

Aspley Guise Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109428
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	309980
Inspection dates	18–19 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Jill Bavin

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	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	108
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Siobhan Turney
Headteacher	Mrs Melanie Mercer
Date of previous school inspection	8 December 2003
School address	Spinney Lane Mount Pleasant Aspley Guise Bedfordshire MK17 8JT
Telephone number	01908582245
Fax number	01908 585630

Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average, but oversubscribed, first school serving local villages just east of Milton Keynes. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds, with very few learning English as an additional language. The school has fewer pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities than is usual. Few pupils have free school meals. The current headteacher has been in post for two years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school that is led and managed extremely well. It provides exceptionally good value for money. Parents value the school's work highly. Some of the many positive comments sent to the inspector include, 'my children love coming to school'; it is 'an excellent school'; and even that their children have made 'fabulous progress'.

Excellent leadership from the headteacher is supported by highly effective governance and good subject leadership. This is a reflective school, strong on using evaluation to drive further improvement and very far from complacent. The school knows itself very well: it is consistent, rigorous and accurate in its constant assessment of its own performance. Extremely tight systems enable all staff to keep a close check on how well pupils are doing. The use of this information to ensure impressive achievement for all groups of pupils is exemplary. It is to the school's credit that it maintains such a strong focus on academic achievement without compromising pupils' enjoyment and sense of fun. Within this environment, which fosters a love of learning, the targets set for pupils' achievement are very challenging. They are also realistic because of the high quality of teaching and because they trigger flexible provision of extra activities to match pupils' particular needs. This is a key strength in the curriculum, which is outstanding because it is an integral part of the cycle that links pupil progress with what is taught. Nevertheless, the school is not complacent and recognises the need to involve pupils more fully in the evaluation of their own work.

The combination of outstanding teaching, and a rich curriculum which helps teachers to respond to individual needs, account for the exceptional progress that all pupils make. Results have been impressive for the last two years and school data indicates that pupils are on track to attain similarly impressive results at both key stages in 2008, with an even higher percentage of pupils attaining National Curriculum Level 4 in all subjects at the end of Year 4. The school faces the challenge of building upon high standards at the end of the Foundation Stage by increasing the proportion of pupils achieving the highest results as they move through the school. Impressive improvement over the last two years means that the school has outstanding capacity for further improvement.

Extremely strong pastoral care contributes to pupils' outstanding personal development. They feel extremely safe and secure in school and make enormous gains in social confidence. They trust the adults in school implicitly. Consequently they are prepared to share their ideas and consider their responses in lessons, assemblies or in conversation with adults, with maturity.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Standards on entry to the Reception class are broadly in line with national expectations, with relative weaknesses in communication, language and literacy. During the year children make exceptionally good progress. By the time they join Year 1 most children exceed expectations for their age. They benefit from highly skilled teaching and learning is also supported by an exceptionally relevant, challenging and fun range of activities. There is outstandingly strong teamwork between the teacher and teaching assistant. This means that children respond to consistently high expectations that are expressed through extremely well-planned and well chosen activities. Far from complacent, this team works hard to keep evaluating what is working well and how to improve provision further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Give pupils more chances to routinely evaluate their own learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils' achievement is outstanding. Most children join Year 1 with above the expected levels of attainment. They continue to make extremely good progress throughout the rest of the school. Results in national tests soared in 2006 and school data indicates that the impressive results have been maintained in 2007, with pupils doing equally well. By the end of Year 2, pupils reach extremely high standards in reading, and well above average standards in writing and mathematics. The school places a very strong emphasis upon continuing to add value to pupils' learning and to accelerating their rates of progress. Consequently, by the end of Year 4, pupils make extremely good progress, given their starting points and standards are extremely high. The proportion of pupils attaining higher National Curriculum levels increases as pupils move through the school.

An impressive feature of pupils' achievement is that all groups of pupils exceed national expectations to the same extent. For example, although boys do not reach quite such high standards in reading as girls, they exceed national results equally impressively. Similarly, pupils with learning difficulties do far better than national averages. This picture represents very good improvement since the previous inspection, when higher attaining pupils did not always do as well as they should.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils enjoy school enormously. Attendance is good. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exceptionally good. Pupils demonstrate remarkable maturity for their age. They are highly tolerant of one another. They recognise, and can explain, that there are disagreements when friends 'fall out', but these are short-lived. Older pupils regularly initiate offers of help to younger pupils and all pupils give thoughtful responses to moral dilemmas in assembly. They make outstanding progress in their ability to reflect on serious issues and their understanding of right and wrong. Particularly impressive is their interest in, and understanding of, experiences beyond their own. They recognise that they are fortunate to attend this school because, as one boy said, 'some schools have bullying and all sorts, we have none of that'. Pupils enthusiastically embrace all aspects of school life. They demonstrate their willingness to adopt healthy lifestyles by their wholehearted participation in the many opportunities available for physical exercise. The vast majority enjoy the fruit and vegetables on offer. They contribute eagerly to recycling projects and to raising funds for charities. They are extremely well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teachers and teaching assistants are highly successful in motivating pupils. They have very high expectations of them and constantly challenge pupils to justify their responses with ever more thought and consideration. A key feature of their skill is that they do this without

jeopardising pupils' enjoyment. Staff make regular and rigorous checks on pupils' learning, keeping a very close eye on their progress. One result is that lessons are planned extremely carefully to ensure that tasks are modified, albeit sensitively and subtly, to meet the needs of varying groups within the class. Teaching assistants make an invaluable contribution to pupils' learning, especially, but not exclusively, for those pupils who find learning difficult. Teachers routinely share learning intentions and their expectations with pupils, who appreciate the help they receive in finding ways to improve their work. In spite of good feedback to pupils, opportunities for them to evaluate their own learning are sometimes missed.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

There is a rich variety of practical and relevant activities. The school has successfully modified national guidance in order to add interest, while not compromising the focus on key literacy and numeracy skills. A particular strength is the extent to which links are made between subjects, especially information and communication technology, and the emphasis upon practical work. These features account for the contribution the curriculum makes to pupils' outstanding achievement. There is a very well structured personal, social, health education and citizenship programme. The school is very good at providing specific programmes for individuals or small groups of pupils as needs arise: for example, by providing assertiveness training or self-esteem work. Enrichment activities are plentiful, with a huge variety of visitors coming into school and a good programme of visits out of school. Pupils participate enthusiastically in the extensive choice of extra-curricular clubs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

This is an area of considerable strength, much appreciated by parents, who are entirely confident that their children are safe and well cared for at school. They are reassured by the open channels of communication between school and home. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are robust. Excellent procedures help to keep pupils safe on a day to day basis, including the deployment of playground 'buddies' to ensure no-one feels upset in the playground. Pupils with learning difficulties receive impressive support and so make extremely good progress towards the specific targets set for them. Pupils are given clear and constructive guidance on how to improve their work. Systems to monitor pupils' progress are second to none. The school is very good at using information to focus guidance just where pupils need it, whether in class or through work in small groups such as 'mathematics club'.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher provides exceptionally skilled leadership. She successfully ensures that this is an extremely cohesive school, sharing a commitment to high standards and continual improvement within a fun learning environment. She is very ably supported by her team, who share her passion for the pupils' academic and personal well-being. Governors keep an extremely close check on how well the school is doing, holding the school to account for its decisions and pupils' progress. They are perceptive about the challenges facing the school. Subject leaders are increasingly effective in analysing strengths and relative weaknesses in their subjects. Since the headteacher has been at the school there has been a rapid rise in standards and achievement.

She has introduced exemplary systems for checking pupils' progress, as well as a new mathematics curriculum. Comprehensive records are rigorously analysed so that the progress of every pupil is under close and regular scrutiny. The positive impact of this analysis is evident in teachers' planning and pupils' achievement. This is a school that knows itself very well and selects the right priorities for further improvement.

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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?	1
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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
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	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

20 September 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Aspley Guise Lower School, Aspley Guise, MK17 8 JT

Thank you for being so friendly and welcoming when I visited your school recently. I was really impressed by how polite and courteous you were with me and how kind you are to each other. A special thank you goes to the children who talked with me in the library and showed me some of their work. I agree with you and your parents that you go to an exceptionally good school. There are too many good things to list all of them, but here are some.

- You all make extremely good progress and find learning fun.
- You are remarkably grown up in the way you behave in lessons and around the school.
- You are very good at keeping healthy and safe.
- Your headteacher, teachers and teaching assistants expect you to do your best all the time.
- All the adults in the school care about you and you feel very safe in school.
- There are loads of interesting things for you to do, like making pretzels in science, and you use computers a lot to find out extra information.
- The headteacher and governors make sure you all keep making such brilliant progress and keep trying to find ways to make the school even better.

I have asked the teachers to think of ways for you to let them know how well you think you are learning sometimes, before they tell you how well you have done. You can help by beginning to think about what you have learned at the end of a lesson.

I wish you every success in the future, and hope you always enjoy learning so much.

Jill Bavin

Lead inspector