

Robert Peel Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109522
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	310014
Inspection dates	15–16 November 2007
Reporting inspector	John Messer

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	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	304
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Julie Warriner
Headteacher	Mr David Saunders
Date of previous school inspection	31 March 2003
School address	Dapifer Drive Sandy Bedfordshire SG19 1QJ
Telephone number	01767 681185
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Age group	3–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This first school is larger than average. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. The proportion who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also below average. The attainment of most, but not all, pupils on entry to the school is below average, especially in communication, language and literacy. The school has the Basic Skills Quality Mark and the National Healthy Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school because teaching and support staff are dedicated to doing their very best for every single pupil. First, and foremost, staff try hard to make pupils feel happy and comfortable so that they enjoy each school day. Teaching is good and teachers strive hard to make sure that every individual does well and makes good progress in all aspects of development. Academic progress is good and standards are above average. Children in the Nursery and Reception classes make a good start to their education. The nurture unit gives exceptionally good support to pupils who are vulnerable and need extra help to fit in with classroom routines. It is particularly successful in helping pupils' emotional development so that they can become effective learners. Personal development, including social, moral, spiritual and cultural development, is good. Throughout the school, there is a strong emphasis on developing pupils' self-confidence and their belief in themselves as successful learners. Leadership and management are good. The new headteacher has given a renewed impetus to school improvement. He and his deputy give clear direction but this new partnership has not yet had time to make its full impact on improving provision. The curriculum is good and is developing well. There are good plans to make it more exciting in order to intensify pupils' motivation and raise standards. Pupils are prepared well for the next phase of their education. Computers are not used sufficiently to develop a wide enough range of skills in information and communication technology (ICT) and to support pupils' learning. This is partly because equipment is old and unreliable. The school is awaiting delivery of new hardware.

Teachers help pupils to become effective learners. Special attention has been given to improving the quality of pupils' written work. This has been successful and by Year 4, many pupils have become powerful writers. They write vividly, as for example, 'Boudicca's teeth were gritted as she brandished her sword while barking orders to her tribe'. Relationships between teachers and pupils are warm and friendly. This encourages pupils to feel comfortable about asking questions and expressing their views.

The school has a good framework in place for measuring pupils' progress. It is used well to set ambitious targets in literacy and numeracy in order to raise standards. These challenging targets are agreed by teachers who are keen for their classes to make as much progress as possible. Most targets are met. The targets are not always translated into individual targets for pupils. Because practice is inconsistent, many pupils have no clear understanding of what they need to do to reach the next stages on their learning journey.

There has been good improvement since the last inspection and standards are now better than they were. The school has a strong capacity to improve and it is poised to make further advances. The overwhelming majority of parents are very pleased with the education provided for their children. One comment was typical, 'My son is happy to go to school and talks about the teachers with the utmost respect'. Finances are managed well and the school provides good value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Before children start in the Nursery, staff visit families at home and this creates the beginning of a good partnership between home and school. Resources for learning indoors and outside are good. All sessions are carefully planned, with close attention to detailing exactly what pupils

are expected to learn. The colourful learning environments are planned creatively. Currently the autumnal theme includes indoor 'woodland' areas where crisp golden leaves crunch and hedgehogs hibernate. There is an appropriately strong emphasis on encouraging children's communication skills and teaching reading skills. The leadership and management of the Foundation Stage are good. Teachers and support staff are bursting with plans and creative ideas to make learning even more exciting. There is scope for closer links between the Reception and Nursery classes to promote a more consistently challenging and stimulating curriculum. Children thoroughly enjoy learning and are becoming increasingly confident and independent. They achieve well and most are on course to reach most of the early learning goals but, because starting points are below average for many, standards by the end of Reception are below average.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make better use of computers to support pupils' learning.
- Make sure that pupils have a clear understanding of what they need to do to reach the next stages in their learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils start with standards that are below average and by the time they leave at the end of Year 4, standards are above average. This represents good achievement. Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage but by Year 1, standards are still below average, especially in communication, language and literacy. Pupils make good progress in Years 1 and 2 and by Year 2, standards are above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Good progress continues in Years 3 and 4 and standards, by the time pupils leave the school at the end of Year 4, are above average in reading and mathematics and well above in writing. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported and make good progress, often from very low starting points.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are developing as confident learners with high self esteem. They really enjoy school life and attendance is good. Pupils have a clear understanding of how to live healthy lifestyles. They feel safe in school because they are well cared for. Older pupils act as good role models and 'buddies' for others. One parent typically commented that opportunities for younger pupils to interact with older ones greatly boosts confidence. Throughout the school, pupils are friendly and well-mannered, with most behaving well in lessons and at break times. They reveal a good understanding of the values of the school, demonstrated by their full involvement in the 'good deeds' fundraising activity for 'Children in Need'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress because teaching and learning are effective. Teachers and teaching assistants work well together, with teaching assistants providing good support in most lessons. Throughout the school, work is well matched to pupils' needs, so that the more able pupils are

appropriately challenged and those with learning difficulties are effectively supported. Pupils are encouraged to evaluate their own work and they often decide, with their teachers, whether or not they are ready to move on. The assessment of pupils' work and progress is generally good but marking does not always tell pupils what they need to do to improve. Also, the school has yet to develop a consistent approach to target-setting for individual pupils. Relationships are good, behaviour is managed successfully and pupils are keen to do their best.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum provides a well rounded education with a wide range of learning opportunities that interest pupils and make learning exciting. Lively activities within the curriculum, such as orienteering and a Roman feast, combined with an impressive range of extra-curricular opportunities, ensure that children are highly motivated. Music, art and sport are well represented. Many pupils learn to play instruments. Leaders encourage staff to make clear links between subjects so that pupils understand that their learning is connected. Interactive whiteboards are used effectively to improve standards but many computers are outdated and are used too infrequently to support learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils' care, guidance and support are good. Staff are very caring and pupils' safety is always a top priority. The school's procedures for ensuring the safety and well being of pupils are good. Child protection procedures are clearly understood and consistently implemented by all staff. Pupils receive good guidance about safety and how to lead healthy lifestyles. Pastoral guidance is good but there are shortcomings in academic guidance because pupils are not always sure about what they need to do to reach the next stages in their learning. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive the help that they need and so make good progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher, ably supported by his deputy and senior management team, has a clear vision for the school that is focused on improving the achievement of all pupils. The sense of togetherness is striking. Although only in post since the beginning of this term, the headteacher has already communicated a clear direction for raising standards, enhancing pupils' enjoyment of the curriculum and providing a high level of pastoral care. The provision for more vulnerable pupils, including those with learning and emotional difficulties, is well led. These pupils are successfully involved in school life and learn effectively.

The school has developed good practices to successfully maintain strong links with parents. The popular 'drop in' facility in the nurture unit helps to foster such links. The good progress pupils made during the last academic year, combined with the strength and skills of the leadership team, indicate that the school has a strong basis for further improvement. The headteacher has made a good start to improving teaching and learning by developing the skills of all teachers through robust performance management procedures. Finances have been challenging to manage, due to low pupil numbers in some year groups, but the headteacher

has identified key spending priorities to promote school improvement. Governors are becoming increasingly effective. They meet their responsibilities well and are developing their roles as critical friends in shaping the strategic direction of the school. They share with the school leaders a commitment to further raising standards and enriching the learning of all pupils.

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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	2
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

19 November 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Robert Peel Lower School, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 1QJ

We really enjoyed our visit to your school. Thank you for being so friendly and helpful.

We think that there are many good things about the school. You are polite and well behaved. You are keen to learn and eager to please. You make good progress and reach standards that are above average. The quality of your writing is particularly impressive. You take part in a great many interesting activities and the Roman feast in Year 4 was great. There are so many brilliant recorder players in Year 2 and they played very well in assembly. You told us that you are happy in school and said that one of the best things about the school was how kind the teachers are. We agree. They certainly work hard and, with the support of the teaching assistants, help you to learn. You also said that you particularly enjoy making friends. The school is certainly a friendly place and you all work and play happily together. You told us that you feel very comfortable and secure in school and that you get good advice about health and safety. You know how to look after yourselves and understand the need for vigorous exercise and a balanced diet. You talk sensibly about your work. We were particularly pleased to see how confident most of you are.

There are two things that we have asked Mr Saunders and the teachers to do to help you even more. We think that you should use computers more frequently to develop your ICT skills and support your learning. We also think that you should have a much clearer understanding of exactly what you need to do to reach the next stages of your learning. If you know what the next steps are, it might help you to make even better progress.

We wish you every success in the future.

John Messer

Lead inspector