

Sharnbrook John Gibbard Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109478
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	309999
Inspection date	9 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Geof Timms

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

Type of school	First
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	4-9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	142
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs E Carr-Archer
Headteacher	Mrs S Kaznowski
Date of previous school inspection	17 January 2005
School address	High Street Sharnbrook Bedfordshire MK44 1PF
Telephone number	01234 781328
Fax number	0700 580 7815

Age group	4-9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- how the school achieves such high standards, and how staff are improving writing and higher attainers' mathematics
- how effective are the tracking systems, including the assessment of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- the effectiveness of the quality of teaching and learning
- the capacity of the school to improve further given the planned changes to its status.

The inspector gathered evidence from observations of lessons, samples of pupils' work, discussions with pupils, staff and the chair and vice-chair of the governors, and from parents' questionnaires. The main documents used by the school in monitoring and strategic planning were examined. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average lower school. It serves the villages of Sharnbrook and the surrounding area of North Bedfordshire. Most pupils are from socially advantaged backgrounds and a below average proportion are entitled to free school meals. Of the small number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, very few speak English as an additional language. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average overall but high in some year groups. Attainment on entry to the school varies from year to year. Recent year groups have had skills broadly in line with those typically found. The school has been awarded a Basic Skills Quality mark, a School Achievement Award and an Activemark Award.

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. It is providing its pupils with an excellent start to their education and a very effective preparation for their future lives. Standards are exceptionally high, and pupils' behaviour and attitudes are also excellent. The high quality teaching ensures that all pupils are treated as individuals and helped to succeed. This success is due to the outstanding leadership demonstrated by the headteacher and the governing body, and the very effective work of all staff in the school. Parents overwhelmingly recognise the school's strengths. One wrote, 'We believe Sharnbrook provides an excellent foundation for education and prepares the pupils well for middle school.' This view is confirmed by the findings of the inspection.

Talking to pupils provides a clear idea of how highly they rate the school and how well they feel the school helps them to learn. One said 'Teachers are really really really good at teaching and make lessons fun.' This is evident in pupils' achievement. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics are exceptionally high and have been consistently so over a number of years. A fall in the number of pupils reaching the higher levels in mathematics in 2007 was largely due to the nature of a specific year group, and this has been addressed.

Achievement is outstanding because of the excellent progress made by pupils throughout the school. The school's results at the end of Year 2 are exceptionally high. The outstanding progress continues through Years 3 and 4, so that by the end of Year 4 pupils are reaching standards that are well above those expected for their age. The inspection did not investigate all subjects in depth but evidence showed pupils clearly attain high standards in information and communication technology (ICT), history and art and design. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those who are recognised as gifted and talented, especially in reading, mathematics, music and gymnastics, are very well supported through extra provision, and they make progress that is equally as good as that of their peers.

Pupils praise the level of care shown by the school, which they appreciate deeply. They greatly enjoy school and are very positive about how teachers respond to any worries or concerns they may have. Their knowledge of how to keep themselves healthy and safe is exceptional. They agree that they are well prepared for middle school and their lives outside school because of the high level of basic skills that they acquire. Pupils have many opportunities to contribute to school life and to the local and the wider community. They know the targets set to help them improve and they appreciate that teachers' marking of their work helps them learn. Pupils say there is no bullying and that they 'don't like arguing because you lose friends and get lonely.'

Pupils feel safe and secure. The school has very effective safeguarding procedures, including those for child protection and ensuring the appropriate checks are carried out on all adults who work with them. Staff track individual pupils' progress in many subjects very effectively and this enables them to intervene quickly where there may be underachievement or to provide support through extra teaching if needed. In addition, the school has developed a system for tracking pupils' developing skills in the spiritual, social, moral and cultural aspects of the curriculum. Though at an early stage, this is proving effective in offering extra care and support for pupils with particular needs.

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding throughout the school. Staff are very knowledgeable and experienced. They are extremely willing to try new ideas if they can see the benefit for their pupils. Since the last inspection for example, the use of ICT in planning,

resourcing and teaching lessons has greatly improved, and this is having a real impact on pupils' learning. This was especially evident in a history lesson where the effects of bombing during World War 2 were very effectively illustrated and therefore better understood by pupils. Teachers have created a challenging but supportive ethos in their classrooms, helped by the work of highly effective learning support assistants, and relationships between adults and pupils, which are excellent.

The school has developed an outstanding curriculum with a very high level of enrichment through the imaginative resourcing of lessons and a wide range of visits and visitors. In addition, specific themed days help pupils to develop their learning over an extended period. For example, they particularly enjoyed recent art days and a day learning about healthy living. The school provides an excellent range of out of school activities, many of which enable pupils to extend their knowledge and skills to a high level in areas that interest them, especially in the arts, music, drama and physical education. The school is yet to look at further improving practice when children move from the Reception class into Year 1, and how that transition can best be handled to ensure learning is appropriate for individual children.

The outstanding nature of the school's work is underpinned by the excellent leadership and management. The headteacher provides very clear and effective leadership, with the focus strongly on individual pupils achieving the best that they can. She is very well supported by her senior staff, subject leaders and the rest of the adults in the school who work very closely together. The governance of the school is excellent and the result of extremely strong, knowledgeable and effective leadership by the Chair of the Governors. One result of the outstanding leadership is the clear, accurate and honest self-evaluation, which results in the school having an excellent knowledge of what it does well and what could improve. The school is working with other schools in the local area to create a Trust that will support pupils' education from 4 to 19 by making much closer links between schools, including the effectiveness of the transition between schools to improve consistency. This is an example of the willingness of the leadership to look for continual improvement and to keep the best interests of the pupils at the heart of all that it does. Because of this, as well as the existing success of the school's work, there is an outstanding capacity to maintain the current high standards and improve even further. As another parent summed up, 'Excellent school, child very happy, making good progress...Couldn't really ask for more!'

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

One Reception parent said 'My daughter cannot wait to return to school each day.' After even a brief visit to the Reception class it is easy to see why this is a common feeling among parents and children. The staff have created a very well planned, interesting and challenging curriculum which reflects the individual children's needs well. There is a supportive ethos, not only because staff help the children, but also because children are encouraged to help and support each other. The assessment of their progress is detailed and very effectively used to provide a wide range of activities that are well matched to build on prior learning. The excellent teaching helps make the lessons enjoyable as well as interesting. The progress already made shows how well the children are doing and how effective the provision is in helping them to learn. The standards achieved by the end of the Reception year in all areas of learning are consistently above those expected. Children are very well prepared for their future, both in and after school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Build on the arrangements for transition between the Reception class and Year 1, and between Year 4 and pupils' next schools, to ensure they are fully effective in supporting pupils' learning.

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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	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	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

10 January 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Sharnbrook John Gibbard Lower School, High Street, Sharnbrook, MK44 1PF

I am writing to thank you for the way that you made me welcome when I visited your school recently. I really enjoyed meeting and talking to you, especially those of you I met at lunchtime and who told me how much they enjoyed being at the school. You were very polite and helpful and you helped make my job much easier.

You and your parents are very happy with the school and I think you are right to be so because it is an outstanding school. You work very hard and reach exceptionally high standards, especially in reading, writing and mathematics. You also do very well when learning to use computers.

One reason you learn so well is because you behave very well and this helps your teachers to teach you. I was very impressed with how well you listen and answer questions, and how well you take part in lessons. You know what you need to do to get even better and the teachers provide interesting activities that help you learn.

I know you are very happy with the way teachers look after you and care for you, and I think they do this very well. This is especially true if you are ever worried about anything either at school or at home. All of the adults in the school are very caring. A lot of you join the clubs and other activities, and I know parents think your end of term performances are exceptionally good.

To help the school stay as good and successful as it is, I am suggesting that those who lead the school look at the differences in teaching and learning, and the curriculum, especially between Reception and Year 1, and between Year 4 and the other schools you will go on to later. This is to help make it easier for you to adjust to new ways of working.

Many thanks once again for your help. Enjoy your time at Sharnbrook and keep working hard!

Yours sincerely

Geof Timms

Lead inspector