



Christopher Reeves CofE VA Lower School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109622
Local Authority BEDFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 288453
Inspection dates 7–8 February 2007
Reporting inspector John Brennan

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

Type of school	First	School address	Hinwick Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Podington, Wellingborough
Age range of pupils	4–9		Northamptonshire NN29 7HU
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01933 353531
Number on roll (school)	69	Fax number	01933 313615
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Pauline Cameron
		Headteacher	Mrs Sue McNally
Date of previous school inspection	3 March 2003		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This small school draws pupils from the village of Podington and the surrounding area. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. Children's skills on entry to the school vary from year to year but are typically above expected levels. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties or disabilities is average. For the size of school a higher than usual number of pupils have complex needs for which they have a statement. The school has achieved an Activemark. There has been considerable change in headship in the recent past.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This satisfactory school has improved well of late. It has responded effectively to concerns raised by the local authority. The relatively new headteacher leads the school with energy and perceptiveness and has built on the good work of the recent past. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory and the school is giving satisfactory value for money. Governors are vigilant to see that progress is maintained and subject coordinators are keen to play their part. They are however, in their own words, 'at the beginning' of doing this. They are yet to acquire necessary leadership skills to help them effectively check up on teaching and learning and assess how well pupils are doing. Many parents express confidence in what the school is doing for their children.

Standards are above average but in relation to their abilities pupils' achievements are satisfactory. The quality of teaching and learning and curriculum organisation is better in the Foundation Stage and Years 3 and 4 than in Years 1 and 2. This variable quality means that teaching and learning and the curriculum are satisfactory overall. Good provision in the Foundation Stage ensures that children's education gets off to a good start. However, progress slows down in Years 1 and 2. Pupils do too little writing and much of what they do in mathematics is mundane. Work is too easy for more able pupils, who mark time as a result. Progress picks up in Years 3 and 4 because teaching expects more of pupils and sets them tasks that fire their imagination and adds to their enjoyment of school.

Pupils' personal development is satisfactory. Pupils have responded well to improved play facilities and to new behaviour rules. They play well together and work hard. Many eat healthily and are active at playtimes. They acquire most of the skills needed for the future. The main exception to this is using information and communication technology (ICT) as a learning tool. This is because pupils have too few opportunities to use computers, especially when they are studying other subjects. Improved systems for tracking pupils' progress ensure that pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given suitable support and make steady progress. However, the school is only at the beginning of using assessment information to help pupils see for themselves how to improve their work. Consequently pupils are not yet taking enough responsibility for taking their work forward.

What the school should do to improve further

- Give more able pupils in Years 1 and 2 more challenging work, especially in writing and mathematics.
- Ensure that the curriculum gives pupils more opportunities to use computers.
- Ensure that pupils know for themselves how to improve their work.
- Equip all subject coordinators with essential leadership skills.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are above average but, in relation to pupils' capabilities, achievement is satisfactory. Children's education gets off to a good start in the Reception class and they achieve well in learning to read, write and count. Many attain beyond expected levels by the time they start Year 1. However, this good momentum is not maintained in Years 1 and 2. Progress slows down and is merely satisfactory. As elsewhere in the school, pupils who have learning difficulties and other disabilities receive suitable support and make steady progress. However, not enough is expected of more able pupils, who are capable of achieving more, especially in mathematics and in writing. This is the main reason why results in national tests, which have often been high, fell back to be nearer the average mark in the last two years. Achievement of more able pupils picks up again in Years 3 and 4 because teaching becomes more adventurous and the curriculum more engaging.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

The vast majority of pupils work hard and play well alongside their peers. They are keenly motivated by the extensive array of rewards on offer and report that there is little bullying. Attendance rates are high and pupils enjoy school. Pupils have a good knowledge of how to stay healthy and readily put principle in practice. Many eat healthily and playtimes are active and social occasions. This has been aided by a playground extension and the purchasing of play equipment. The latter was chosen by the school council, who have a strong voice in the school. Pupils take this responsibility seriously. However, there are few other outlets for pupils to practise responsibility and to make decisions. In general, pupils do not have a clear enough idea about the next stages of their learning or on developing skills to assess for themselves how well they are doing. A well thought out programme for school assemblies helps pupils consider moral issues and provides opportunities for reflection. Pupils' knowledge of life in multi-cultural Britain is less well developed. Overall therefore, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers establish encouraging relationships with pupils. Classrooms are calm so that pupils and teachers can go about their work undisturbed. Teachers are making increasingly regular use of interactive whiteboards, which pupils say helps make lessons more interesting. However, the quality of questioning is variable. In some lessons too little is done to test and delve into pupils' understanding and to ensure that all pupils are engaged in question and answer sessions. Some, but not all, teaching assistants

are effective at such times because they help less confident pupils answer questions. All teaching assistants make a strong contribution to pupils' learning during group work. An improved assessment procedure gives teachers a good idea of each pupil's ability but, despite this, too little is expected of more able pupils in Years 1 and 2. Too many worksheets are used in mathematics so that pupils rarely solve mathematical problems and there are too few opportunities for pupils to draft and craft writing. This is in stark contrast to the good quality of teaching in Reception and in Years 3 and 4. Work here is more enjoyable, better pitched and has a sense of purpose.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Events such as 'Anti-Bullying Week' contribute well to pupils' personal development and form part of a thorough programme for pupils' personal development. The curriculum for children in the Foundation stage is lively and engaging. Good use is made of the rather limited outdoor space to promote learning outside of the classroom. Throughout the school, too little use is made of other subjects to help pupils acquire and make thoughtful use of ICT skills. With the exception of ICT, linkages across subjects to make learning meaningful are increasingly common in Years 3 and 4. For example, pupils in Years 3 and 4, having studied Ted Hughes' *The Iron Man*, made their own models, complete with electrical circuits, and went on to write imaginatively about their robot's escapades. The curriculum in Years 1 and 2 is not as thought provoking. In particular, pupils do too little writing in other subjects. There is a satisfactory range of clubs, trips and visits for pupils to take part in outside of lessons that add to their enjoyment of school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The family ethos of the school can be seen in the caring and considerate relationships staff build with pupils. Vulnerable pupils are well looked after and those with the most complex needs are given close support. Improvements to the way pupils' progress is tracked have helped identify pupils who, whilst not having severe needs, need a boost to learning. This has led to widespread and successful help for reading, but this is yet to be fully extended to other areas of learning. There is little on offer to act as an outlet for pupils who have particular talents and gifts. Tracking data is yet to be used effectively to give pupils more personal academic guidance. Formal systems for ensuring pupils' safety, including those for child protection, are robust. Overall, standards of care, support and guidance are satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher has wasted no time weighing up the strengths and weaknesses of the school and taking action. Regular but somewhat informal classroom visits have given her an accurate view of teaching and learning. Parents', pupils' and staff's views

have been sought and school performance data analysed well against national standards. The headteacher knows the school well and in the short space of time since her appointment has injected vigour and adjusted priorities so that the right areas for improvement are tackled. As one member of staff said and others echoed, 'We are going forward together.' Governors are supportive of the school, are well informed about performance and play an important part in decision making and in seeing for themselves how effectively the school operates. Training is now closely linked to school improvement, and partnerships with the local authority and other local schools have been forged that benefit the school. Subject coordinators are given the licence to take a lead. This has raised morale and helped created a sense of optimism. The capacity to secure future improvement is satisfactory. Until of late, too little has been done to equip coordinators with essential leadership skills. This is changing but, as coordinators themselves recognise, more remains to be done. At present they do not know enough about what is going in other teachers' classrooms and are not yet routinely checking to see how well recently agreed changes work out in practice.

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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	2
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	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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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	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

9 February 2007

Dear Children

Christopher Reeves C of E VA Lower School, Hinwick Road, Podington, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, NN29 7HU

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school recently. It felt like I was visiting one big family. I would like to share with you what I thought about your school.

The headteacher, staff and governors are working hard to make your school the best it can be. A lot has happened recently that has made things better at your school.

You play your part in helping the school to get better still. You behave well and try hard in lessons. You told me how much you like the extra space you have outside to play in and the play equipment that you use well. You know a lot about healthy eating and I could see many of you eating healthy foods. I think more could be done to help you know more about your work. I think the school could be doing more to help you see for yourselves how to improve your work and I have asked them to find ways of doing this.

There are lots of good things for you to do in lessons, especially for the youngest and oldest children in the school. I noticed that in Years 1 and 2 some of you found the work too easy. I have asked the school to make sure that those of you who are able to manage it are given harder and more interesting work, especially in writing and mathematics. I noticed that many of the computers, especially those in your classrooms, are not used a lot. I have asked the school to make sure that you use computers more often, especially when you are working in other subjects.

The last thing I have asked your school to do is to make sure that teachers pop into each other's classrooms more often to see what is happening and to learn from each other.

Thank you once again and good luck in the future.

John Brennan

Lead inspector