



The Mary Towerton School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 110208
Local Authority Buckinghamshire
Inspection number 288599
Inspection date 19 September 2006
Reporting inspector Heather Yaxley HMI

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

Type of school	Infant	School address	Beacons Bottom
School category	Community		Studley Green, Stokenchurch
Age range of pupils	5-7		High Wycombe HP14 3XN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01494 482384
Number on roll (school)	35	Fax number	01494 482517
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Janet Smith
		Headteacher	Mrs Judith Standen
Date of previous school inspection	5 February 2002		

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

Mary Towerton School is a small, semi-rural school with children coming from Studley Green, Beacons Bottom, Horsleys Green, Dashwood Hill and Piddington. The school also takes children from families at the Wycliffe Centre where Christians come from all around the world to study and translate the Bible. These children often stay for short periods of time and bring a diversity of religious and cultural experiences. There are currently five children in school who speak English as an additional language. None requires additional support with their learning. Two children have been identified as having additional needs linked to speech and language difficulties, including one child with a Statement of Special Educational Need. There are no children currently taking free school meals and none is looked after by a local authority.

There can be up to 18 children in each year group but the numbers on roll are falling. Children are taught in two mixed-age class groups. The headteacher has a teaching commitment for half of each week.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Mary Towerton School is a good school. Parents often send their children to it because it is small and standards are high. However, there is more to the school than this. The school has consistently provided a good standard of education. This not only enables children to achieve well, but also develops increasing awareness of how to keep healthy and safe. Children are well prepared for the next stage in their education. This represents good value for money.

The headteacher and governing body give good strategic leadership, with children at the heart of all that they do. Good improvements have been made since the last inspection. This demonstrates excellent capacity to improve the provision even further. Whilst the whole staff team work together in monitoring the quality of what they provide, they do not always know exactly why provision and outcomes are good. So, plans sometimes lack precision in pinpointing what it is that will lead to the development of outstanding school provision and how to measure it.

Effective monitoring, evaluation and assessments lead to good teaching and the delivery of a good curriculum by skilled and enthusiastic classroom staff. The progress children make is reviewed regularly and is enhanced by the involvement of parents and the children themselves. The youngest children in the school settle quickly and gain a good foundation to their education. This combination enables all children to produce high quality work and make good progress in their learning and personal skills. This pattern of achievement is well established and consistent over time for all groups and subjects. Although the curriculum is good, supporting teachers in planning lessons with a rich and varied content, some elements lack enough indication about how all areas of skill and knowledge are being covered.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and are justifiably pleased with how their children are guided and supported through this early stage of their education. Many parents made additional comments on the pre-inspection questionnaires and all responses were positive. One said 'the school is truly wonderful; the staff are absolutely focused on our children and ensuring that they get the best start'.

Mary Towerton School may be small but it is forward thinking and outward looking. It rightly enjoys recognition for the support and confidence that it gives to other schools in the wider community as well as to children and their families in the locality.

What the school should do to improve further

- Sharpen development planning so there are clear success criteria to measure the extent to which provision and outcomes can become outstanding.
- Ensure that long term curriculum planning identifies how the full range of knowledge and skills are covered.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are above average. Children reach levels of work which are just above average at the end of the Reception Year. Standards are above average at the end of Year 2. Standards for mathematics are exceptionally high when compared to national averages, all children reaching at least Level 2 for the past four years.

Achievement is good. Children have skills which are broadly average for their age when they come to the school. The high standards that are reached by the time they leave the school represent good progress from individual starting points. Those with learning difficulties are few in number but make excellent progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Children's personal development and well-being are good. To say that children enjoy their education at Mary Towerton School is an understatement. They are very happy to come to school each morning and talk enthusiastically about what they are learning and the things that they remember doing in the past. Particular favourites include mathematics lessons, study walks around the local area and school fetes. Attendance is good, and is consistently above the national average. The development of spiritual, moral, social and cultural skills is good. Children respond positively to the high expectations that staff have of them to behave well, keep one another safe, to be independent and to be active learners. This is seen in the way in which children play well together and in high quality presentation of class work. Older children act as good role models for the younger ones. This helps to settle any children who are new to the school. Friendships are strong, even with those who may only be at the school for short periods of time.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching seen during this inspection was good and supports the view that the school has of its own strengths and areas for development. Teachers are skilled in pitching work at the right level of ability and interest for children of mixed ages. Support staff are well informed and make a good contribution to the teaching and assessment of groups. Individual children who need a little extra help are supported and encouraged sensitively. A particular strength of teaching is the way in which staff use opportunities presented by the children to deliver the curriculum in a flexible, timely and relevant way. This contributes to the enjoyment that children have of their learning. Teachers are keen to improve practice, actively responding to areas identified through regular monitoring of lessons by one another and the headteacher. Recent work undertaken

to refine the use of questioning and the pace of activities in lessons has led to improved responses from the children.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The quality of the curriculum is good. The two-year rolling curriculum plan effectively ensures that children progress through the full range of subjects and build on prior learning as they get older. This enables children to achieve well. Planning for some subjects is not yet sufficiently detailed to show how skills and knowledge will be covered. Staff are already refining how links are made between subjects through themed areas of work and how to integrate personal, social and health education throughout the curriculum. The curriculum is enhanced through good use of the school grounds and the local area, as well as visiting experts. The involvement of children in growing, picking, cooking and eating their own vegetables has been effective in encouraging them to make healthy choices. They are currently looking forward to harvesting and cooking seven very impressive pumpkins!

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The good care, guidance and support that children receive from staff contribute significantly to the good progress made in their personal development and academic achievement. This applies equally to the guidance that they get in class and the attention that is given to their general health, safety and well-being. Staff know the children and their families very well. Parents have confidence in the school, expressing that it provides 'a very caring and safe environment that is very encouraging, whatever the ability of the child'. Staff are particularly mindful of the need to prepare children for when they leave to attend schools which are much larger than they have been used to. Feedback from parents and former pupils suggest that they do this well.

In class, children know what they must do to improve their work. The use of individual targets and feedback when work is completed effectively supports them in taking responsibility for doing their best. It also helps them to be independent in their learning at an early age. More work is planned to increase the involvement that children have in making decisions and how they assess their own work. Additional support and guidance given to those with learning difficulties is very effective. Their excellent progress is a result of coordinated approaches, close working with parents and the delivery of individual programmes. The school meets the current requirements for safeguarding children.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher and the governing body have been very effective over a long period of time in ensuring that

children achieve well. The number of children in each year group is small and the school appropriately focuses on the progress of individuals, but also looks for patterns over past years to illuminate any possible areas of underachievement. This is demonstrated by recent deliberations and subsequent actions taken to address possible under-achievement for boys with writing.

The headteacher is reflective and a very effective leader of the whole staff team. The governing body is very supportive but also gives a good level of challenge to the headteacher. Together the team have a clear focus on helping children achieve greater success. However, they are not always methodical in the way in which they analyse and evaluate what they do. This means that improvement planning is not sharp enough to measure success. However, the school has a very good track record of using initiatives and training to successfully drive improvement. This is seen in the way that the Healthy Schools programme has led to changes in the way that personal, social and health education is delivered. Similarly, professional development opportunities have improved the quality of the curriculum for information and communication technology.

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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?	2
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	1
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	1

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	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	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

You may remember that I came to inspect your school in September. I talked to some of you outside and we looked at your vegetable patch. I enjoyed having my lunch with class 1 and also seeing the lesson that you had all about pulleys. I saw the lesson using computers in class 2 and was impressed by how hard you were working. I really enjoyed joining in with the songs that you sang in assembly. You told me that you are very happy in school and that you especially like maths. I have thought about the things that you said and have also listened to the comments that your parents made about your school.

I have written a report and it says that Mary Towerton School is a good school because you are taught well and you have a good headteacher. It also says that you work hard and really enjoy coming to school. Your parents are very pleased with the good things that you learn in class.

I have asked your headteacher to think about a few things that will help to make your school even better. This is to make sure that the things that you learn are planned very carefully and to help the staff to check on how well the school is doing. I am sure that you will help your headteacher and all of the staff to keep your school a happy place for learning.

Thank you for the good time that I had in your school and I hope that you have fun cooking and eating the pumpkins soon.

Yours sincerely,

Heather Yaxley

Her Majesty's Inspector