

Potton Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109475
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	309998
Inspection dates	8–9 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Susan Aldridge

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	227
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Alison Kitchener
Headteacher	Mrs Ruth Burmo
Date of previous school inspection	13 January 2003
School address	Everton Road Potton Sandy Bedfordshire SG19 2PB
Telephone number	01767 260239
Fax number	01767 262708

Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average sized school. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. There are lower than average proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups, a small percentage who speak English as an additional language and a few pupils from the traveller community. The percentage with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average, although the proportion with statements of special educational need is above average. Since the school was last inspected there have been four changes of headteacher, two of whom were acting headteachers. The school is currently led by an acting headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree that this is a good school. It is successful in meeting its aim that is to give pupils a flying start. Pupils reach high standards and develop a clear set of values and good personal skills. Although it has been through a turbulent period in its leadership, standards have risen since the last inspection and overall improvement has been good. The school is well led, managed and governed. Staff form a cohesive and committed team. The skills of parents, governors and members of the wider community are used effectively to support pupils and to enrich their experiences. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well catered for and included in all aspects of school life. They make good progress. The acting headteacher has provided much needed continuity and stability over the past year and the pace of development has accelerated considerably. One parent, typical of many, noted that the acting headteacher 'seems to have brought the school on in leaps and bounds'. Staff and the governors are immensely supportive of the acting headteacher; all are working hard to improve standards and rectify weaknesses identified by the school's accurate and thorough self-evaluation. Parents are very pleased with the recent changes and so are pupils, who greatly enjoy coming to school and are proud to be part of it.

When children enter Reception, their knowledge and skills are typical for their age. They make good progress here and across the school because the provision is good, and by the time they leave in Year 4 standards are above average overall. Good progress is associated with the good quality of teaching and the good support given to pupils who need it. Standards in English, mathematics and science are above average, although those in information and communication technology (ICT) are average, because there have been limited opportunities for pupils to use ICT equipment. The governors have recently made a significant investment in ICT resources and staff are working hard to provide additional opportunities for pupils to use ICT facilities more frequently and in all subjects.

Pupils' personal development is good. It is promoted well by the good curriculum, which provides a rich range of enjoyable experiences, and by the good care and guidance pupils receive. Pupils learn about healthy living well and how to keep themselves safe. Behaviour is good. It has improved under the current leadership because effective procedures have been introduced to encourage good behaviour and support pupils who find it difficult to deal with their emotions and behave well all of the time. Pupils participate enthusiastically in the many opportunities to contribute to school life and to the wider community as they learn to be good citizens. Pupils acquire good basic skills and learn to work well on their own and with others. This prepares them well for middle school and future employment.

There is good capacity for further improvement. The school development plan includes the right priorities. However, it does not fully reflect the long-term vision that exists for the school because it covers a period of one year only. Evaluation of the success of the plan is not as efficient as it might be, because there are too many success criteria, not all of which are measurable, and few are linked to the raising of standards.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Good links with pre-schools and parents smoothes the transition into Reception and parents comment favourably on how quickly their children settle. Staff assess pupils thoroughly and

use this information well to plan activities that are closely matched to children's abilities. Good, animated and enthusiastic teaching adds to children's enjoyment. Staff are caring and build good relationships with children who clearly feel 'at home' and happy. The resources, classroom and outdoor areas are all used effectively to provide a wide range of appealing and stimulating activities, with plenty of choice. There is a suitable balance between activities that children can choose themselves and those led by staff. However, assessments of what children know and can do are usually undertaken while staff are guiding learning rather than when children are engaged in activities that they have selected themselves. Therefore, occasionally gains made by children are not always recognised and acted upon quickly. Nevertheless, from average starting points, children make good progress to reach above average standards by the end of Reception.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in ICT so that they are as high as those in English, mathematics and science.
- Improve school development planning and evaluation of actions taken by including long-term priorities in the school improvement plan and identifying measurable success criteria.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

All groups of pupils make equally good progress from average starting points because they are taught well and effectively supported in reaching the challenging targets set for them. In 2007, standards in Year 2 were above average and those in Year 4 were well above average. Currently, standards are above average in both year groups. This position in relation to the current Year 4 reflects the fact that these pupils had several changes of teacher when they were in Year 3. Standards have risen since the last inspection, particularly in writing, mathematics and science, because the school has focused on these subjects and improved provision. In science, for instance, more opportunities for pupils to carry out investigative work have helped to push standards up. Standards in ICT are average because, until recently, limited resources restricted opportunities for staff and pupils to use ICT equipment widely in lessons.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, although their understanding of cultural diversity in modern Britain is not strong. Pupils say that they thoroughly enjoy school and comment on how the behaviour has improved in the past year. Attendance levels are average. The school does all it can to improve this but a small number of pupils attend sporadically. Pupils enjoy taking responsibility, for example, as playground buddies and helping younger pupils with their reading. They grow in confidence, learn to work collaboratively and independently and acquire good skills in literacy and numeracy that prepare them well for the next stage in their education. Pupils' voices are influential through their representatives on the school council. The considerable funding they raise for various charities reflects pupils' consideration for those less fortunate than themselves. Pupils are very knowledgeable of how to live safe, fit and healthy lives, although not all make healthy choices at lunchtimes.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching ranges from satisfactory to outstanding and is mostly good. Teachers plan effectively in teams and provide a variety of learning activities that pupils enjoy. They make good use of assessment to ensure that tasks are well matched to the full range of skills and abilities in each group. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Staff manage pupils well so lessons are calm and purposeful. Pupils' positive attitudes to learning contribute to the generally good progress made in lessons. Occasionally, the pace of learning slows when teachers spend too much time on whole class teaching, and do not involve all pupils well enough. Teaching assistants and volunteers are well briefed and they provide good support to pupils who find learning difficult. Teaching assistants also lead small groups well. Pupils know what they are learning in each lesson because staff explain this clearly, and strategies for involving pupils in assessing their learning and enjoyment are beginning to be used more regularly.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum exceeds basic requirements. Good provision for literacy and numeracy skills contributes to high standards of basic skills. Extensive use of visits, visitors and themed events add much to pupils' enjoyment and progress, particularly those identified as gifted and talented. For example, a memorable visit by a re-enactment group enabled pupils to experience aspects of life in World War II first-hand. Older pupils greatly enjoy residential visits to an outdoor activity centre, helping to develop their confidence and self-esteem. The school is seeking to extend further the links between subjects and to increase the use of ICT. The well developed personal, social and health education programme contributes much to pupils' personal development. Many pupils take advantage of the good range of clubs and additional activities which include sports and creative and performing arts.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Parents express their appreciation of the good levels of care and support provided for their children. Staff know the pupils well and provide a very positive and encouraging learning environment where pupils feel secure. Good use is made of expert advice where necessary to assess and plan for the particular needs of individuals and groups. Effective guidance and support, provided by well-informed teachers and their assistants enables all pupils to progress well. There are very effective links with partner institutions to ensure a smooth transition into and out of the school. Systems for checking and reviewing the progress pupils make have improved with the recent introduction of a new central recording system. The good feedback provided through regular marking helps pupils to improve and most pupils know their targets. However, teachers do not routinely involve pupils in setting and reviewing their individual targets. This limits pupils in their ability to take some responsibility for their own learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The good leadership of the acting headteacher is complemented well by that of governors and staff with whole-school responsibilities. For instance, subject leaders are fully involved in checking the quality of provision and they evaluate standards in their subjects. Governors' skills are utilised well. The chair takes the lead in budget management, as the acting headteacher is gradually developing her skills in this aspect. By investing wisely in ICT resources, governors have successfully converted a substantial surplus, which arose from staffing changes, to a sensible contingency. They contribute strongly to the direction of the school, by leading on certain initiatives, and monitor the school's work through regular and frequent visits. There is a shared vision for the school, but this is not articulated clearly enough in the short-term development plan. For example, the plan shows that the use of new ICT equipment will be evaluated in a number of ways, but measuring success through gains made in standards attained by pupils has not been quantified.

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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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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	2
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 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

10 January 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Pottton Lower School, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2PB

Thank you for making us welcome in your school, especially to those who talked to us about school life. We enjoyed our visit.

We agree that your school is a good one. This is because the staff and governors are all doing such a good job. Your headteacher has made a big difference and many of your parents wrote to us to say how pleased they are with the school. You are all making good progress and doing well in English, mathematics and science. This will help you to carry on learning in middle school and will help you when you leave school. We were particularly pleased to hear that you all enjoy coming to school and that you feel safe here. We heard that you have noticed improvements in behaviour, which we found was good. We were impressed with your knowledge of healthy living and how to keep safe. You help out at school in many ways and you deserve to be proud of the money you raise for charities.

We have asked the staff and governors to see that you do as well in ICT as you do in English, mathematics and science. They have lots of good ideas for making the school even better. We have asked them to make sure that their planning documents show what sort of school they want yours to be in a few years' time, and to work out better ways of measuring whether or not their plans have been successful. You can help by keeping up the good work, attending regularly and by trying your best to reach your targets.

We wish you all the best in the future.

Mrs S Aldridge

Lead inspector