

Putnoe Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109496
Local Authority	Bedfordshire
Inspection number	310006
Inspection dates	22–23 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Colin Henderson

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	236
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	41
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ian Andrews
Headteacher	Ms Gillian Peck
Date of previous school inspection	22 March 2004
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Overdale Bedford Bedfordshire MK41 8EN
Telephone number	01234 303400
Fax number	01234 303401

Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average sized primary lower school. Most pupils come from the area surrounding the school. At over 40%, the proportion taking a free school meal is well above the national average. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds is above average and 23% of pupils speak English as a second language. The number of pupils who have learning difficulties and /or disabilities is higher than most schools of this size. The attainment of most children starting in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is well below that expected for their age. There is an on-site pre-school and extended schools setting, including a breakfast club, which is not managed by the governing body. The school has received various awards in recognition of its work, including the National Healthy Schools Award, Artsmark Gold, Eco Schools Award, Active Mark, the Basic Skills Quality Mark, the DCSF Teaching Award for Sustainable Schools, the Marjorie Boxall Quality Award for excellence in nurture group practice and Investors in People Status for the third time in succession.

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 that provides an excellent education for its pupils. It is valued highly by pupils and their parents, as reflected in such parents' comments as 'My child really enjoys school and her improvement reflects the outstanding teaching and care she receives'. The outstanding leadership of the headteacher has been hugely influential in moving the school forward. Her relentless focus on improving the achievement of each child provides a very clear direction for staff and pupils alike. She has worked in a very effective partnership with her deputy headteacher and senior leadership team, to establish a very strong team of staff and governors who work closely together to create a supportive and caring learning atmosphere. A consistent focus on such key values as trust and respect enables pupils to grow in confidence, enjoy their learning and try hard to succeed.

Children settle quickly and happily into the two Reception classes because of excellent individual care and support, effective arrangements to introduce them to school life and an interesting, well-organised range of learning activities. Outstanding teaching helps them to achieve very well. Pupils continue to make excellent progress throughout the school mainly because of high quality teaching, an outstanding and enjoyable curriculum, exceptionally well-matched to their differing needs and very effective individual support and guidance. Pupils' achievement is outstanding and standards of attainment are improving throughout the school. Most pupils attain nationally expected levels for their age and an increasing proportion attain above average levels.

Pupils' outstanding personal development is another key factor in supporting excellent achievement. They speak enthusiastically about their school and behave excellently in lessons and around school. They understand how to adopt healthy and safe lifestyles exceptionally well. Year 4 pupils enjoy taking responsibility around school, for example, being monitors at lunchtimes and setting up for assemblies. They value helping younger pupils, for example as peer tutors, and would welcome more opportunities to support the school's caring community. School councillors talk proudly about their work and their good contribution to improving their school.

The school's caring ethos is reflected clearly in the way staff work hard to ensure that every pupil is happy, secure and ready to learn. Teachers' use of assessment information is excellent. They track the progress of each individual carefully and, in close discussion with the headteacher and other key staff, use the information to set challenging targets to ensure that all pupils continue to make excellent progress. Teachers plan lessons carefully to meet the needs of different groups of pupils and the quality of teaching is never less than good. Lessons are interesting and teachers make outstanding use of different ways of helping pupils improve their work, for example, self-assessment and improvement targets in literacy and numeracy.

The headteacher and her leadership team constantly encourage staff to look for ways to improve the school's programme of activities and actively involve pupils in their work. Such recent initiatives as introducing aspects of the International Primary Curriculum are beginning to improve pupils' awareness of communities other than their own. This is planned for further development. The excellent systems to check closely on how well pupils achieve and to evaluate teaching and learning provide the headteacher, governors and staff with clear points for improvement. They work closely together to plan in detail to improve these aspects and governors are increasingly involved in checking rigorously on the progress made. This ensures

that the school continues to provide a high quality education for its pupils and is set up excellently to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children make excellent progress. They are helped to learn and develop through inspiring environments and exceptional guidance in developing their ability to learn independently. Their interest and enthusiasm are inspired by carefully planned introductions such as when a teacher and teaching assistant worked together to stimulate the children's imagination by creating a 'parcel from outer space'. This captured the children's interest and encouraged them find out more about space and aliens. Children show great enthusiasm for their learning by willingly participating in the full range of carefully planned indoor and outdoor activities. The programme provides an excellent balance between those activities that are directed by adults and those of children's own choosing. Personal social development is outstanding because of clearly established and consistent guidance on building relationships and establishing expectations. This encourages children to develop skills in cooperation and an understanding of other's feelings. Assessment and target setting procedures contribute very effectively to increasing staff's knowledge and understanding of individual children. Policies and procedures, reflected exceptionally well in practice, ensure that children's welfare has a high priority. Leadership and management of the EYFS are excellent. Rigorous monitoring and support for teaching and other staff ensure high quality provision and the half-termly tracking of progress ensure all pupils to make excellent progress. Those needing extra support are identified quickly and supported very effectively by teachers and teaching assistants.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend pupils' contribution to their own community and their knowledge and understanding of other communities.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils achieve excellently throughout the school. Their knowledge and skills are developed very successfully and attainment is improving consistently. Current standards are broadly average overall at Year 2 and Year 4. An increasing proportion of pupils attain above average levels, particularly in reading and mathematics. This is evident in the improvements in the Year 2 national tests in 2008 and the results of Year 4 assessments. School assessment data, pupils' work and lesson observations during the inspection show that the school is on track to achieve its challenging targets for 2009. They also reflect the high standards of pupils' achievement in other subjects, particularly art and design and physical education. Pupils who have learning difficulties and /or disabilities are given excellent support to help them achieve their specific learning targets and to progress as exceptionally well as other pupils. Pupils who speak English as a second language also benefit from excellent support and guidance enabling them to make outstanding progress. The school goes the extra mile to enable these pupils to settle quickly and to target the rapid development of their English language skills.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The valuable opportunities in assemblies and in lessons and the focus on developing understanding of key values effectively improve pupils' understanding of morality and cultural differences. The very good relationships are a reflection of the effective strategies to promote social development and respect for all. The strong personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme enables pupils to understand their feelings and those of others and contributes to their understanding of the importance of regular attendance. Pupils comment on the improvements in behaviour, respecting the need for sanctions and enjoying the rewards. Pupils contribute effectively to the smooth running of the school, for example, through their recycling focus. They are proud of their school and have a strong sense of belonging. Many enjoy working with members of the local community, for example local businesses. The school's allotment, the sale of fresh fruit in the school and wide range of opportunities for exercise enable pupils to understand healthy lifestyles exceptionally well. The commitment of all staff ensures that pupils understand and adopt safe practices around the school. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of the world of work are enhanced well through their involvement in such mini business enterprises as 'Delicious Delectables' and 'Tuti Fruiti Tuesday'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are of a consistently high standard because the leadership team has established an excellent system for checking and improving any areas for development. Teachers plan in detail to meet pupils' different learning needs. They make good use of interesting resources, especially the interactive whiteboards, to gain pupils' interest. The very effective partnership with teaching assistants ensures that pupils receive support when needed, although this is not always consistently good in every lesson to ensure that all pupils contribute their ideas. Teachers make very effective use of strategies, such as pupil improvement targets and self-assessment, to help pupils know what they need to improve. The outstanding use of such initiatives as 'hovering', in which pupils use their arms to signal how well they have understood, enables teachers to receive instant feedback on their teaching. Some teachers link it well to the success tips to guide pupils and to raise standards quickly.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The excellent commitment of school leaders to curriculum development provides a curriculum that is carefully matched to pupils' needs and provides them with the key skills they will need to be successful in the 21st century. Pupils acquire skills progressively in all subjects through termly and half-termly themes based on pupils' interests and experiences. This results in excellent levels of interest and enjoyment. There are increasing opportunities for pupils to apply their key literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills in other subjects, to learn another language and about life different to their own in the wider world. Curriculum planning supported by rigorous assessment procedures in all subjects enables each pupil to build their skills very successfully. Opportunities for enrichment through themed weeks are exemplary. Visits and visitors are used to create interest, develop imagination and enhance

learning across many aspects. A wide range of extra-curricular activities enhances the provision very well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Systems for safe guarding pupils are robust and fulfil requirements. All staff are involved in regular reviews of systems. The supportive environment promotes pupils' confidence and, with excellent support and guidance, encourages them to take increasing responsibility for their learning. They respect the use of targets to enable them to progress and value the sharing of these with their parents. Early identification of learners' needs effectively enables all learners to be supported and make exceptional progress. The Nurture Group very effectively provides support for pupils who experience difficulties in socialising and builds the confidence they require in order to learn. Their inclusion within regular classes is carefully planned and monitored so that they have access to the full curriculum. The outstanding provision for improving attendance and punctuality is raising standards significantly.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The influential headteacher and her very effective partnership with the deputy headteacher and leadership team are key factors in raising pupils' and teachers' expectations and improving the school. Her leadership is valued by all staff and by many parents - 'Our school has shown fantastic improvement under this head'. Staff work hard to develop a closer partnership with parents, for example through the Family Worker. The headteacher and governors have encouraged a very strong teamwork to establish excellent procedures to check how well pupils are achieving and to target any areas for improvement. There is no guesswork; issues are highlighted through careful scrutiny of assessments and lessons. The management structure is highly effective in ensuring all key staff make significant contributions to the school's success, particularly on promoting the caring ethos and ensuring all pupils are included fully. The staff team, supported by a good governing body, have established a vibrant school community in which everyone is valued. They are planning to extend pupils' understanding of their roles in, and contributions to local and international communities.

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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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which 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	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 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

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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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	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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

24 October 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Putnoe Lower School, Bedford MK41 8EN

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking to you about what you do in school, looking at your work and watching you learn. You clearly enjoy school and, together with most of your parents, you think that it is an excellent school - we agree.

We were pleased to see how well you get on together. You behave really well and this means that teachers can get on with the job of helping you learn. We really enjoyed visiting your classes and seeing you take part enthusiastically in an excellent range of activities. We would like to say special thanks to the Year 4 pupils and the members of the School Council we talked to who told us all about life at Putnoe.

You told us that you learn a lot in school and enjoy your work, especially the good range of school clubs, visits and visitors. We think that your learning is excellent. Your teachers make your lessons very interesting and you try hard to do what your teachers ask. You help yourselves and each other by looking carefully at ways to improve your work. You are keen to achieve your learning targets and this is helping to improve your work, especially your writing. Mrs. Peck and all the staff constantly try to help you learn as well as possible. We have asked them to continue to help you contribute to your own school community and try to improve your understanding of different groups in this and other countries.

Thank you again for helping us to find out about your school. We hope that you will continue to listen carefully to your teachers and to work hard to achieve your learning targets.

Yours sincerely

Colin Henderson

Lead inspector.