

Thomas Johnson Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109468
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	309996
Inspection date	4 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Colin Henderson

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	3-9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	94
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Debbie Ralphs
Headteacher	Mr Kevin Nolan
Date of previous school inspection	9 February 2004
School address	Hurst Grove Lidlington Bedford Bedfordshire MK43 0SB
Telephone number	01525402377
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector in one day.

Description of the school

A significant majority of children come from the local village which reflects a broad range of social backgrounds. All pupils speak English as their first language. The number of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is fewer than in most other schools of this size. The attainment of children who start in the Nursery varies from year to year, although it is generally just above national expectations.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with some outstanding features. It serves its community well and gives good value for money. The school provides a very caring and supportive ethos that is valued highly by pupils and their parents - 'we are very lucky to have such a great school in such a small community'. The school's success is built on the excellent leadership of the headteacher, a strong staff team, good teaching, an outstanding curriculum and good links with parents to support their children's learning. Good procedures help the school to gain a clear understanding of how well it is doing and to identify and improve weaknesses.

Pupils' achievement is good overall. Children achieve well in the Nursery class and in the Reception Year. Many exceed the learning targets expected of them by the time they move into Year 1, although weaknesses in aspects of speech and language limit the achievement of some children in developing their early writing skills. Achievement in Years 1 and 2 is good. Year 2 pupils attain standards that are above average overall as reflected in the results of national tests. Test results have dipped recently in writing to broadly average levels. Weaknesses in some pupils' knowledge and understanding of how to solve number problems restrict their achievement in aspects of mathematics. Achievement in Years 3 and 4 is excellent because of very effective teaching and pupils' enthusiasm for learning. By the end of Year 4, pupils attain standards that are significantly above, and in some areas well above, expected levels. Pupils with educational difficulties or disabilities receive effective support from teachers and teaching assistants and make good progress.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. They clearly enjoy school - 'they are all our friends!' Their enthusiasm for school is evident in their excellent attendance and positive attitudes in lessons. Their behaviour is exemplary in class and around the school. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development is excellent. They talk enthusiastically about the excellent learning activities including the good range of extra-curricular activities. Their participation in a wide range of sports helps pupils to have a detailed understanding of healthy and safe lifestyles. Staff give high priority to pupils' personal development. Relationships are outstanding throughout the school, as reflected by older pupils looking after the younger ones in the playground. Pupils enjoy taking increasing responsibility for their own learning and for contributing to the school community, for example, through the school council.

Teaching is good. It is outstanding in Years 3 and 4. Teachers know their pupils very well and plan the activities carefully to meet their different learning needs. Teachers use resources effectively to capture pupils' interest, as, for example, when Year 3 and 4 pupils sat in their imaginary 'Saxon Hall' and listened with rapt attention to the storyteller. The headteacher, supported successfully by his Primary Strategy leader, is focusing strongly on raising standards in writing and improving pupils' skills in solving number problems. They have introduced some new initiatives, for example, using pupil improvement targets and effective marking. These are working particularly successfully in Years 3 and 4 and, as a result, standards are high. They have yet to be implemented as successfully in other classes.

All staff know their pupils very well and provide outstanding pastoral care. Pupils are confident about approaching any adult if they have a concern. All legal requirements for safeguarding pupils' welfare are met. Care, guidance and support of pupils are effective. Academic guidance is good. Teachers and the headteacher use regular assessments to check how well each pupil is doing. They use this information to guide their teaching and, working closely with teaching

assistants, provide further support to pupils whose progress is not what is expected. Some teachers encourage pupils to assess their own work carefully or that of a partner. This helps them to understand what level they are attaining and what they need to do to improve. Such practices are improving pupils' work, although they are not consistently developed to ensure that each pupil knows and understands what to do to raise the standard of their work.

Leadership and management are good. The leadership of the headteacher is excellent. It provides a strong direction to the work of the school and is valued by parents - 'He is a strong headteacher yet is always approachable and willing to listen'. He has established a good team of staff who work very well together to try to meet the learning needs of each pupil. They encourage parents to become fully involved in working with the school to support their children's learning.

Governors are supportive and work well with staff to check on how well the school is doing, particularly in key subjects. They monitor closely what the school provides, although some aspects of their evaluations are not always sufficiently rigorous. The strong team ethos and the consistent focus on improvement provided by the headteacher and some key staff are improving the school, for example through better accommodation and resources. This is raising standards, including those in information and communication technology. The school is well placed to make good improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children in the Nursery and Reception Year have a good start to schooling. Good teaching and an effective range of well-organised and interesting learning activities help children to settle quickly and happily into school life. The Nursery manager works closely with the Class 1 teacher to ensure good continuity of learning. Opportunities for Reception pupils to use the full range of facilities each morning help them to make good progress, particularly in personal, social and emotional development. Weaknesses in some children's speech and language skills limit their progress. The headteacher has resources in place to improve this weakness.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' skills in writing and solving number problems by extending good practice in teaching, target-setting and assessment to help all pupils know what they need to do to raise the standard of their work.

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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
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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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

5 October 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Thomas Johnson Lower School, Lidlington, MK43 0SB

Thank you for being so friendly and making me feel welcome when I visited your school recently. I enjoyed talking to you, looking at your work and watching you learn. You clearly enjoy school and, together with your parents, you think that it is a good school - and I agree.

I was pleased to see how well you get on together. Your behaviour is excellent and this means that teachers can get on with the job of helping you learn. It was interesting to talk to school councillors about how they are helping to improve the school. They have some good ideas and enjoy being responsible.

You told me that you learn a lot in school and really enjoy your work, especially the many interesting clubs and activities and the different visits and visitors. I think that your learning is good. Your teachers make your lessons interesting and you try hard to do what your teachers ask. Some of you have a good understanding of how to improve your work and are working hard to achieve your learning targets. I have asked the teachers to help all of you to understand what you need to do to improve your work, especially your writing and solving number problems. Work has already started to help you do this and Mr Nolan, the staff and governors are working hard to make your school even better.

I hope that you continue to be happy at school and carry on working hard.

Colin Henderson

Additional Inspector