

Mill Lane Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123036
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	292563
Inspection dates	17–18 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Mike Thompson

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	228
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr R Hiley
Headteacher	Mrs P Birch
Date of previous school inspection	11 June 2001
School address	Mill Lane Chinnor OX39 4RF
Telephone number	01844 352106
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Mill Lane is an average-size rural primary school. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage, and are from a wide range of home circumstances. Overall, the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) is broadly average. The school gained Investors in People status in May 2005, and has very recently earned the Healthy Schools award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Mill Lane Community Primary is a good, improving school. It is effective because the good teaching, curriculum, and leadership enable pupils to achieve well. Since the appointment of the headteacher in 2004, standards have risen. An important contributory factor to the school's effectiveness is the good standard of pupils' personal development and well-being. This stems from the good pastoral care provided for all. Pupils' good behaviour and social skills contribute to the good climate for learning throughout the school. Particularly noteworthy are pupils' excellent attitudes towards their education and their enjoyment in being at school.

Most parents share their children's very positive views of the school. One of the many parents who added written comments to their questionnaires summed up the views of others when writing, 'Mill Lane provides a caring, nurturing environment in which children can develop their individual strengths and confidence'. However, despite the wide range of avenues of communication open to parents, the perception of a significant minority is that communication between school and home could be better and their views are not always considered. Inspection evidence shows that the school does as much as it can, sometimes in difficult circumstances because of issues of confidentiality, to respond to individual parents' concerns.

Children are given a satisfactory start to their education in the Foundation Stage classes. Overall, their levels of skills, knowledge and understanding are generally in line with what is expected of three year-olds when they start school. They make satisfactory progress, and by the time they transfer to Year 1 children are close to reaching most of the goals expected at this point. The curriculum provided for children in the Foundation Stage classes is good, but the secure systems for assessing children's attainment are not consistently applied. Consequently, the assessments made are of variable quality. In Key Stage 1 and 2, teaching is good and consequently pupils make good progress. By the time they leave at the end of Year 6, standards are above average. However, not enough of the more able pupils attain the higher standards expected of them in writing. The reason for this is that the targets set for these pupils are not always challenging because teachers' expectations are too low. This has been identified by the school as an area for improvement.

Mill Lane is an inclusive school in which each child matters. All pupils are warmly welcomed and equally valued. The school's many good features include its systems for assessing pupils' needs and checking on the progress that they make. As a result, teachers know their pupils very well. They use this knowledge to plan interesting and exciting activities, and consequently pupils are always keen to learn.

The driving force behind the school's success is its headteacher. She is ably supported by her staff team and so leadership and management are good. Governors are committed to the school and provide good support. However, their monitoring of the school's work is not always rigorous enough. The school has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. There is a strong commitment to continuous improvement and good systems to help ensure that this happens. The school is, therefore, well placed to make further progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that more able pupils are given consistently challenging tasks to improve their writing.
- Improve the use of systems for assessment in the Foundation Stage.
- Develop governors' skills in holding the school to account.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

In the Foundation stage classes, children make satisfactory progress in developing their basic skills of literacy and numeracy. They make good progress in developing their social skills because of the wide range of opportunities provided for them to work both independently and cooperatively. This provides a secure platform for future learning.

In Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils make good progress overall because information from the regular checks on their progress is used to provide specific help whenever it is needed. By the end of Year 6, standards are above average in English, mathematics, science. The school is good at meeting, and frequently exceeding, the targets set for pupils' performance. However, in writing, more able pupils do not make the consistently good progress that is a feature of other subjects. This is because the tasks set for them are not always pitched at a high enough level. Pupils develop good levels of skills in information and communication technology (ICT), and use these skills well to improve their learning in other subjects.

Pupils achieve well irrespective of gender. Those with LDD achieve well because their specific learning needs are carefully assessed and they are given good quality help in lessons.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' behaviour is good and their mature attitudes make a significant contribution to the school's calm and friendly atmosphere. They show great enthusiasm for all that the school offers, and this is seen in the above average rate of attendance. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, with a particular strength in their spiritual awareness. This is in response to the very good opportunities which, through its promotion of 'values-based' education, the school offers for pupils to reflect on matters of deeper significance. Pupils are very open and honest when expressing their personal responses and their ideas are treated with great respect. They show good understanding of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, enjoy physical activities, and make sensible efforts to translate their knowledge of healthy eating into practice. They are well prepared to keep themselves safe. A very small number of parents expressed concern about pupils' behaviour. These concerns were thoroughly investigated. Pupils say they feel safe in school and are confident that whenever there is unkind or inconsiderate behaviour the school deals with it very effectively. They make good contributions to the life of the school and to the wider community, some of which are particularly memorable, such as singing in Dorchester Abbey. Pupils develop good basic skills; they are confident and articulate, and are good team workers. These skills prepare them well for the next stage of their education and, eventually, the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Particularly noteworthy features of lessons are the attitudes towards learning and the attention shown by all pupils. They are interested in their lessons because their teachers explain things clearly to them and most often pitch work at suitably challenging levels. This occurs because the teachers know their pupils' learning needs very well. However, in some English lessons, all pupils are given essentially the same written tasks, regardless of their abilities, and this slows

the rates of learning for the higher-attaining pupils in particular. Targets set by some teachers for the more able pupils to achieve in their day-to-day writing are not demanding enough. In all classes, teachers manage their pupils well and relate well to them. Skilled classroom assistants work well in partnership with teachers and give good quality help to pupils who need more individual attention.

In the Foundation Stage, the system for assessing children's attainment is satisfactory, but teachers' practice in applying assessment procedures is inconsistent.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The Foundation Stage curriculum acknowledges the way in which young children learn. There are good opportunities for children to make sensible choices of activities and also to work on tasks directed by adults. The activities provided hold children's interest and give them plenty of opportunities to develop their personal and social skills.

In Key Stages 1 and 2, a good emphasis is placed on promoting pupils' healthy lifestyles and social skills. There is a wide range of out-of-class activities which help enrich the curriculum, including sporting events within the Thame partnership of schools. The school ensures that visits to places of interest or visitors to the school, such as a performance by the Chinnor Band, add interest and enjoyment to pupils' learning. An annual residential visit for pupils in Year 6 provides good opportunities for pupils to become more independent.

The curriculum achieves a good balance between subjects. However, planning to extend pupils' skills in writing is inconsistent. Teachers work hard to ensure that activities are interesting. Throughout the school, pupils are given good opportunities to develop the basic skills learned in a variety of other subjects. For example, an end-of-year project in Year 6 enabled pupils to draw together skills in many subject areas including English, mathematics, science, and ICT as they planned, researched, shopped, and finally produced healthy breakfast bars.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Overall, the quality of care, guidance and support is satisfactory. The school provides good pastoral care and support for its pupils. A good example of this is the group which has been formed for some older girls who experience emotional challenges. This allows them to discuss their uncertainties in a secure and supportive environment. All who attend agree that it has given them increased confidence to deal with their problems in a mature and assured manner. The school has forged effective links with a range of outside agencies and organisations in order to support pupils and families who are experiencing challenging circumstances. The school has good knowledge of the pupils' needs and works diligently to ensure that the agencies are responsive to them. There are robust and effective systems in place to safeguard pupils. The academic guidance given to pupils is variable in quality, but is satisfactory overall. The guidance of pupils with LDD, provided through their individual education plans and carefully focused support, is good. However, teachers' marking of pupils' writing does not always provide enough information about precisely what pupils need to do to improve their work. Where advice is given, it is always positive and encouraging, but is sometimes too general. Pupils do not always have a clear understanding of their targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The quality of leadership and management is good. There is a strong focus at all levels of management on raising standards through planned improvement. Subject leaders are making a difference to pupils' education and are helping to raise standards, although some acknowledge lack of confidence in using data to help them monitor the impact of their work. All managers have a mentor who is able to offer guidance so that support is available in areas of uncertainty. This emphasis on shared management is successful because it involves all staff, including teaching assistants, and strong partnerships are formed. The impact of this is seen in the fact that the school has been successful in raising standards over the past three years, and in past two years it has met or exceeded all its challenging targets. The work of the governing body is satisfactory. Governors are loyal and supportive, but many are recently appointed and have little knowledge or experience of the full scope of their demanding role. This means that their evaluation of the performance of the school is not always objective enough. Although all governors are assigned an area or subject in the school for which to take special responsibility, insufficient progress has been made in forging these links.

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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?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
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?	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?	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?	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	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

6 September 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Mill Lane Community Primary School, Chinnor, OX39 4RF

On behalf of the inspectors I would like to thank you very much for being so helpful when we came to visit your school. We really enjoyed meeting you, talking to you and looking at all your work.

We agree with you and your parents that you go to a good school. There is so much we like about your school that I can't mention everything, so here is a list of what we think are the most important things.

- You do well in your work, and when you leave school at the end of Year 6 your results are better than those of most other schools. You should be very proud of this.
- Everyone in your school is friendly and welcoming. Your behaviour is usually good and you get on well with each other.
- You learn a lot in lessons because the teaching you are given is good.
- Your teachers are good at planning lots of interesting things for you to do.
- All of the adults in your school make sure that you are well looked after.
- All the people who help run your school do a good job in making sure that you get a good education.

We would also like to let you know that we really enjoyed hearing the choir sing in assembly, and would also like to say a special 'thank you' to Year 6 for the samples of the breakfast bars you made. They were delicious!

Even in a good school like yours there is always something that could be even better. So, we think that what needs to be done next is for the school to set harder targets and give more difficult work to those of you who find writing easy. The reason for this is that I would like to see you become even better writers than you already are. I'm sure that you are ready for this challenge! All of your teachers keep a close check on how well you are getting on, but we think that the checks made in the Foundation Stage could be a bit closer. Your school governors do a good job in supporting the school, but quite a few of them are fairly new. So we would like them to find out more about the job they have to do of checking on how well your school is getting on.

I am sure that you will continue to have great success in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Mike Thompson.

Lead Inspector