

Milton Ernest VC Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109613
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	310039
Inspection date	13 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Roger Brown

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4-9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	67
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Vivien Holt
Headteacher	Mrs Mary Harris
Date of previous school inspection	24 January 2005
School address	Thurleigh Road Milton Ernest Bedford Bedfordshire MK44 1RF
Telephone number	01234 822079
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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: the achievement and standards of children particularly in Key Stage 2, whether teachers challenge those of all abilities and if the monitoring and evaluation of the work of the school is rigorous enough to identify areas for further improvement. Evidence was gathered from discussions with staff, the chair of governors and children, brief lesson observations, a scrutiny of documentation and samples of children's work. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in as much detail, but the inspection 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

Milton Ernest Lower School is a below average sized school serving the village of Milton Ernest and the surrounding area. Almost all of the children are White British, with a very small number from minority ethnic backgrounds. There are no children entitled to free school meals. The proportion of children who need additional support is above that found nationally. A number of these children have a statement of special educational need. The average level of development for children starting at the school is usually above national expectations in most respects.

The school has an Active 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. It is a happy school where the children get on well together, really enjoy their education and are involved in their learning. Parents are full of praise for the school, 'My children could not have had a better start to their school career!' being typical of the comments they submitted for the inspection. The school accommodation, although thoughtfully adapted to maximise the restricted physical space of the Victorian building provides insufficient facilities for the education of the children. However, the school makes good use of the village hall, the Church and the village green to extend its work. In return, the children take a full part in the community and support events throughout the year.

The standards attained by the children in all areas and subjects are consistently above the national average at all stages of their development. By the time they leave at the end of Year 4, most children are attaining standards that are well above the national average. There is no pattern in the school's results that shows a weakness in any aspect of the children's learning, but the consistently high standards of writing demonstrate that this area is a significant strength of the school. Some of the children in the current Year 4 are already producing writing of a standard that is more than two years ahead of that expected for their age. Although the average level of attainment on entry to school is slightly above national expectations, the range of individual attainment is very wide. A small number of children need a lot of extra support. Teachers and teaching assistants cater for this wide range of needs very well and the teaching and learning are good. All children, whatever their starting points, make good progress, and consequently their achievements are good. Teachers make sure that all children are fully integrated into all aspects of the work they cover. However, the teachers recognise that some children who have exceptional gifts and talents could be given more opportunities to shine and excel.

The children's personal development and well-being is outstanding. All children are encouraged to become active members of the school community. 'I am very impressed with the open-minded and proactive approach that the school takes,' wrote one parent. The older children relish the opportunities they have to take responsibility and to help to take care of the younger children. They have a genuine say in what happens at the school through a number of committees such as the school council. The staff take every opportunity to ensure that children experience a good quality, broad and balanced curriculum. There are many visitors to the school, and many opportunities for the children to go to places of interest and take part in a range of activities outside school. These factors all help to contribute to the excellence of the children's spiritual, moral and social development. However, staff are not complacent about their success. They recognise that the rural location of the school makes it hard to provide a broad and worthwhile range of cultural experiences, acknowledging that the children's cultural development is good rather than outstanding.

The level of attendance at the school is high and carefully monitored. The children are keen to explain that the teachers make learning fun and enjoyable. This results in their excellent behaviour in class. The school has capitalised on the staff's expertise to give the children a wide-ranging and excellent understanding of what they need to do to stay healthy; this is despite the lack of facilities for physical education (PE). The children also have an excellent understanding of how they should stay safe. Discussions with Year 4 children highlighted their frustration and awareness of the difficulties and dangers for all children having to cross the road several times each day to go to lunch and take part in PE. Nevertheless, they are very

responsible and sensitive not just about their own safety, but also that of other children and adults. Children are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

The care, guidance and support provided for the children are good. All statutory requirements are met. The children are very positive about the academic guidance they receive. They understand not only when they have been successful, but also get good guidance about the next steps they should take to improve their work.

The leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher has recently taken responsibility for a second school, but neither children nor staff feel that this has diminished her effectiveness. Staff firmly believe that the move has enabled the head to take a more strategic role and that the spread of responsibilities has encouraged even stronger leadership from the rest of the team. The school has progressed well since it was last inspected; the governors are now much more effective. They, along with the leadership have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. This gives the school a good capacity to continue to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The good quality of the teaching by all the staff in the Foundation Stage gives children an effective start to the early years of their schooling. As a result, most children exceed the expected levels by the time they move into Year 1. Thoughtful curriculum planning ensures that there is a careful match of the tasks and activities to children's needs. The process is backed up by accurate assessments and careful observations by all the adults. This allows staff to track the children's progress and target interventions. There is strong support from parents, who appreciate the school's flexible and helpful approach to the way children can start school. These elements are clearly helping the children to settle quickly and enjoy all aspects of school. However, the physical space in which the children are taught is inadequate. The Reception classroom is formed from the ground floor of the old school house. A lot of effort has gone into improving the area, and the outside play space. However, it is still insufficient to allow the children enough freedom to make their own choices, or freely move between activities. This limits their independence and restricts the creativity of the staff, in turn restricting the children's development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Review the provision for gifted, able and talented children to find more opportunities to allow them to excel in their areas of accomplishment.
- Work with external agencies to seek ways to extend and improve the accommodation for the Foundation Stage in order to give the children more scope to become independent learners.

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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?	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	2
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	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

14 March 2008

Dear Children,

Inspection of Milton Ernest VC Lower School, Bedford MK44 1RF

Thank you for being so friendly when I visited your school. I would like to share with you what I found when I spent time in your lessons and talked with you and your teachers.

I think you go to a good school. Many of your parents wrote to me saying that they think so too. Like them, I could tell that your school continues to get better. I could also see that in some areas the school helps your development to be outstanding, for instance, the excellent ways in which you work together, look after each other and have such an enthusiasm for learning is wonderful.

I could tell from my talks with Year 4, and your teachers, that yours is a very happy school. It is also a very safe school, where you know about being active and healthy despite the difficulty of having no school hall or field. I could see for myself, and therefore really appreciate Year 4's concern about the safety outside the school. Obviously, you all have to cross the road daily to eat your lunch, or take part in physical education, but I believe that Year 4 are correct to think that even more needs to be done to make this even safer for you and the adults that look after you.

When I was discussing your achievements with your teachers, I asked them to try and look at the ways they help those of you with particular gifts, abilities or talents to excel. I know that what they do is already good, but I think that they could make it outstanding.

Finally, I must mention the Foundation Stage. Once again, I know from Year 4, that the accommodation is much better than when they started, but I would still like Mrs Harris and the governors to work with other experts to find ways to make it even better. I think that this would help the children in the Foundation Stage become even more independent and therefore help them to make even more progress than they do already.

Thank you once again for your warm welcome.

All the best for the future.

Roger Brown Lead inspector