

Carlton VC Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109610
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	310037
Inspection date	6 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Martin Newell

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	76
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Wendy Stark
Headteacher	Mrs Sue Burt
Date of previous school inspection	22 November 2004
School address	The Moor Carlton Bedford Bedfordshire MK43 7LP
Telephone number	01234720281
Fax number	01234 720281

Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspection evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: provision in the Foundation Stage, the development of early writing skills, the effectiveness of assessment and target setting, the impact of leadership and management on standards and achievement and the capacity for further improvement. Evidence was gathered from lesson observations, sampling of pupils' work, assessment and target setting information, evidence of impact of different initiatives to raise standards and discussions with pupils, key members of staff and governors. 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 detailed in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Carlton Lower School is a smaller than average sized school. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is lower than the national average. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than the picture nationally although the number of pupils with a statement of special educational need is below the national average. Most of the pupils are from White British backgrounds and, of the small number of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds, none is at an early stage of acquiring English. The school was awarded Basic Skills Quality Mark in 2006, has gained Investors in People recognition, National Healthy Schools Award and Activemark in 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Carlton is a good school with some outstanding features. Parents think highly of the school and many wrote very positive comments about the quality of education the school provides and their feeling is best summed up by one parent who wrote, 'This is a special little school.' The many qualities in teaching, learning, the curriculum and in leadership and management combine together to form a winning combination, enabling pupils to leave the school as well rounded individuals who are well prepared to face future challenges in their lives. Over the past 12 months, the school has had a change in headship and some new members of staff. In a small school, this represents significant change. However, a very strong sense of team spirit and a shared and determined commitment to take the school on to the next level are evident. Under the good leadership of the current headteacher, the school is in a good position to make this vision become a reality. The headteacher has a very good grasp of the school's strengths and is leading the drive to tackle identified weaknesses with rigour and effectiveness to bring about improvements in standards and provision. This suggests that the school is well placed for sustained development.

Attainment on entry is a little below average overall with pupils' communication skills often being the weakest aspect. By the time that pupils leave the school, standards are above average. This represents good progress and achievement. Progress is particularly good for the older pupils in the school. Teaching for these pupils is often outstanding. It is challenging, vibrant, exciting and lessons are packed with pace and fun. Much emphasis is placed on pupils learning through investigations and practical 'hands on' experiences that keep them focused and engaged throughout the lesson. Elsewhere in the school, teaching is good because learning is often focused well to meet the differing needs of the pupils, relationships are good and teaching assistants contribute well to helping pupils make good progress. Occasionally, teaching lacks pace or work is not challenging enough for the most able pupils. Improving writing skills for the younger pupils is an identified area of improvement for the school. This is an accurate assessment because over recent years there has not been enough emphasis on developing emergent and other early writing skills or for young pupils to participate in role play or structured play activities. The school is already tackling this issue well but it is work in progress. There are good systems in place for assessing and tracking pupils' progress. The information is used well to guide and inform teaching. Pupils' progress is tracked on a regular basis and additional support targeted if pupils are not on track to meet their challenging targets. Teachers are held accountable for the progress that pupils make. This whole process is helped by the quality of the marking of pupils' work, because it is not only regular, but also informative. Teachers give clear pointers for improvement. This is further helped by pupils who are keen to improve their work and are more than ready to take on board the excellent guidance that they receive.

There are a number of other factors that contribute to the success of the school. A notable one is the pupils themselves. Pupils are keen and motivated learners who show a desire to do well. They talk enthusiastically about all that the school offers and particularly enjoy investigative work and finding things out for themselves. The vast majority of pupils are well behaved and only occasionally does behaviour slip below this good standard. Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in the above average rates of attendance. Pupils are reflective and caring individuals who show a good awareness of how their actions can affect others. They have a good understanding of Britain as a culturally diverse society and their knowledge of what is needed to lead fit and healthy lives. Their understanding of how to manage risks in their lives is excellent.

Pupils are more than willing to take on responsibility and to contribute to the school and wider community and, when opportunities are presented, they are ready to rise to the challenge. The school has accurately identified the need for pupils to be given even more responsibilities in contributing to the school as a community.

Pupils' enjoyment of school is further fuelled by the rich and varied curriculum that is on offer. A strong emphasis is given to the development of key skills in literacy and numeracy but this is not at the expense of other curriculum areas. Good opportunities are provided to develop computer skills across different subjects. Humanities and science knowledge are often reinforced within literacy lessons where appropriate. The strong emphasis that is given to physical education underlines for pupils the importance of exercise in pursuit of healthy living. The more creative aspect of the curriculum is not neglected, with pupils given the chance to play a musical instrument. The vibrant displays of art work around the school are testimony to the school's commitment to developing pupils' artistic skills. Add to this the wide array of visits, visitors, themed history and technology days and after-school clubs that include dance, karate, gymnastics and basketball and it is easy to see why pupils enjoy attending Carlton School. The development of early writing skills is not yet a strong enough feature of the curriculum. The good provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities enables these pupils to make similar progress to their classmates.

Another contributing factor to pupils' good progress and achievement is the excellent care guidance and support. Pupils feel very safe and secure in school and they are keen to point out how they are valued and respected. Pupils also state that they have a genuine voice in the life of the school and have played an influential role in helping to improve aspects of the school's accommodation and resources. The very good links that are in place with outside support agencies, alongside the school's internal support mechanisms, mean that help can be called on quickly for any pupils experiencing learning, social or emotional needs. Procedures for safeguarding pupils and child protection are well known and all staff assiduously follow them. An impressive strength is the level of academic guidance. Pupils have individual targets very well matched to their needs and abilities and these are 'signed off' when achieved and new ones assigned. Particularly impressive is pupils' knowledge of their targets and the National Curriculum levels they are working at. They also show an excellent awareness of what they need to achieve at the next higher level. There is little doubt that this high level of care, guidance and support adds significantly to the social and academic nurturing of all pupils.

Carlton is a successful school because everybody plays their part in moving the school forward. The headteacher leads and manages the school well and she is in the forefront of the school's drive for excellence. She has played a pivotal role in the continued improvement of the school and the school's self-evaluation is both accurate and effective. Good systems are in place for analysing test and assessment data. The newly established staffing structure is working well but the roles different staff members play in monitoring teaching and achievement are still evolving and not yet embedded in school practice. Governance of the school is good because governors are very supportive yet challenging. They have rightly identified the need to adopt a more formal and cutting edge approach to how they evaluate the school's work.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The Foundation Stage provision is much improved since the time of the last inspection and is now good. The planned activities now carefully reflect the recommended six areas of learning. A good balance is struck between adult led and child-led activities and pupils are actively

encouraged to become independent learners. Teaching is good and adults work together well to provide a range of purposeful learning activities. Good use is made of the outdoor accommodation. The provision is now more focused on the development of emergent writing skills. Pupils have opportunities to participate in role-play and structured play activities that have specific learning intentions. However, these activities are not yet at the heart of teaching and planning to have the best possible impact in how well pupils' early writing skills are developed. Good procedures are in place for assessing and tracking pupils' progress and the information is used well to modify future learning. Good induction procedures enable pupils to settle quickly into school routines.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve writing standards for younger pupils by embedding the development of emerging writing skills, role play and structured play activities.
- Further establish the newly formed staffing structure and the roles different staff members play in monitoring standards and achievement.

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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	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
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?	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

7 March 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Carlton VC Lower School, The Moor, Carlton, Bedfordshire MK43 7LP.

You will probably remember that I visited your school not too long ago and I am now writing to let you know what I found out. Before I do, I would first like to say thank you for making me feel so welcome. I have told your teachers how you were all so helpful and polite. Through my discussions with you it was great to hear how much you love coming to school and how much fun you find it. It was also good to hear about how safe you feel in school, that bullying is not an issue and that there is always someone to talk to if you are worried.

I found so many good things about Carlton School that I have to say it is a good school with some outstanding aspects. Teachers and other staff make teaching and learning challenging and fun and help you to achieve well. The curriculum, the clubs, the visits and visitors are all good. The way in which the school helps you to keep safe and healthy and how it cares and supports you are all excellent. Mrs Burt is a good headteacher and together with all the staff and governors, makes the school a good place to learn. There is another strength of the school that I have not mentioned yet. That is you, the children. What good ambassadors for the school you are! I was impressed with your behaviour, your enthusiasm and particularly how you know so much about keeping healthy and safe. Well done!

Even good schools like yours can improve. I have asked your teachers to help further improve the writing skills of the younger children and for all teachers to play a part in checking on how teaching helps you make good progress. Mrs Burt, the staff and governors want the school to continue to be as successful and I know you will play your part by continuing to behave well and work hard. I wish you every success in your future. It was a pleasure and privilege to meet you.

Martin Newell

Additional inspector