

Pulloxhill Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109501
Local Authority	Bedfordshire
Inspection number	310007
Inspection date	6 May 2008
Reporting inspector	John Messer

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

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	55
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Mark Britton
Headteacher	Mrs Annette McCullion
Date of previous school inspection	6 May 2003
School address	Fieldside Road Pulloxhill Bedford Bedfordshire MK45 5HN
Telephone number	01525 713150
Fax number	01525 721547

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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 progress pupils make in literacy and numeracy and the impact of the federation. Evidence was gathered from classroom visits, discussions with staff, a school governor and pupils as well as examination of school documents, especially assessment data. 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 school is much smaller than average. Most pupils are from White British families, a small number are from minority ethnic backgrounds and there are some pupils from the Traveller community. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is below average. Some pupils have particular problems with language development. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school is broadly in line with national expectations. The school has received the Active Mark and Healthy Schools Awards as well as recognition as a Values School. The school is federated with a neighbouring lower school and so shares the same headteacher and governing body. It also shares Investors in People status with its partner school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The school's self-evaluation is accurate in judging that its overall effectiveness is outstanding. One key strength is the federation that has been established with a neighbouring lower school. This link has brought many benefits that have had a positive impact on teaching and learning, pupils' achievement and on the leadership and management of the school. Expertise among staff has been shared and this has supported the development of teaching extremely well. The school benefited greatly from the support of its neighbouring school during a difficult period caused by staff absences. Foundation Stage children enjoyed being accommodated in the partner school whilst their new classroom was being built.

Pupils' personal development, including their excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is another strength. The core values that the school promotes, such as respect, unity and perseverance, underpin the life of the school. These values act as a guide to behaviour and help the pupils to make decisions and evaluate the actions of others. This enhances the climate for learning. Pupils' behaviour is excellent. Their social skills are outstanding. They are extremely courteous and highly sensitive to the feelings of others. Parents are delighted with the education provided for their children. One comment summed up the views of many, 'There is a lovely community feeling in the school at all levels - the children all mix well across the year groups, something that is backed up by the values system upon which their schooling is based'. Parents, pupils and staff respect and admire the site agent, who is passionate about supporting the schools and received an MBE for her outstanding services to education.

Teaching and learning are outstanding and so pupils make excellent progress. Teaching assistants make a major contribution to the quality of support, especially for those who find learning difficult. Some teaching assistants are highly skilled at teaching information and communication technology (ICT) and help pupils to attain exceptionally high standards. One key feature of the teaching is the great clarity of teachers' descriptions and demonstrations. Teachers' explanations are measured and crystal clear. Interactive whiteboards are used well to emphasise key points. Above all, teachers make lessons interesting. Pupils appreciate this and one comment was typical, 'We learn in a really fun way and not in a boring way'. Highly effective learning is laced with much laughter. An excellent innovative approach to homework, based on pupils' 'Learning Logs', adds another dimension to the development of pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding.

Children achieve well in the Reception class and by the end of the Reception year standards are above those expected nationally. Pupils make outstanding progress in Years 1 and 2 so that by the Year 2 standards are exceptionally high in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils continue to make excellent progress in Years 3 and 4 and by Year 4 attainment is exceptionally high. Pupils who find learning difficult are supported well and most make exceptionally good progress. The curriculum promotes a well rounded education and is relevant to pupils' needs. There is a strong emphasis on literacy, numeracy and ICT. There is an excellent range of extra activities such as after-school clubs and educational visits.

Pastoral care is a strong feature of the school. Staff have extremely good knowledge of each individual pupil. Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent. Personal guidance, such as advice on leading healthy lifestyles, is excellent. Academic guidance is equally strong. Teachers give pupils a clear understanding of what they need to do to reach the next stages in their learning, mainly through discussion and careful marking which indicates the strengths in pupils'

work as well as areas for development. There is an exceptionally good ratio of staff to pupils. Although this supports learning well, there are times when pupils are too reliant on adult support and are not sufficiently encouraged to use their initiative and become more independent. Procedures for safeguarding children are fully in place. Pupils are self-assured and develop an excellent range of skills that gives them a secure platform for moving on to their middle schools.

The headteacher gives excellent leadership and is ably supported by the senior teacher. She analyses the school's performance in great detail and identifies precisely the most important areas for improvement. She works closely with the governing body to produce good development plans that give clear direction to school improvement. Governors are far sighted and have worked hard to secure the school's future by establishing the federation. The school's outstanding track record of improvement demonstrates that it has excellent capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The Reception children have just moved into a brand new classroom linked to the classroom used by the pre-school playgroup. Already staff have created a vibrant, inviting learning environment that stimulates learning well. There is scope for further improvement to ensure that activities always provide plenty of exciting exploration and investigation and more opportunities for children to use their initiative. Teaching is good and everything is explained carefully so that children's understanding is assured. Lessons are planned in great detail and there is a strong emphasis on teaching children the link between letters and the sounds they make. They know, for example, that 'c' and 'h' are friendly letters that stick together to make 'ch' and this helps them to read words like 'kitchen'. There is also a good emphasis on teaching children about shapes, patterns and numbers so that their mathematical development is secure. They learn an exceptional range of skills in ICT and use computers confidently.

What the school should do to improve further

- Encourage pupils to be less reliant on adult support and to develop greater independence.

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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	2
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

7 May 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Pulloxhill Lower School, Bedford, MK45 5HN

What a great school! I thoroughly enjoyed the short time I spent with you. Thank you for being so friendly and helpful.

I think that you get a wonderful start to your education and there are so many good things about your school. The links you have made with Greenfield Lower School are very helpful and highly successful. Mrs Jenkins, the site agent, is wonderful and has had a massive influence on making your school such a happy place. The older pupils are very good at helping the youngest children and that makes the school seem very much like one big happy family. You are very good at literacy, numeracy and ICT. Your behaviour is excellent and you thoroughly enjoy learning new things. You work willingly but also enjoy having fun. You learn quickly and your learning is peppered with lots of lovely laughter. Those of you who find it a little difficult to learn new things get lots of help and do really well. You are good at sport and keep yourselves fit by having plenty of exercise. You know how to stay safe and look after yourselves and others. You told me that one of the best things about the school was the teachers and the way that they make learning fun. All the grown ups do their best to help each and every one of you to feel happy and to learn successfully. All the staff are keen to make the school even better and to make your lessons even more exciting.

I think that there is one thing in particular that would make the school even better. I think that you could be more independent and use your own ideas a lot more in making decisions about how you learn. I know that you want to do your best and I suggest that if you learn to use more initiative and do things for yourselves you could become even better learners.

I wish you every success in the future.

John Messer

Lead inspector