

Millbrook Combined School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131815
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	293857
Inspection dates	3–4 May 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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	335
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Ania Sagajllo
Headteacher	Miss Debra Mansfield
Date of previous school inspection	11 March 2002
School address	Mill End Road High Wycombe HP12 4BA
Telephone number	01494 524791
Fax number	01494 533361

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average primary school with a Nursery. It serves a mixed community but there are pockets of significant deprivation within its community. Most pupils are of Pakistani heritage and one in five are from White British backgrounds. Around half of pupils speak English as an additional language. Attainment on entry is well below average. Mobility amongst pupils is higher than in most schools. The school is designated by the local authority as a full extended service school and provides a range of services through the Millbrook Centre. A new headteacher was appointed in April 2006 and a new deputy in September 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

Millbrook Combined is an improving school although it currently provides an inadequate quality of education. Pupils' achievement is unsatisfactory and standards are too low. This is because of inadequacies in teaching and learning. These weaknesses have been recognised by the new headteacher in an honest and perceptive evaluation of the school. She has rapidly gained the confidence of staff and governors. Aply assisted by her deputy, she has put in place a range of measures that are leading to improvements. Staff and pupils are clear that the atmosphere in the school is calmer and that behaviour has improved considerably. Most parents also recognise the changes and one commented 'The school is changing in many ways. I welcome this for the school and the community.' Rigorous assessment and monitoring is leading to improvements in teaching and learning, which in turn is resulting in better progress for pupils. Whilst issues from the last inspection have not been addressed successfully, these recent improvements demonstrate that the school has the capacity for further improvement. Many of the school's leaders are new to their posts and are keen to make an impact. However, their roles in raising standards and improving teaching and learning are underdeveloped.

From their low starting points children do not make enough progress in the Foundation Stage. They make a good start in the Nursery because of the interesting and stimulating learning environment. However, this is not consolidated in the Reception classes, where children's social skills are not sufficiently well promoted for them to develop good learning habits. Standards have been too low in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 2 and Year 6 for several years and many pupils have made insufficient progress. Teaching has improved markedly this year, particularly in Key Stage 2. However, there is not yet enough strong teaching for pupils to make consistently good progress. Good systems have been established to track pupils' progress and to identify underachievement. This is beginning to be used by teachers to set challenging targets for pupils and to ensure that work is not too easy or too hard for them. However, it is not firmly embedded and the impact is variable in different classes.

A strength of the school is the strong pastoral care provided for pupils. It looks after its vulnerable pupils extremely well and draws effectively on the support of many outside agencies to meet their needs. The school's commitment to its parents and community is illustrated through the wide range of services provided through the Millbrook Centre. The satisfactory curriculum is considerably enriched through a good range of clubs and additional activities. The sporting activities, in particular, contribute to pupils' satisfactory adoption of healthy lifestyles. Most pupils enjoy school but this is not the case in some lessons where activities fail to stimulate and excite them. Pupils feel safe because they say that adults will help them to sort out any problems they may have. Whilst some present challenging behaviour from time to time, pupils are confident that poor behaviour is not allowed to disrupt learning any more.

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could be reasonably expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to standards and achievement, teaching and learning and to provision in the Foundation Stage.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching and learning in order to raise standards in English, mathematics and science.
- Improve provision in the Foundation Stage by building on the good practice in the Nursery.

- Use assessment information to set challenging targets for all pupils and to ensure that work is consistently matched to their needs.
- Develop the roles of management at all levels in improving teaching and learning and raising achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Pupils' achievement is inadequate. The majority of children start school with skills and understanding that are well below those expected for their age. Although they make a good start in the Nursery, by the end of the Reception year children are not making enough progress in their social, emotional and communication skills because of ineffective teaching. Consequently, the large majority do not reach the standards expected in all areas of learning. By the end of Year 2 and Year 6, the low standards are the result of inconsistent assessments by teachers and some weak teaching. Recent improvements are beginning to sharpen the way pupils' performance is tracked. This is helping teachers to provide more challenging targets and is improving pupils' progress. However, this is not yet consistent and progress remains too slow in Key Stage 1, although improving in Key Stage 2. Pupils joining the school at different times, including those in the early stages of learning English, have made unsatisfactory progress overall as have those with learning difficulties or disabilities. However, since September the progress of these pupils is improving. Pupils' are inadequately prepared for the next stage of their education because of their weak basic skills.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development and well being, including the social, moral, spiritual and cultural dimensions, are satisfactory. Their behaviour has improved this year due to the consistent expectations of staff. Most feel much safer in school and explain that when bullying occurs, 'It's always quickly dealt with.' They also have an awareness of wider safety issues and explain, for example, why it is important to wear goggles when conducting some scientific experiments. Many pupils have positive attitudes to learning and say they enjoy school. This is reflected in improving attendance although not always evident in lessons when activities fail to capture their imagination. As well as understanding the importance of exercise pupils also know that good diet contributes to a healthy lifestyle, although this is not always reflected in their lunchboxes! Pupils are keen to take on responsibility, as prefects for example, and their views are being sought increasingly through the school council. Recently they made some suggestions which have led to improvements in school lunches. Pupils contribute to the wider community by raising money for charity although the school is aware that more could be done.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

The school's own monitoring shows that teaching and learning has improved considerably over the course of the year. There are pockets of good teaching in the Nursery, Year 2 and in Key Stage 2. However it is inadequate overall because its impact is not yet sufficient to have enabled pupils to achieve as well as they should. Teachers have good relationships with pupils and generally manage their classes well. In some lessons they give pupils opportunities to discuss

their ideas to consolidate their learning. For example, in a Year 3 mathematics lesson, the teacher helped pupils of all abilities to develop their understanding of number problems through probing questions and partner work. Consequently, pupils enjoyed the lesson and consolidated their understanding. However, this is not the case in too many lessons. Often, teachers do not give pupils sufficient opportunities to participate and activities are pitched at the wrong level. As a consequence, learners become distracted and find work too easy or too difficult.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum has not promoted pupils' basic skills well enough in recent years. This is improving and a variety of additional support programmes are in place which are helping to accelerate the progress of those pupils who may be falling behind. Some links between subjects are made which make learning more purposeful for pupils. However, subjects are often taught in isolation and the relevance is not clear to pupils. The school is aware of this and has begun a major curriculum review aimed at making systematic links to make it more creative and enjoyable. This will include the use of information and communications technology (ICT) as opportunities to develop pupils' skills to support their learning in other subjects are sometimes missed. The curriculum in the Nursery is exciting and creative and provides particularly well for children's personal development. This is not built on effectively in the Reception classes where children are given too few opportunities to choose and sustain activities. Enrichment is a strong feature of the curriculum and contributes well to pupils' personal development and enjoyment. Pupils have opportunities to participate in a wide range of clubs and compete against other schools in sports tournaments. They have also made visits to the Royal Albert Hall and local caves, for example, but the school recognises that more visits would enhance pupils' learning still further.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall and the pastoral elements are a strength. The, 'Millbrook Message', about respect and caring for one another, is beginning to be firmly embedded in the school's ethos. A pupil told inspectors, 'This is an encouraging and interesting school'. Pupils at risk of exclusion are quickly identified and supported well, as a result behaviour has improved and exclusions have decreased significantly. Those new to English are now supported effectively and are beginning to make better progress. The school has good links with secondary schools to facilitate smooth transition and demonstrate support for parents by taking a central role in the extended services provision. The new tracking systems are beginning to have an impact on improving pupils' progress. Some pupils are clear that their targets 'help to know what to do to reach the next level' as one Year 6 pupil put it but this is not yet embedded firmly enough in all classes. Consequently, not all pupils are aware of their individual targets and how to achieve them.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and deputy form a very strong team and are providing good leadership which is leading to improvements in provision and pupils' progress. They have created considerable optimism and impetus amongst all the staff to address the significant weaknesses in the school. They have put in place the right strategies to secure improvements. This has led to a calm and

purposeful learning environment and better teaching and learning. There has not yet been time for this to result in consistently good teaching or in good enough provision in the Foundation Stage. The new senior leadership team and subject leaders are developing their roles but their impact on improving teaching and learning has been limited thus far. The school has further plans for key appointments and to develop the skills of these leaders in order to build further capacity for improvement. Governors are supportive and knowledgeable and developing confidence in their role of holding school leaders to account. Leadership and management overall are satisfactory.

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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?	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	4
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	No

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

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	3
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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	4

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4
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 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	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
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?	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

25 May 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Millbrook Combined School, High Wycombe, HP12 4BA

You may remember that I visited your school recently with two other inspectors. I am writing to thank you all for being so welcoming and helpful. We enjoyed our time at Millbrook. I thought you would like to know what we found out.

We believe that your school is getting better all the time but currently is giving you an inadequate quality of education. You told us how you enjoy school and how much better it is than a while ago. You told us how much calmer it is and that behaviour has improved. We agree. We found most of you to be well behaved and keen to do your best although a few of you find it hard to concentrate.

You have not been doing well enough in English, mathematics and science for some time and this makes it harder for many of you to do well when you get to secondary school. We found that teachers are working well together to help you improve. You told us that the new systems for setting targets are also helping you to know what to do to improve although we found that this was much better in some classes than others.

The main reason the school is getting better is because your headteacher is doing the right things to help it improve. She is getting very good assistance from her deputy and all the staff and governors. We have given your school what is called a Notice to Improve because we think that will help. Your headteacher knows that the most important things to do are:

- to make the teaching and learning better to help you do better in English, mathematics and science
- help staff in the Reception classes to build on the good work in the Nursery
- make sure that your targets help you to improve and that you are given work which is not too easy or too hard for you
- get all the school leaders to work with teachers to help them to improve what they do.

Good luck to you all.

Yours truly

Graham Lee

Lead Inspector