

Wilden VA Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109627
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE
Inspection number	288457
Inspection date	4 May 2007
Reporting inspector	John Messer

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	41
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs M L Mardline
Headteacher	Mrs J Overs
Date of previous school inspection	20 March 2002
School address	High Street Wilden Bedford Bedfordshire MK44 2PB
Telephone number	01234 771313
Fax number	01234 771313

Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Pupils are taught in three classes in this very small village primary school. Most pupils are from White British families. A small number are from minority ethnic backgrounds and a very small number speak languages other than English. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. On entry, the attainment of most children is at the level expected for this age. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is average. The school has a Healthy Schools award and Investors in People accreditation.

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 a good school. It has many strengths and some outstanding features. The new headteacher sets high standards and gives exceptionally good leadership. She has given a renewed impetus to the school's improvement. Pupils receive a well-rounded education. Pupils do well in French, sports, gymnastics and music. Good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) for research and to communicate with, for example, contacts in Australia. The school's 'Global Learning' initiative is firmly embedded in the curriculum and it is well on the way to achieving the International School award. It has good links with other schools in America and France. Pupils are developing an excellent understanding of how people live in other parts of the world. The curriculum is being developed exceptionally well. A wide range of after-school activities, visits and visitors enhance the curriculum and enrich pupils' learning. The school has made a start on linking subjects together to make the curriculum more exciting and relevant to pupils' interests. Personal development is outstanding. Pupils are self-assured and develop into confident learners. Care, support and guidance are good. Pupils say that they feel safe and secure in school. They have a good understanding of how to eat sensibly, stay healthy and keep fit. Pupils enjoy school and attendance is good.

Teaching is good. Lessons are stimulating and motivate pupils well. All groups of pupils make good progress because work is accurately matched to their widely varying stages of development and the very small teaching groups allows each individual to receive close attention. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' performance and standards are above average in English, mathematics and science. Pupils' excellent personal skills, coupled with their good academic achievement, prepare them well for the next stage of their education. Children settle happily in the Reception class where the quality of provision is good so that, by the end of the Reception year, most attain all of the early learning goals. A new system is being introduced to set the amount of progress that pupils are expected to make in literacy and numeracy and to give each pupil clear learning targets. At present pupils do not fully understand exactly what they need to do to reach the next stages in their learning.

The management of the school is good. The school makes an excellent contribution to community cohesion by, for example, taking a full part in the village's annual May Fair. There are good links with the village playgroup which promote continuity in children's learning. Parents are pleased with the education provided for their children. The school council is highly effective and ably assisted governors in the selection of the new headteacher. The governing body monitors the school's performance closely and provides good support. Finances are managed well and the school provides good value for money. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and it is used well to create an excellent school development plan. The school is poised to make further advances and has good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Set clear learning targets for pupils in English and mathematics so that they know exactly what they need to do to reach the next stages in their learning.
- Pursue ways of linking subjects together creatively to construct an exciting curriculum that is relevant to pupils' interests.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities and those who do not speak English as their first language, achieve well. This is largely because teachers prepare lessons carefully and set challenging tasks that are well matched to each individual's particular learning needs. All pupils learn successfully. They achieve well in the Reception class and by the end of the Reception year standards are in line with national expectations. They make good progress in Years 1 to 4 and by Year 2, and again by Year 4, standards are above average in English, mathematics and science. The number of pupils in each year group is very small, so comparative statistical data must be treated with great caution. However, an average of the school's performance in the national assessments for pupils in Year 2 over the last three years shows that results in reading are exceptionally high and are well above average in writing and mathematics. Pupils make good progress in Years 3 and 4 and some make exceptional progress in English and mathematics so that by Year 4 they are two years ahead of the levels normally expected. Pupils are developing a good range of skills in ICT.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

This is a key strength of the school. Pupils are keen to learn and eager to please because they are highly motivated. One school councillor summed this up: 'Our school is a learning society, a place for learning and fun where we keep finding ways to improve our work.' The warm and friendly relationships between pupils and all the adults in the school, coupled with high expectations of pupils' ability to participate sensibly in decision making, helps to foster high levels of maturity and responsibility. The strong links with the church support pupils' spiritual development effectively. The school council plays a dynamic and pivotal role in the school and is highly respected as a group that help to improve provision. Visitors, such as Indian dancers and African drummers, support cultural development well. Pupils are polite and sensitive to the needs of others. They willingly support a range of charities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers and skilled teaching assistants work closely together to support pupils' learning. The number of adults per pupil is high and so each individual often receives individual learning support. One strong feature of the teaching is the flexibility with which adults, including the headteacher, are deployed in response to the varying needs of different groups. Sometimes, for example, all the Year 2 pupils work together in a small group, whilst at other times the slower learners will form a separate group for extra intense support. Gifted pupils have access to the 'Children's University' each summer and those who are talented in sports are given extra opportunities to develop their particular skills. The leadership and management of the school are highly successful in organising learning that meets individual needs. However, the pace of lessons is not always sufficiently brisk to make best use of time. Interactive white boards are used well to enhance teaching and learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It has some outstanding features. The Global Learning initiative and the school's international links are exceptional and make a strong contribution to pupils' understanding of different languages and cultures. All pupils learn French and are making good progress. There are good opportunities to learn to play instruments and pupils particularly enjoy playing the cello and violin. There are good links with the middle school, where pupils have gymnastics lessons, and with the local Sports College. The school has more recently started to plan a curriculum that links subjects together to form interesting topics.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care and support are especially strong features of the school and underpin learning particularly well. Great emphasis is placed on ensuring the safety of pupils. Child protection procedures are in place and are understood by all staff. Pupils say they feel secure in the school. They receive clear guidance about how to stay safe and lead healthy lifestyles. They feel well supported by all school staff and would have no hesitation about sharing problems or concerns with their teachers. General pastoral guidance is good but academic guidance that shows pupils exactly what they need to do to reach the next stages in their learning, is lacking.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The new headteacher gives clear direction and energetic leadership. She is ambitious for the school and has laid excellent plans to improve provision further. Historically, the school has always helped pupils to achieve well and attain high standards but there is no complacency. Teachers and support staff are constantly seeking ways to improve provision further. The staff are eager to participate fully in new developments to improve teaching in order to make learning even more effective. Governors provide strong support. Many assist teachers by offering their services to help in classrooms. Finances are managed well. The school is an orderly community with strong links with the village. The headteacher is working hard to forge equally strong links with the other villages in which pupils live, by, for example, following the school bus and talking with groups of parents at each stop. The school is well placed to make further improvements.

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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?	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	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
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.

Annex A**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	1
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

4 May 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Wilden VA Lower School, High Street, Wilden, Bedford, Bedfordshire, MK44 2PB

What a great school! I thoroughly enjoyed my short visit. Thank you for being so friendly and helpful. I was impressed with the way you danced around the May Pole, making intricate patterns with the ribbons. It was clever of you not to get into a terrible tangle.

I think that there are many good things about the school. You are very sensible and your behaviour is excellent. You work hard and enjoy learning new things. You are also full of fun and enjoy playing with your friends. The school council helps to improve things around the school. You have certainly chosen good councillors. They did a great job by helping the school governors to find such a super new headteacher. You always do your best and so you make good progress in your learning. You are very good at reading and many of you attain high standards in writing, mathematics and science. You use computers confidently to help you with your learning. You use the internet well for research and as part of the school's Global Learning initiative to make links with schools in other countries. You are becoming really good at learning to speak French. You are good at music and it was lovely to see the violinists playing so well together. You are also good at physical education (PE) and you get good support for gymnastics and sports from Alban Middle School, Sandy Upper School's Sports College and Rushden and Diamonds Football Club. You know how to stay safe and look after yourselves.

I have asked Mrs Overs and the school governors to think about setting you clear targets to aim for in literacy and numeracy so that you know exactly what you need to do to reach the next stages in your work. I agree with Mrs Overs that the teachers should continue to find ways to join subjects together to make exciting topics so that lessons become even more interesting.

I wish you every success in the future.

John Messer

Lead Inspector