

The Meads Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109558
Local Authority	Luton
Inspection number	310023
Inspection dates	10–11 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Joy Richardson

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	320
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	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Cindy Williams
Headteacher	Mrs Carmel Clarke
Date of previous school inspection	27 September 2004
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Sawtry Close Luton Bedfordshire LU3 2UE
Telephone number	01582490905
Fax number	01582591343

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school serves the northern side of Luton, and also areas of central Luton from which pupils travel to school by bus. The school is growing and a major building programme is about to commence. Children start in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), in three Reception classes, in the year of their fifth birthday. On entry, children's skills are broadly in line with expectations for this age, though some have less well developed language and emotional skills. Just over half the pupils are White British and almost half come from a diversity of other ethnic backgrounds. Nine pupils are at an early stage in learning English. The percentage of pupils identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is around the national average. More pupils join or leave the school during the year than in most schools because of mobility in the local population. The school has gained a 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: 3

The school provides a satisfactory education. The school considers its effectiveness to be good. Inspection judgements confirm that the school has a number of strengths, but these are not consistent throughout and initiatives to bring about improvement are not yet fully embedded.

Pupils make satisfactory progress through the school as a whole, and those who are learning English as an additional language do as well as other pupils. Children make good progress in Reception from their starting point on entry. Achievement is satisfactory in Years 1 and 2. However, although most pupils reach the standard expected nationally at the end of Year 2, few achieve beyond this. Progress is slow in Years 3 and 4 but picks up in Years 5 and 6 so that by the time they leave, pupils reach standards close to the national average. The school recognises that expectations are not consistently high in all years, or for all pupils including the most able. It is starting to track more closely the progress made by pupils each half term, to show up where action is needed. Pupils make slower progress in writing than in reading, and the school is beginning to take action to remedy this.

Pupils enjoy school and all that it offers and their personal development is satisfactory. Pupils come from many different backgrounds and share a lively interest in other places, faiths and customs. They have some opportunities to take responsibility, for example as members of the school council, or as prefects in Year 6. Pupils are eagerly contributing to planning for the new building. Behaviour is satisfactory. Pupils usually behave well in lessons, but behaviour is sometimes boisterous around the school and in the playground and this is a concern for some pupils. Attendance is satisfactory because of steps taken by the school to ensure that pupils attend regularly and on time. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep healthy.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teaching is well planned and thorough, though it does not always fully challenge pupils' thinking or encourage them to go further. Teachers manage classes well and hold pupils' attention. Pupils gain confidence in speaking because they are encouraged to share their ideas, for example with a 'talk partner'. Teaching assistants work well with class teachers, providing valuable support for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, or who are learning English as an additional language.

The school offers a satisfactory curriculum and widens pupils' experience through many extra activities, including clubs, theatre visits and residential trips. Pupils enjoy learning French. The school cares well for pupils whatever their individual needs. It welcomes newcomers and helps them to settle in. Family workers support pupils' welfare and make valuable links between home and school. The school sets some targets to guide the work of pupils, but these are not always effective in speeding the pace of progress.

The quality of leadership and management, and the school's capacity to improve, are satisfactory. The headteacher sustains the school's ethos of care for each individual, recognising the barriers to learning that many face. She is well supported by a new leadership team that is working with commitment and determination to raise standards. Systems for regularly checking pupils' progress are taking root and beginning to have an impact. However, the quality of teaching and learning is not evaluated rigorously enough to guide improvement through the school as a whole.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make a good start to their learning in Reception because of good teaching and well-planned activities that help children to develop as learners. On entry to Reception, their skills are broadly similar to those expected at this age, though some children are at an early stage in their emotional development and language skills. Children achieve well in relation to their starting points. By the end of the EYFS, most are well on their way towards the early learning goals set nationally for this age. Children's skills in speaking and listening are carefully encouraged and developed and this helps all children, including those who are learning English as an additional language. Good foundations are laid in reading by helping children to understand how the sounds of letters make up words. Progress in writing is slower because there is too little regular practice. Children's personal skills develop well. Clear routines are established that help children to settle and feel secure. They quickly learn to share and co-operate with each other. Children become absorbed in interesting activities and gain confidence as they practise their skills. However, the outdoor area is not used to full advantage to extend learning. Leadership and management of the unit is good and the staff work as a united team. Good systems for observing and assessing children's learning give a clear view of their progress. Parents are welcomed and information is shared about their children's development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards further in writing throughout the school.
- Develop consistent expectations of what pupils, including the most able, are capable of achieving.
- Extend oversight and evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in order to guide improvement through the school as a whole.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next Section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory and they reach standards that are close to the national average by the time they leave. Progress is satisfactory in Years 1 and 2, leading to standards that are broadly average at the end of this key stage in reading, writing and mathematics. Although most pupils reach the level generally expected at the age of seven, few achieve beyond this. This is because too little account is taken of what children can already do in order to set sights high for them. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 make slow progress, and the school has pinpointed this weakness through its new system for tracking how well pupils are doing. Progress accelerates in Years 5 and 6 because of determined efforts to help pupils catch up. As a result, pupils reach standards by the time they leave that are close to the national average in English, mathematics and science. However, standards in writing lag behind those in reading, and this is recognised as an area for development through the school as a whole. The school sets challenging targets for each year group and is becoming increasingly successful in meeting them. It is not yet ensuring that progress by all pupils, including the most able, is as good as it could be.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Most pupils have positive attitudes to learning and are enthusiastic about their school. They are friendly and show concern for others, for example in their charity fundraising activities. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory and has some strengths. For example, pupils are proud of the increasing range of cultures in their school community and enjoy finding out about other ways of life. Pupils have a clear perception of how to stay safe and a good understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Behaviour is generally good in the classroom, although this does not always carry through consistently to the dining hall and the playground. Incidents of aggressive or poor behaviour concern some pupils, but most feel that these are dealt with quickly and fairly, and older pupils speak of how difficulties are amicably resolved. Pupils, especially in Year 6, accept a range of responsibilities with dignity and efficiency, although there are few opportunities for older pupils to care for younger ones. Pupils gain satisfactory skills to prepare them for the next stage of their education and for later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory with some good features. Most lessons proceed at an appropriate pace. Pupils are generally attentive and settle well when working alone or in small groups. Teachers effectively foster pupils' skills in speaking. As a result, most enjoy discussions, respond well to questions and readily share their ideas. Good relationships create a positive climate for learning. The aim of each lesson is clearly explained, and work is carefully tailored so that pupils achieve it. However, less attention is given to stimulating thinking and encouraging pupils to go as far as they can. Marking is helpful in highlighting whether objectives have been met. It does not always challenge pupils to think more widely or to apply what they have learned previously. Tasks are adapted for pupils of different ability, though not greatly extended for the most able, except at times in the older years. Teaching assistants carefully support and encourage those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, helping them to keep up. Pupils complete interesting work in their 'learning logs', which link their learning at home and at school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is broad and balanced and enables pupils to make satisfactory progress. A new initiative is being implemented to support reading through the extended teaching of phonics. A focus on talk to improve the use of language in writing is beginning to have a positive effect. The school is starting to develop links between subjects to make lessons more interesting and to set skills in context. During the inspection, pupils in Years 5 and 6 experienced a day as Victorians, which greatly enlarged their knowledge in many areas. Skills in information and communication technology are not applied widely across the curriculum. Teachers and teaching assistants take care to ensure that all pupils have access to the whole curriculum, whatever their individual needs. Those who are learning English as an additional language are given help so that they quickly gain fluency. Pupils who are gifted and talented are not routinely identified and supported in building on their skills. The curriculum is greatly enriched by extra activities.

Visitors, visits out of school and links with the community widen pupils' horizons. Pupils enjoy a range of clubs, such as knitting and board games at lunchtime, and participate in a variety of sports.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Because relationships between staff and pupils are good, pupils feel confident to share their problems and to seek help. The school places a major emphasis on developing links with families in order to promote pupils' welfare. Parents and carers appreciate the guidance provided about helping their children to learn and develop. Safeguarding procedures are secure. The school works hard to monitor and promote good attendance. Although many pupils have to travel some distance to school, the staff maintain a clear expectation of punctuality. The school works well with a range of agencies to extend the care of pupils. The guidance of pupils' learning and progress is satisfactory. Systems are being put in place for more frequent checking and discussion of how well pupils' are doing. Staff are gaining skills in setting targets to help plot the next steps in pupils' learning and to raise expectations. However, guidance for pupils is not finely tuned to ensure that all, including those who find learning easy, are fully challenged to make the best progress they can.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher is well supported by a new leadership team, including the deputy headteacher and a teaching and learning manager for each part of the school. This team is working hard to lead the school forward and to implement plans for improvement, and this provides the school with satisfactory capacity to improve. The school has improved since the last inspection, particularly in its support for pupils who need extra help, and in its links with parents. With a new leadership team in place, the pace of improvement shows signs of speeding up. The focus on raising achievement is becoming sharper because more regular tracking of pupils' progress is helping to highlight where shortcomings lie. The school's self-evaluation helps this process, but it is not rigorous enough in identifying what could be better and how to make it so, and involving all stakeholders in this. Governors are supportive and gaining skills in guiding and challenging the school in pursuing improvement. The school is inclusive and has effective systems to help pupils who may be vulnerable, though concern for the well-being of each individual is not consistently linked to securing progress in learning. The school works well with partners beyond the school, for example in promoting good attendance. It makes appropriate arrangements for safeguarding pupils and ensuring their safety. The school adds much to the welfare of the community it serves. It is developing a good, harmonious awareness of the diverse languages, faiths and cultures represented in the school, however it has yet to formulate a policy for contributing to wider national and global understanding. Most parents are supportive of the school and generally satisfied with the education it provides.

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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?	3
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	3

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

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

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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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**

12 December 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of The Meads Primary School, Luton, LU3 2UE

Thank you for welcoming us when we visited you. We enjoyed seeing all the things you do at school. We had meetings with some of you and were impressed by the way you explained how the school works and what you think about it. You want to help make your school as good as it can be, and we were interested to hear how you are helping to plan for the new building.

Those of you in the older classes were taking part in a Victorian Day when we came. We could see that you were fascinated by what you were learning. Many of you decided that school is better than in Victorian times, and that your teachers are much kinder. We are glad that you appreciate them.

We think that you work hard, concentrate and behave well in lessons, and this is helping you to learn and make satisfactory progress. The school cares for you well and the staff give you extra help if you find learning difficult. The youngest children settle in well and soon begin learning to read.

Mrs Clarke and all the staff want you to do as well as possible and we have been talking about ways of helping you to do this. The staff will be working out how much progress you should be expected to make each year and checking that you achieve this. We agree that you could do better in writing. We also think that some of you who find learning easy could make faster progress. We want the school to look at how well you learn in each class so that good ideas are shared right through the school. You can do your part by thinking hard about how you could improve your work.

We hope you go on enjoying school and all the special things you do there, and trying your very best.

Yours sincerely

Joy Richardson

Lead inspector