

Burford School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110314
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	288628
Inspection date	4 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Graham Lee

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	413
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Leanda Robson
Headteacher	Ms Karol Whittington
Date of previous school inspection	11 March 2002
School address	Marlow Bottom Marlow SL7 3PQ
Telephone number	01628 486655
Fax number	01628 898103

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: pupils' achievement in writing and the quality of the school's provision for writing, the quality of teaching and learning, the strengths of academic guidance, and the impact of the school's leadership on raising achievement. Evidence was gathered from discussions with senior staff, governors and pupils, school documentation and observations of lessons and other features of the school's work. In addition, the inspector analysed questionnaires returned by parents. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspection found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included in this report.

Description of the school

The school is popular and oversubscribed and serves a relatively advantaged community. Most pupils are of White British origin and very few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is well below average. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2006 and a new deputy in September 2007. The school has long been recognised as an Investor in People.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Burford provides a satisfactory quality of education for its pupils with some strong aspects to its work. It is a happy and friendly school where relationships between adults and pupils are trusting and supportive. This is recognised by many parents and one, echoing the views of others, commented, 'The school is a very warm and nurturing environment and I feel very lucky that my three children have come here.' Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. They feel extremely safe and secure and enjoy everything that school has to offer. They are very polite and behave extremely well. The new headteacher is providing strong leadership and is ensuring that these strengths remain at the heart of the school's work. At the same time, she has identified that more needs to be done to improve pupils' academic achievement, which is currently satisfactory.

Standards have been significantly above average at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 for a number of years. From the good start they make in Reception, pupils' progress is broadly satisfactory as they move through the school. A significant number are not doing well enough in writing, particularly the more able. In 2007 for example, the majority of eleven year olds reached the higher levels in mathematics, science and reading but relatively few did so in writing. A significant number of these pupils had made inadequate progress between Year 2 and Year 6. This is part of a five year downward trend in writing. Overall, pupils' steady progress is the result of satisfactory teaching and learning. Teachers manage their classes very well and use interactive technology effectively to engage and motivate learners. However, sometimes teachers spend too much time talking, consequently pupils do not have enough opportunities to share their ideas and consolidate their learning. Whilst teachers plan to meet the needs of all pupils, work for the most able is not always challenging enough. In particular, they do not have enough opportunities to develop their own ideas and to follow their own lines of enquiry, through internet research for example.

The inspector saw some good examples of pupils being inspired to write in interesting ways. For example, in Year 2 pupils were creating their own versions of traditional stories using words, images and music. They made very good use of information and communications technology (ICT) to do this and collaborated very effectively in their roles as leaders, scribes, reporters and envoys. There was a real buzz of excitement. In Year 4, pupils were very keen to tell the inspector about their articles for a newspaper they were making on Tudor times. They could see the relevance of this activity because it clearly supported their work in history. These kinds of links are not firmly established and pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to write to support their learning in other subjects. In addition, there is an over reliance on worksheets in some classes. The school is currently reviewing its curriculum to make it more creative and enjoyable for pupils and to provide more opportunities for pupils to write for different audiences and purposes.

A real strength of the curriculum is the enrichment provided through a wide range of clubs, visitors, visits and residential trips. These are enjoyed greatly by pupils and considerably enhance their personal development. The sports activities, in particular, support their outstanding awareness of the need to adopt a healthy lifestyle. There is a strong tradition of music in the school and pupils perform to a high standard. French is also taught throughout the school. Pupils are proud of the contribution they make through the school council.

The new leadership team has rightly recognised that weaknesses in academic guidance have contributed to some pupils not achieving as well as they might. Over the years, data has been collected on each pupil's progress and targets have been set for each of them, however, there has not been effective monitoring to check that pupils are reaching their targets and to provide additional support for those who might be falling behind. A more rigorous system has now been introduced which will identify potential underachievement much earlier. Whilst this development is at an early stage, it has already led to the setting up of a number of support groups for those pupils who need a boost with their learning.

The headteacher is very ably supported by her new deputy, and they have a very clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This is shared by governors, who are very supportive but recognise that their systems for holding the school to account need further development. Although other leaders make a significant contribution to the life of the school, their role in relation to improving teaching and learning and raising achievement remains underdeveloped, as it was at the time of the last inspection. The leadership has plans to address this as the team develops the necessary skills. Whilst not all of the issues from the last inspection have been addressed fully, the drive and commitment of senior leaders and the positive impact of the changes that have been introduced indicate that the school has good capacity for further improvement.

After many years of stability, there has been significant staff movement in recent times. This has been unsettling for some parents. A small minority do not have confidence in the leadership of the school and do not feel that their views are taken sufficiently into account. These views are not shared by most parents and pupils. One parent, reflecting the views of others, commented 'I am extremely impressed and encouraged by what the headteacher has addressed to date and am confident that this will enhance both the ethos and performance of the school.' When asked about what is best about the school, one school councillor, to the obvious approval of the others, said 'The headteacher, because she is really nice and has brought in lots of new ideas.' Governors are also clear that communication has improved through regular newsletters and curriculum information. Security has been improved in response to parental concerns, and recently governors held a well attended open forum for parents to discuss their views.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children arrive at the school with skills and understanding which are generally better than is typical of four year olds. The warm and nurturing environment in the Reception classes allows them to settle quickly and to make good progress in all areas of learning. By the time they move into Year 1, most are working at or beyond the goals set for children of that age. The curriculum is designed effectively to develop children's early literacy and numeracy skills as well as giving them many opportunities to explore the world around them. The outside space is fairly limited but the Foundation team compensates for this by making full use of the playground and adjoining woods to develop children's understanding in all areas of their learning. The Foundation team members work well together under the effective leadership of the experienced coordinator.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise pupils' achievement in writing.
- Ensure that teachers consistently challenge more able pupils to achieve as well as they can.
- Develop tracking systems to ensure that challenging targets are set and met for all pupils.

- Develop the role of leaders at all levels in improving teaching and learning and raising achievement.

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

Annex A

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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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?	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.

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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

13 December 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Burford School, Marlow, SL7 3PQ

You may remember that I visited your school recently. I am writing to thank you all for being so friendly and helpful. I really enjoyed my day at Burford. I thought you might like to know what I found out.

You and most of your parents are very pleased with the school and you told me how much you enjoy your education and, in particular, all the extra things you have to do. I was very impressed with your behaviour and your enthusiasm for learning. The way the school looks after you and helps you to develop as thoughtful and caring young people is a real strength. Overall, the school is satisfactory rather than good because some of you could be achieving more in your lessons.

When you leave school you are generally doing well in mathematics and English and are well prepared for secondary school. Some of you who find things a little bit easier than others could be doing even better, especially in writing. I have asked your teachers to give you more chances to write about what you are learning in different subjects.

You told me how much you like your headteacher and how she has helped to improve the school even more since she has been here. She gets lots of help from governors and staff and has plans to make it even better. I have asked them to do a few things that I think might help.

- I want the school to help you to do better in writing.
- Teachers give you lots of interesting things to do. I want them to make sure that the work is hard enough for those of you who are already doing well.
- Some of you have targets for your work. I have asked the school to make these even clearer to help you improve even more.
- There have been a few staff changes recently. I would like everyone who helps run the school to become even more expert in helping you to do well.

Best of luck to you all.

Yours truly

Graham Lee

Lead Inspector