

Brooksward School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132210
Local Authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	293984
Inspection date	23 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Keith Williams

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	246
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Martin Blunden
Headteacher	Miss Debbie Dawson
Date of previous school inspection	3 February 2003
School address	Tower Drive Neath Hill Milton Keynes MK14 6JZ
Telephone number	01908 605605
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This average sized school serves a socially and ethnically diverse area. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. More pupils than usual are at an early stage of learning English, the most common home languages being Bengali and Tamil. The proportion of pupils identified with learning difficulties is just above the national average. More pupils than usual join or leave the school at other than the usual times. The proportion eligible for free school meals is about average. The school has Activemark and Gold Artsmark awards. The headteacher, deputy and several governors have been appointed in the past two years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Brooksward is a good school that ensures that pupils make good progress academically and in their personal development. Most pupils behave impeccably, enjoy school and make an excellent contribution to its smooth running and to the wider community. Most parents are supportive, one reflecting the views of many in commenting, 'The teachers are very caring and friendly. I think this is why my child always looks forward to going to school.'

Pupils join the school with a range of skills which, overall, are below average. Attainment is particularly low in communication, language, literacy and mathematical calculation. In addition, many are at an early stage of learning English. Pupils achieve well to reach average standards by Year 6. Children get off to a good start in Reception, because of the good provision for these children. Most achieve well in this supportive environment, although standards remain below those expected by the end of Reception. Pupils make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 1 and standards, by the end of Year 2, are below average. Senior staff monitor the work of the school closely and they have a clear and accurate understanding of what is working well and what could improve. They have rightly identified the need to raise standards in Key Stage 1, particularly in reading and writing. Staff have reviewed the way these important areas are planned and taught. Improvements, including a daily session for pupils to learn about letter sounds and securing greater consistency in the teaching of spelling, have been introduced. Early assessments show an improving picture, particularly in spelling, but more time is needed for them to have their full impact.

The school is equally focused on promoting pupils' personal development and ensuring that they are well cared for and supported. Procedures to secure the health, safety and welfare of pupils are robust. Weaknesses in lunchtime supervision and playground organisation have been tackled and, consequently, pupils report that they feel safe and find the staff approachable. There are good systems to track pupils' academic progress. The information gathered is used well to plan appropriate work, identify those who need extra help and set group and individual targets for improvement. While some pupils have a clear picture of how they should improve, others are not so sure when their targets are expressed in language they do not fully understand. The school provides an interesting curriculum that motivates pupils to want to learn, one pupil reporting, 'Teachers try to make lessons as fun as possible.' Pupils' enjoyment is reflected in a rate of attendance that has improved considerably since the last inspection. A very good and popular range of activities offered outside of lessons enhances their enjoyment and contributes very well to their all-round development. Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle and they are well prepared for their future economic well-being because they make good progress in the basic skills.

Good leadership, management, teaching and teamwork are at the root of pupils' good progress. There is no complacency, however, and the leaders' accurate view of the school's effectiveness and their success in dealing with previous weaknesses show that they have good capacity to secure further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in literacy, especially in Key Stage 1.
- Ensure that pupils have a clear understanding of how they should improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils respond well to good teaching and they make good progress. Standards are average by the end of Year 6, which represents a good level of achievement from their below average starting points. Children in Reception achieve well, although only about a half of them reach the expected national goals. Effective teaching of early reading, writing and number skills contributes to their good progress. The results of the national assessments for pupils in Year 2 were significantly below average in 2006 and the work of the current pupils shows that they are likely to remain below average. The school is working determinedly to raise standards to build on the good start made in Reception. Their evaluation rightly identified reading and writing as the main focus and early signs show that they are beginning to accelerate pupils' progress, particularly in aspects of writing. The school's data shows that pupils in Years 3 and 4 make brisk progress and this contributes to the average standards achieved by Year 6. Across the school, there is no significant difference in the progress made by pupils of different abilities, including those with learning difficulties, nor amongst pupils from different ethnic backgrounds. Those at an early stage of learning English achieve as well as their classmates because they are well supported. Their increasing confidence contributes to the good progress made in Key Stage 2.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Relationships amongst pupils and with the adults in school are positive, and pupils' behaviour is exemplary. Consequently, they enjoy school and make good progress. Levels of attendance have improved since the last inspection because the school uses a wide and imaginative range of strategies to encourage good attendance and check on those whose attendance is too low. While current rates are in line with the national average, the school is right to try to reduce the amount of holidays taken during term-time. Pupils' behaviour is excellent and the few incidents where it drops below these high standards are dealt with swiftly and effectively. A particular strength is the way that pupils contribute to the school and wider community. The school council is very influential and councillors are very proud of their achievements, especially the improvements to lunchtime arrangements. This has played a very strong part in improving weaknesses from the last inspection. In addition, they have contributed very strongly to the school's debate about 'what makes a good learner.' Pupils increasingly take on extra responsibilities acting, for example, as reading and lunchtime buddies and play-leaders. Pupils make a very strong contribution to local charities and those further afield and they report that their suggestions about which causes to support are always taken seriously. Many groups perform regularly at local events. One such ensemble, 'A Capella,' sang delightfully during assembly.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good and this ensures that pupils make good progress. Pupils understand what they need to do to learn well and there is a strong sense of teamwork amongst

staff and pupils. Lessons are calm, supportive and firmly focused on what pupils are expected to learn and how they will know when they have done so. This was seen to good effect in a good lesson in Year 2, where the teacher regularly revisited the intended learning to check on pupils' understanding of how their stories should be structured. This on-going assessment was a strong feature of a successful lesson in Year 6 and, coupled with a brisk pace, ensured that pupils made good progress in converting decimals to fractions. Teachers mark pupils' work conscientiously, often providing pointers for how pupils might improve, although the school has rightly identified the need to gain greater consistency in this. Lesson planning takes good account of pupils' differing needs.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good curriculum and a very good range of enrichment activities that enhance pupils' learning and enjoyment. The planning for literacy and numeracy is being reviewed and modified in order to raise standards. An increased emphasis on teaching letter sounds in Key Stage 1, building on the successful approach in Reception, is beginning to accelerate pupils' progress, but has not had sufficient time for them to benefit fully. The school has recognised the need to ensure that there are consistent and regular opportunities for pupils to develop their writing in other subjects. The imaginative use of time outside of lessons is a significant strength. A combination of outside providers, staff and volunteers deliver a wide range of sporting, musical and artistic opportunities, as well as those that extend pupils' work in classrooms. Higher attaining pupils, for example, benefit from science and technology days at a local school and pupils in Years 4 and 6 enjoy regular French lessons. The school pledges to ensure that pupils receive their full entitlement as a right, and this is much appreciated by pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Pupils appreciate the help and support they get and appreciate their teachers' patience when they are stuck. Appropriate checks are made of the suitability of all adults to work with children and systems to promote their health and safety are secure. A close check is kept on the welfare of all pupils, including those identified as vulnerable. Lunchtime supervision has improved since the last inspection. Pupils' academic progress is tracked carefully and this information is used well to provide support where it is most needed. Teaching assistants contribute strongly to the provision for needy pupils and links with outside agencies are good. As a result, those with learning difficulties are supported well and achieve as well as their classmates. Those pupils at an early stage of learning English receive good support, so that they soon gain confidence in using English. This increasing confidence is a factor in pupils' good progress in Key Stage 2. All pupils are set group and individual targets, although they are not always sufficiently clear, such as when they are phrased in language that is too difficult for the pupils to understand.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Good leadership and management ensure that all pupils are valued, whatever their background or ability and are able to learn well and play a full part in the life of the school. The headteacher,

deputy, staff and governors form an effective team that is focused on raising standards. The leaders have an accurate view of the school's effectiveness, based on thorough monitoring and the evaluation of test results and other assessments. Consequently, they know what needs to be improved and weaknesses, including those highlighted in the last report, are tackled rigorously. Inconsistencies in teaching are ironed out, although the leaders recognise that there is more to do to ensure a more coherent approach to the marking of pupils' work and the setting of targets. Governors are well informed about the school's work and new governors are well supported as they ease into their roles.

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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?	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	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	3
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	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
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	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	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

3 May 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Brooksward School, Tower Drive, Neath Hill, Milton Keynes, MK14 6JZ

I am writing to let you know about the findings following my recent visit to your school. Many of you spoke to give me your views. You were very friendly and you gave me lots of helpful information.

Many of you told me how much you enjoy school and how well you think you are doing. I agree with you, and many of your parents, that yours is a good school. Your headteacher and teachers do a good job in helping you to learn well. You play your part by working hard, enjoying school and carrying out lots of jobs to help the school run smoothly. Your behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent. The school council are right to be proud of what they have achieved. You make a real difference and lots of children who are not on the council told me what a good job you do. I was impressed with the amount of work that you do to raise money for charities and I was very pleased by the number of clubs and other activities that you do outside of your lessons. Many of you told me how much you enjoy them.

Your teachers work hard to make lessons interesting and I saw how well you listen and concentrate on what you have to do. I am pleased that you understand what it means to be a good learner. Your teachers help you improve by setting you targets, although you do not always understand what they mean. I have asked your teachers to make sure that the targets are easier to understand. Your teachers have also been working on improving your reading and writing, especially those of you in Years 1 and 2. I agree with them that this is a very important thing to do.

I know you will want to help your teachers improve these things by carrying on working hard and behaving so well. I wish you good luck for the future.

Yours sincerely

Keith Williams

Lead inspector