

Studham CofE VC Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109607
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE
Inspection number	288447
Inspection dates	13–14 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Paul Missin

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	60
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Meg Bender
Headteacher	Miss Delene Rodway-Johnson
Date of previous school inspection	14 January 2002
School address	Church Road Studham Dunstable Bedfordshire LU6 2QD
Telephone number	01582 872337
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This school is much smaller than most other primary schools. Skill levels on admission is above average and most children benefit from pre-school educational provision. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is average but a higher than average proportion have statements of educational need. A below average proportion are eligible for free school meals. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds and none are at an early stage of learning English. There has been a high staff turnover in the last two years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This school provides a satisfactory standard of education for its pupils. It is a happy, caring place where pupils are looked after and cared for well and show an impressive commitment to being part of an attractive and welcoming community. These strengths are appreciated by parents, who are very supportive. One wrote, 'A great feature of the school is the warm family atmosphere. My child thrives there and is proud to be part of it.' Pupils' personal development is promoted well and their attitudes and behaviour are excellent. They have good opportunities to take responsibility for others and contribute to the running of their community through the school council. Pupils understand how to stay healthy, and appreciate the importance of physical exercise. They enjoy school and attendance is above average.

Across the school, pupils reach standards that are consistently above those expected for their age. However, the school is not yet successful in ensuring that pupils always make the best possible progress. Their achievement overall is satisfactory. From a generally above average standard when they begin in Reception, most pupils make satisfactory progress to reach above average standards by the time they leave Year 4. Within English, progress in reading is good and in writing it is sound. As a result standards in reading in Year 4 are now well above average and slightly better than in writing. The curriculum is sound. It is focused well on promoting basic literacy and numeracy skills. Provision for reading is noticeably good but there is scope to enhance further the provision for promoting the full range of writing skills.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Much high quality teaching was observed during the inspection but a residue of previous less effective teaching remains. Currently, teaching has several important strengths. Among them is the sensitivity with which pupils are managed and the way that teachers use questioning very effectively to challenge pupils of all abilities. However, not all lessons are taught at a sufficiently brisk pace and the detailed use of assessment data is only just beginning to be effective. High quality teaching is now successfully overcoming the results of less effective teaching in the past and is enabling pupils to catch up with ground that had been lost previously.

Leadership and management are satisfactory as the school itself judged. The school's capacity for improvement has been limited recently by the pressures caused by significant staffing disruption and the establishment of a new pre school facility associated with the school. However, greater staffing stability and a recent focus on using assessment data to clearly monitor the progress which pupils are making have reversed the downward trend in Year 2 and ground lost is now being regained. Recently introduced initiatives to raise standards in mathematics have been successful. These successes and the clear vision of the headteacher and other senior staff mean that the school is now well placed for further improvement. A weakness is that the school improvement plan does not put raising standards at the centre of its work and the action plan to accelerate progress in writing is not sufficiently detailed. Governors support the school well, but they do not have sufficiently rigorous procedures to critically monitor its work. Overall, the school gives satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the standards pupils achieve in their writing.
- Ensure that the school improvement plan is more clearly focused on raising standards and accelerating the progress which pupils make.
- Bring the standard of teaching consistently up to the best observed in the inspection.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Across the school, most pupils reach standards which are above those expected for their age but in relation to their starting points their achievement is satisfactory rather than good. On entry to the Reception class, many children already have a wide subject knowledge and are confident speakers. Most make sound progress to reach standards which are also above average by the beginning of Year 1. Progress between Years 1 and 2 is now satisfactory. The recent drop in standards in Year 2 has been reversed and indications are that above average standards have now been re-established. Standards in Year 4 are also above average. Across the school, progress in reading is good and standards are well above average by the time pupils leave. Overall progress is not better because the effects of previous underachievement are still present and, until very recently, the school has not had sufficiently detailed monitoring and tracking procedures to ensure that pupils successfully build on what they had previously learned. Progress in writing is consistently slower than that in reading or mathematics. The achievement of pupils with learning difficulties is similar to that of their colleagues.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Pupils are introduced sensitively to opportunities for prayer and have a very good appreciation of being part of the school community. They say how much they value the responsibility of representing others on the school council and are pleased with what they have been able to achieve. Attitudes and behaviour are excellent. Pupils are polite and welcoming to visitors. They talk very confidently and maturely about their school. They enjoy lessons and their attendance is above average. Pupils are knowledgeable about healthy lifestyles and the 'Wake and Shake' exercise session at the beginning of most days is enjoyable and emphasises the importance of physical fitness. Pupils co-operate well when required and most are prepared soundly for the world of work in adult life. They make a good contribution to the wider community through their choir and music festivals and support for activities such as the 'Tree Cathedral' service at Whipsnade.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, with some strengths. In most lessons where teaching is good, teachers are energetic and enthusiastic and manage pupils very effectively. They create expectant classrooms where pupils' behaviour is excellent and most are very eager to learn. Teachers use work done at home and the support provided by parents very effectively. In a lesson on the Great Fire of London, one pupil proudly announced that, 'My mum has told me how the fire started!' Teachers use questioning very effectively to probe pupils' understanding. However, in some lessons, the pace of learning is too leisurely and support

assistants are not sufficiently proactive. Pupils with learning difficulties are supported satisfactorily.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory overall. Appropriate weight is put on the development of basic literacy and numeracy skills. Provision for reading is a strength. Across the school, clear emphasis is placed on the love of books and the teaching of early reading skills. Opportunity for pupils to progressively develop their writing skills is less strong. Singing is taught well and remains a strength, as it was at the time of the last inspection. The curriculum is enhanced well through a number of interesting visits and through visitors to the school. A good number and range of after-school clubs provide additional challenge for pupils as well as adding positively to their sense of enjoyment and personal development. Although the school is beginning to get a clearer view of the progression in pupils' learning as they move through the school, this is still not sufficiently clear in respect of their writing.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are well cared for. A strength is the way in which the school's caring ethos, 'Caring to Learn: Learning to Care' is clearly promoted and implemented by all the adults in the school community. The value which adults place on what pupils can do and the way they celebrate all their achievement encourage pupils' commitment to the school community and impact very positively on their personal development. The school provides a safe and secure environment. Child protection arrangements are effective and appropriate risk assessments are in place. The statutory requirements relating to appointing staff are being met. Assessment data are now beginning to be used more effectively to track and monitor the progress which pupils are making. Pupils know their targets and say that they are helping them to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. In recent years, staffing disruption and the difficulties caused in the establishment of a new pre-school facility affiliated to the school have caused significant difficulties for all school leaders. In this small school where the headteacher has a major teaching commitment, leadership and management systems were severely stretched. The impact of these recent difficulties was that standards, particularly in Year 2 dipped. However, a new focus on using assessment data to set targets and effective monitoring of the quality of teaching are beginning to bear fruit, especially in Year 2, where standards are beginning to rise. However, there are still some weaknesses. The improvement plan does not make sufficiently explicit reference to raising standards and the planned priorities for literacy, particularly how to accelerate progress in writing, are not described in sufficient detail. Senior staff have worked hard to implement the effective assessment and tracking system. Governance is satisfactory. Governors support the school well and have a very good range of sub-committees to oversee different aspects of the life of the school. However, they are not yet making sufficiently challenging judgements about school effectiveness.

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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?	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	2
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	2
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	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	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?	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?	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?	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

15 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Studham CofE VC Lower School, Studham, Dunstable, Bedfordshire, LU6 2QD

Thank you for making me so welcome when I came to the school recently to see how well you were doing.

Here are the things that I think are best about your school.

- You all behave very well in class and around the school. You told me how much you enjoy and appreciate being at this school.
- You enjoy books and do very well with your reading.
- You all take pride in being part of an attractive, caring school community.

There have been some changes in teachers recently which have been unsettling for you. This has meant that some of you have not always been able to make the best possible progress in your learning. However, things are better now that your teachers are more settled and you are too.

These are the things which I think could be even better at your school.

- You could make even more progress in your writing to match what you do in your reading.
- Now that teachers know each other better they could help each other to make sure that all lessons are as good as the very best ones.
- Your headteacher, governors and staff could make sure that the school improvement plan shows very clearly what they need to do to make sure you do as well as you can.

Thank you once again for your welcome and I wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Missin

Lead Inspector