

Cotton End Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109446
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	309985
Inspection date	5 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Patricia Cox

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

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	40
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Richard Pool
Headteacher	Mrs Lyn Fairweather
Date of previous school inspection	10 February 2003
School address	37 High Road Cotton End Bedford Bedfordshire MK45 3AA
Telephone number	01234 740100
Fax number	01234 743821

Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Most of the pupils in this very small school are from White British backgrounds and almost all have English as their first language. The proportion entitled to free school meals, and that of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are similar to the national average. The proportion with statements of special educational need is above the national average. More pupils leave or join during their school career than is usual for first schools. Attainment on entry to the Reception class varies considerably from year to year because the cohorts are so small. In some years it has been well above national expectations, in others well below, and there is no consistent pattern.

The school had experienced a lengthy period of disruption in staffing and leadership and management for some years, until the appointment of the present headteacher in January 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This satisfactory school has improved considerably over the past year; the good leadership and management of the headteacher have been instrumental in bringing stability, purpose and consistency. Almost all parents agree; comments such as 'the school has improved hugely,' the present headteacher 'has improved Cotton End 100% in all aspects, teaching, community, children's confidence, working closely with parents,' were typical of a number. Through rigorous evaluation of its effectiveness, she has a good understanding of its strengths and where improvement is needed. The staff are working as a closer team, although their leadership and management skills are at an early stage of development. The governors contribute well to the good capacity to improve further. The school provides satisfactory value for money. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, with strengths in Key Stage 2. Relationships are good throughout the school, between pupils and with adults, and therefore lessons proceed without disruption. Where the teaching is vibrant and engaging, the pupils are totally involved and eager to contribute. The introduction of frequent and regular assessment of pupils' standards and progress is having a positive impact on classroom practice. Teachers are starting to use this information to plan work for their pupils. However, this process is still inconsistent and therefore some pupils, particularly the more able, do not always have tasks that meet their needs. Therefore, they do not make as much progress as they could.

Nevertheless, pupils' achievement is satisfactory; they make sound progress through the school and standards at the end of Years 2 and 4 reflect their attainment on entry. For example, the standards of the children who entered the Reception class in 2005 were well above those expected for their age. Assessments of those pupils' attainment in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 2 in 2007 were well above average. However, from Reception onwards, pupils do not make sufficient progress in writing. They enjoy their time in school, particularly the developing range of extra-curricular activities and greater use of visits and visitors to enrich the curriculum. While the curriculum is satisfactory, there are too few opportunities for pupils to use and enhance their writing skills in all subjects. The school has identified that links between subjects have not been developed as well, or as imaginatively, as they could be. There is insufficient focus on improving the pupils' skills in each subject.

The school takes good care of the pupils' physical and emotional needs and they say that adults will help them if they need some support. Academic guidance is satisfactory and pupils have targets for improving their work, which they know and understand. These are helping them to see how well they are doing. Pupils have a sound understanding of how to live a healthy lifestyle but this is not always reflected in the contents of their lunchboxes. Their attendance is satisfactory; in spite of the school's best efforts, a few parents do not ensure that their children come to school regularly. Pupils behave well. They say that there is little bullying and that teachers will sort out any aggression if it occurs. Pupils are thoughtful and take responsibilities with enthusiasm when given them but they do not have the opportunity to develop their independence well enough. Nevertheless, they are prepared soundly for the next stage in their education and their future lives.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

The children in the Reception class make a satisfactory start to their education; the adults who work with them have an adequate understanding of their needs. They provide an environment

with a range of resources and activities that are mostly appropriate for their needs. Children develop their personal and social skills soundly; they learn the routines of the class quickly and learn to share and take turns. There is an adequate balance of activities that adults lead and those that the children choose for themselves. However, too few activities allow them to develop their independence. Adults devise some interesting ways to stimulate and involve children but do not always design these to sustain their interest or to promote further exploration. Consequently, although the children mainly behave well, they sometimes lose concentration and do not persist with the activities for any length of time. While there is some challenge for the more able, this is not sustained and there is too little that will promote the development of their writing skills. While children make adequate progress overall, some aspects of mathematical development, particularly calculating, are not catered for well enough. There are insufficient information and communication technology (ICT) resources for them to develop their skills.

What the school should do to improve further

- Build on the work already done to develop teaching, especially to cater for the full range of age and ability in the class, so that pupils' progress, particularly that of the more able, improves.
- Ensure that pupils make good progress throughout the school in writing, and that they develop their skills well through the whole curriculum.
- Develop the leadership and management skills of all staff, so that they take full responsibility for standards in their subjects.
- Develop cross-curricular links, and focus more clearly on developing the pupils' specific skills in each subject.

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

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Because children's attainment on entry varies considerably from year to year, standards at the end of Years 2 and 4 also vary. In all year groups, there is a wide range of attainment and ability. In 2007, the results of the national assessments at the end of Year 2 were well above average, but these were well below average in 2006. The attainment of the pupils who left at the end of Year 4 in 2007 was above that expected for their age, while the pupils presently in Year 4 are working at a much lower level. While achievement is satisfactory overall, it is not good enough in writing and pupils do not form their letters or present their work well enough. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those whose first language is not English make satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Because the school has a consistent approach to, and high expectations of, discipline, pupils have a good awareness of right and wrong and a keen sense of fairness. Their spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory. Their sound understanding of how to stay safe is reflected in their behaviour. Pupils make a satisfactory contribution to the community, mainly through contributions to

charity and connections with local churches and organisations. The school council has not yet started work this year.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers' planning is consistent and usually shows what pupils are to learn from the lesson. These aims are usually shared with pupils so that they have a clear understanding of the purpose. In the better lessons, pupils are reminded of the intentions and are asked to evaluate how well they have achieved them. These lessons also demonstrate a good match of the tasks to the pupils' abilities and need. The teacher has high expectations of their achievement but there are inconsistencies between classes. In addition, there is an over-use of worksheets in many subjects so that pupils do not practise their writing or set out their own work. Teaching assistants make a satisfactory contribution to the work of the pupils they support but their time is not always used effectively at the beginning and end of lessons. At times there are too many adults in classrooms so that pupils do not have the opportunity to work independently. As one said, 'I'd like to be left on my own and not have someone asking me if I need help.'

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school has adopted the new national guidelines for English and mathematics with enthusiasm and this is supporting the development of consistency in teaching. Although the curriculum meets legal requirements, there are imbalances in the timetable, which has many short sessions in addition to the main lessons. Some subjects are not given sufficient emphasis, such as design and technology in Key Stages 1 and 2, or ICT in the Foundation Stage.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

All the required safeguarding procedures are in place and the school carries out all the necessary risk assessments. There is satisfactory support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their individual plans show precisely what they need to improve. The guidance pupils receive through teachers' marking is inconsistent; some books have sound comments, showing how well they have fulfilled the purpose of the lesson and what they need to do to improve further. Occasionally they refer to the pupils' own targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher has high expectations for the school and a single-minded determination to bring about the necessary improvements. She has worked hard to develop the understanding of the staff and pupils about the changes that are necessary and the reasons for them. Challenging targets are set for the whole school and for each class, and these are increasingly effective in raising standards. Governors have a good understanding of the school and are active in supporting it and holding it to account. Although there has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection, it has been very rapid in the past year.

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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?	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	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
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	3

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	2
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	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

6 December 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Cotton End Lower School, Bedford MK45 3AA

Thank you so much for talking to me and helping me when I visited your school yesterday. I thought you might like to know what I found out about it and what you could do to help your school to be better. I enjoyed meeting you because you behave well and were so full of information, especially telling me all the reasons why you like your school.

Your school is satisfactory and it's getting better because Mrs Fairweather and the adults are working hard to help you to do as well as you can. I could see that all of you enjoy school, and the children in Year 4 told me that their lessons are interesting. I agree with them, though, that sometimes there are too many adults so you don't always have enough time to work on your own. You're very good at knowing how to be healthy but some of you don't bring really healthy food for your lunch.

There are some things that the school should do to improve, and you could help with some of them.

- Your teachers could make your work just right for all of you, especially for those of you who find learning easy - so those children could try a bit harder.
- Your writing needs to get better and you should be doing more of it in all the subjects, so it would help if you could do your very best, and work really hard at your handwriting.
- All the teachers need to look at how well you're doing in all the subjects and make sure that they help you to do as well as you can.
- To make your lessons even more interesting, the teachers could make sure that you practise all your skills whenever you can in as many subjects as possible.

My best wishes for a very happy Christmas and a lot of fun as well as hard work in the New Year.

Pat Cox

Inspector