably led by its chair who shares her very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses with less experienced governors.

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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?	1
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	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	1
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.

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

23 November 2006

Dear Pupils

Dunton VC Lower School, High Street, Dunton, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire, SG18 8RN

I very much enjoyed my recent visit to your school to see how well you are learning. Thank you very much for making me so welcome and answering all my questions so well.

You all told me that you love your school, feel safe and really enjoy all the lessons. Many of you told me that there was nothing you would like to change about the school. That is very impressive. Your parents are also very pleased with the school. I think you behave exceptionally well and work hard in your lessons. Your headteacher is very good at her job and your teachers are also good at teaching so that you achieve well. They all work very hard to make sure your lessons are fun as well as interesting. Your school lunches are great and very healthy and I enjoyed trying them very much.

I have asked your teachers to do a couple of things to make your school even better. First I have asked your teachers to make sure that you really know how to solve problems in your mathematics lessons because we all have to solve problems throughout our lives. Second, although you are doing very well in all your subjects we can always do that little bit better. So, I have asked your teachers to write a plan that they can follow to help you achieve even more.

I wish you good luck in the future and hope you continue to enjoy your lovely school so much.

With best wishes

Nichola Perry

Lead Inspector