



Kensworth VC Lower School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109602
Local Authority BEDFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 288446
Inspection dates 12–13 March 2007
Reporting inspector Sue Hall

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

Type of school	First	School address	Common Road
School category	Community		Kensworth, Dunstable
Age range of pupils	4–9		Bedfordshire LU6 3RH
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01582 872336
Number on roll (school)	47	Fax number	01582 872336
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Polly Fraser
		Headteacher	Mrs Annelore Kentish
Date of previous school inspection	7 May 2002		

Age group 4–9	Inspection dates 12–13 March 2007	Inspection number 288446
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a very small school in a rural village in Bedfordshire. A below average proportion of children is eligible for free school meals. All children are of White British heritage. The proportion with learning difficulties or disabilities is below the national average. There has been a change of headteacher since the previous inspection. In 2006 the school achieved an Artsmark Silver award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a school that provides a satisfactory quality of education. There are good features in the personal development and pastoral care of the children. Parents are mostly pleased with the quality of education offered and one notes that their child 'always comes home happy and stimulated by his day at school'.

The skills of children on entry to the school, whilst mixed, are largely as expected for their age. Children make satisfactory progress in the Foundation Stage and enter Year 1 having met and sometimes exceeded the targets expected for their age. In Years 1 and 2 children continue to make satisfactory progress and by the end of Year 2 standards, whilst varying considerably from year to year because of the range of ability within different groups, are largely average. However, national test data shows no children in Year 2 have attained above the average level in writing in the last two years reflecting an issue identified in the last inspection that still remains. In Years 3 and 4, the progress children make is good and, when they leave, standards are often above average although the current group are not set to attain quite the high standards of others who recently took the tests. Overall, children achieve satisfactorily. However, those of higher ability do not consistently achieve all they can, especially in writing.

Children's personal development and well-being are good. They are mostly well behaved and enjoy their time in school. Many children know how to make healthy choices in what they eat and have a sound understanding of the benefits of regular exercise. They also recognise how to stay safe at playtimes and out of school. The school council has a budget which helps children take responsibilities within the school community and develop skills that prepare them for their future life.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and good in Years 3 and 4. Staff manage the children well which ensures that lessons are conducted in a calm and purposeful manner. However, at times not enough is expected of the higher attainers and of many children in their writing. The curriculum is satisfactory with particular strengths in the arts. While the pastoral care of children is good, academic guidance is satisfactory. The range of assessment information is not always used to best effect to track progress and consistently plan challenging activities for groups of different abilities.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher is providing a good vision for school improvement and has developed effective working relationships with the established staff team. Governance is satisfactory, although there are few opportunities for governors to observe the work of the school at first hand. School self-evaluation is, at times, too generous and the monitoring of the work of the school lacks evaluative rigour in identifying precise areas for improvement. Overall there is satisfactory capacity for further improvement and the school provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing by teaching Key Stage 1 children the skills necessary to achieve at the higher levels.

- Ensure that assessment information is used consistently to challenge all children and particularly the more able in Key Stage 1.
- Ensure that the monitoring of the work of the school by staff, and where appropriate the governors, is rigorously evaluative in identifying further areas for improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

With small year groups, statistical comparisons between year groups can be difficult. Children enter the '4+ group' in the term after their fourth birthday. They are generally confident children who communicate readily with those around them. They have mixed, and sometimes limited, pre-school experiences and attainment on entry, whilst varying from year to year, is average overall. In the mornings, the younger children are taught by a nursery nurse in a separate group and, in the afternoons, with others in a mixed-age class. Children in the Foundation Stage make satisfactory progress overall and when they enter Year 1 they are set to achieve, and sometimes exceed, national expectations in their learning.

National test data in Year 2 shows that, with small groups, there has been considerable variation in the standards, including those achieved in the last two years. In 2005 standards were below those seen nationally, particularly in mathematics. In 2006 children did better in such tests, with a significant rise in mathematics. Test data shows that summer born children and boys overall have not done as well as such groups nationally. The previous inspection identified that standards in writing were below average. In the last two years no children have achieved above the average in writing and few join their handwriting on a consistent basis. Overall, standards in Year 2 are largely average and children achieve satisfactorily. In Years 3 and 4 children make consistently good progress and often 'catch up' on some of the higher level skills they need. In Year 4, standards are often above average although the current group is a not such a high attaining cohort in comparison to others. Overall, children achieve satisfactorily, including those with learning difficulties, but they do not make the progress they could in writing and the more able could achieve more, particularly in Years 1 and 2.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Children enjoy their time in school. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, as seen in their enjoyment when singing in assemblies. They say they particularly like art activities. Children generally behave well and most have good relationships, although the older ones rightly note there are conflicts in some groups. Children have a good understanding of how to behave to ensure they and their friends are safe. They are encouraged to eat and drink healthily although there is more to be done to help younger children understand what makes a healthy diet. Children are involved in several community initiatives including the village carnival and through

planting trees locally. This promotes community cohesion well. The fledgling school council is given a budget and, when researching how to spend this for the benefit of the school community, councillors develop skills that equip them well for their future economic well-being. Combined with their academic skills, this provides pupils with a sound foundation for the next stage of their education. Attendance is in line with national averages.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The main strength in teaching is the good management of children, supported by the good relationships evident across the school. This ensures children generally behave well and want to succeed. Displays of good quality art work clearly indicate teaching in this subject is effective. Staff plan conscientiously to meet the needs of different ages and abilities within each class. 'Value added' data and observations show that teaching is most successful in Years 3 and 4. This is because staff have high expectations of what the children can achieve and make sure work contains a consistently good level of challenge. However, overall teaching is not always demanding enough because staff do not make the best use of assessment information to challenge groups of different abilities. As one parent notes, 'Teaching is competent'. But there is little indication in the sample of recent work that this is either exciting or challenging. The teaching of writing is satisfactory but staff are not always clear enough about what specific skills need to be improved in order for children to do better.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Curriculum planning is satisfactory overall with some good aspects. Art is a particularly successful feature of the curriculum and music, dance and drama activities also enrich learning. For a small school there is a good range of extra-curricular activities including residential visits for the older ones. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has improved since the previous inspection although ICT was rarely seen in use during the inspection. The school week is slightly shorter than the national recommendation. Planning for literacy and numeracy is satisfactory. Following a dip in mathematics standards in 2005 the school worked successfully to improve the opportunities for children to solve mathematical problems. However, the sample of recent work shows too much use of commercial worksheets and work books from the Foundation Stage onwards. These limit practical activities and the way children record their ideas, which does little to improve writing or make learning interesting.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Overall, the care, guidance and support of children are satisfactory. Pastoral care is good. Children are well known to the staff who liaise well with parents and so are quickly able to recognise when a child may be ill, unhappy or finding learning difficult. Child protection procedures are well known to staff and there are suitable checks of those who help in school. Children with learning difficulties are well supported by a generous number of staff. However, academic guidance is no more than satisfactory. While appropriate verbal feedback is given to children, the marking of their work is sometimes limited and does not help children to remember what they need to do to improve afterwards. Staff check and track the progress children make but the information available is not familiar to all co-ordinators or used to best effect in planning subsequent work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher provides a good focus for school development following a period when there had been limited change or improvement in the school. Staff work well together as a team which has helped maintain a warm and caring ethos, which is appreciated by parents. The current large budget underspend is earmarked to support the eagerly anticipated development of the pre-school group opening next month. Staffing is generous for the number of children, but the school building is shabby in places and does not help to increase pupil numbers by making a positive statement to the local community. There have been few opportunities for senior staff or external advisers to check teaching or learning across the school. School development planning accurately identifies the main priorities that need to be tackled. However, the monitoring of the work of the school is often informal and lacks rigour in identifying sufficient detail to support further more rapid improvement. Governance of the school is satisfactory. Governors are supportive but reliant on staff for information about the issues that inform strategic decision making.

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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

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	3
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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
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?	3

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?	3
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	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
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

14 March 2007

Dear Children

Kensworth VC Lower School, Common Road, Kensworth, Dunstable, Bedfordshire, LU6 3RH

Thank you very much for looking after me when I visited your school recently. I enjoyed speaking to you in lessons, at lunchtime, in the playground and at the meeting with the school council. I think there are lots of things that are fine about your school.

These are the things that I think are best:

- the staff look after you well and most of you like coming to school
- your art work is good and there is some lovely work on display
- there is a good range of extra activities that make learning interesting
- those of you in Years 3 and 4 make good progress and do well.

These are areas that I think could be improved:

- staff could plan more activities to help you do well with your writing
- work could be a bit harder for you and especially for those who find learning easy
- all the adults could check what happens in lessons and in your work to make sure they know what else needs improving.

Thank you again for being so helpful and friendly towards me. Remember that you can help your school improve even more by making sure you try really hard all the time.

Yours sincerely,

Sue Hall

Lead inspector