

Shillington Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109480
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	310000
Inspection dates	24–25 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Richard Cheetham

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	105
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Louise Reece-Jones
Headteacher	Mrs Ingrid Alsop
Date of previous school inspection	20 January 2003
School address	Greenfields Shillington Hitchin Hertfordshire SG5 3NX
Telephone number	01462 711637
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Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average primary school. The number on roll has declined a little since the previous inspection. It is a popular school and a quarter of its pupils come from outside its catchment area. Nearly all pupils are from White British backgrounds. The school serves a rural community of largely average socio-economic circumstances. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average as is the percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most pupils start school with average attainment. There have been a significant number of staff changes over the last two years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This effective school gives good value for money because it enables its pupils to achieve well and fosters their excellent personal development and well-being. This reflects the school's own view. Parents think highly of it and have very few concerns. One typical comment was, 'The whole environment is better than I hoped for or expected.' There is a strong sense of community in which individuals are valued because staff and others connected to the school work as a team. This promotes pupils' personal achievement and progress and enriches the outstanding curriculum it offers. As a result, pupils enjoy school greatly. They grow in confidence and self-awareness and are considerate, polite and excellently behaved. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They have an excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles, of how to keep themselves and others safe and make an excellent contribution to the school and wider community. The development of skills to support their future economic well-being is good.

The school has made good progress since the previous inspection, understands its strengths and weaknesses well and has a good capacity for further improvement. From average starting points on entry, the school has maintained above average standards in English and mathematics and helped pupils make good progress and achieve well. There was a slight decline in writing standards, especially of boys, that is now reversing and although science standards are well above average in Year 2, they fall to average in Year 4, and these pupils make slow progress.

Leadership and management are effective. The headteacher has skilfully guided the school through recent staff changes, maintained above average standards and has built an effective management structure to guide further improvement. She has ensured a consistently good quality of teaching and learning. Excellent partnerships with other schools have a positive impact on pupils' well-being and achievement. Governors are closely involved in school decision-making and in leading aspects of the school's provision, such as the enrichment half days when the community lends its skills to widen the school's curriculum. They maintain good oversight of the school's excellent provision for pupils' care, guidance and support. They have satisfactory involvement in school development planning and self-evaluation. The school's development plan is comprehensive but too detailed to focus effectively on raising pupils' standards achieved.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Very good liaison with parents and the on-site playgroup enable staff to get an accurate picture of pupils' development prior to them starting school. Sensitive arrangements for entry ensure that pupils quickly adjust to their new environment. Staff accurately assess pupils' individual learning needs and build an exciting learning programme to meet them. Inside and outside the classroom, learning activities consistently promote children's independence, co-operation and confidence. Encouragement and enjoyment are routine. Staff have an excellent understanding of how young children learn best. They work closely together to promote at least good progress and achievement by teaching very effectively a well-balanced curriculum that captures their interest.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the standards boys achieve in writing and those that Key Stage 2 pupils achieve in science.

- Ensure that the school development plan focuses much more sharply on raising pupils' achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils make at least good progress in the Foundation Stage because of its excellent provision. They achieve well and most reach above average standards in all the areas of learning except writing. Even here, their progress is still good from a lower starting point and they reach an average level by the start of Year 1. By Year 2, pupils achieve well. They reach above average standards in reading and well above average standards in mathematics and science. They make satisfactory progress in writing to reach average standards but boys usually achieve less well than girls. By Year 4, pupils continue to achieve well in reading and especially well in mathematics. Pupils again reach average standards in writing and boys continue to achieve less well than girls in this aspect. Pupils make slow progress in science because their predictive skills are unsatisfactory and they reach satisfactory standards. Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities are supported well and make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils flourish in the school's secure environment. Relationships are very positive and this promotes pupils' excellent, safe behaviour and confident attitudes to school. One parent commented, 'My child couldn't be happier in school.' Attendance is well above average because pupils want to be there. There is evidence of genuine enjoyment in lessons where pupils eagerly answer questions, pose their own, paint with feeling and sing with energy and control. They are keen to take part in sports and games, swim regularly and have an excellent understanding of what makes a healthy diet. They are inquisitive, eager to develop ideas and work very well together. They respect one another and listen carefully to different views. Pupils make a very strong contribution to the school and wider community by diligently carrying out everyday responsibilities such as the compost heap building or charity fund raising. The very effective school council runs its own budget and fosters pupils' ability to take responsibility and make decisions. Good achievement in basic skills prepares pupils well for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The school's strengths in teaching and learning are based on accurate assessments of pupils' progress, which teachers use to challenge pupils at different levels. One parent described teaching as, 'stretching yet empathetic.' Lessons often have lively openings that whet pupils' appetites for what is to follow. Learning support assistants work well with small groups of pupils to ensure they are included in overall class progress. Excellent relationships and carefully graded levels of challenge encourage pupils to try hard and sometimes achieve more than they anticipated, as in some very well-expressed thoughts on Autumn in Year 4 poetry. From the Foundation Stage on, pupils learn to be independent and make thoughtful contributions to class discussions. They learn to work things out for themselves, such as in problem solving in mathematics. Teachers mark pupils' work carefully and set mini targets for improvement to

which pupils respond well. However, pupils are not taught routinely to spot and correct their own mistakes. Occasionally, whole class lessons go on too long to meet all pupils' needs.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Teachers' planning is highly effective in ensuring an excellent range of learning activities for all pupils based on the National Curriculum. This meets pupils' needs very well and encourages them to make choices, work together and develop wide literacy and numeracy skills. One parent noted, 'Facilities are superb and my child enjoys the broad range of activities on offer.' Activities, especially for the youngest pupils are practical and fun. They promote speaking, listening and deductive skills through first hand experiences. The curriculum is significantly enhanced by the school's values and enrichment half days and theme weeks. During these sessions pupils benefit from a range of community skills and knowledge and from specialist support from the local middle school. Links between the two schools and with the playgroup are very strong and much to the benefit of pupils' continuity of learning. Teachers make good use of the regular visits and visitors to enliven the curriculum further. Staff have a very good range of subject skills to broaden pupils' experiences in art, music and physical education.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school rightly claims a highly effective, whole school commitment to ensuring pupils' safety and well-being based on secure systems and effective day-by-day knowledge of the children. Pupils confirm that they feel safe in school and know to whom to turn if they need help. Over time, the school has enabled pupils with a wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities to learn alongside their peers and make good progress by accurately assessing and sensitively meeting their needs. Staff deal with any bullying sensitively and effectively. There are good ICT based systems for tracking individual academic progress that the school is developing further. Staff use this information very well to analyse any shortfalls in performance and remedy them. They also use the data very well to set challenging targets for improvement to share with pupils and parents.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has led the school well through a period of staffing change and is developing a largely new staff team to improve pupils' achievement and maintain excellent personal development and well-being. A particular strength of leadership is the excellent partnerships established with other schools for sharing good practice. The management structure delegates responsibilities well and its impact on pupils' progress is clear in most respects. For example, in boys' writing, there is emerging evidence that standards are rising. The same is not yet clear in science because this is a new responsibility and has not had time to show the same effect. Mentoring is a positive feature of school management, which allows expertise to be shared among staff and with trainee teachers. An effective monitoring and evaluation system helps to set the school improvement agenda. School leaders have a good view of teaching and learning quality and have acted effectively when there were shortcomings. However, the raising of pupils' achievement is not expressed precisely enough in the school development plan because

it is obscured by too many maintenance tasks. Governors have a good understanding of their role. They seek to improve it further through their own development plan.

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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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
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	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	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?	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?	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

26 September 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Shillington Lower School, Shillington, SG5 3NX

Thank you very much for welcoming me to your school. I enjoyed my time with you, especially the working lunch with the school council, and I want to tell you what I found out about during my visit. I agree with you that it is a good school and that you enjoy all that it offers.

You all make good progress in your school work and you have fun at the same time. You have many different activities and are lucky to have people from the village and others to help you. The teachers make lessons interesting and you are good at giving your ideas and listening to others. You are very well behaved and take as good care of one another as the school takes of you. You are polite and confident. Your parents are very pleased with the school and support it very well.

The headteacher, teachers and governors work very hard together to make the school even better and there are two things in particular I would like them to do:

- help you all, but especially the boys, to make better progress in your writing and help the pupils in Years 3 and 4 make better progress in science;
- make sure that the staff and governors have a very clear plan to help you all do as well as you can.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Cheetham Lead inspector