

John Donne CofE Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109615
Local Authority	Bedfordshire
Inspection number	310040
Inspection date	25 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Mike Best

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	First
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	87
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	32
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter Holden
Headteacher	Miss Gill O'Hare
Date of previous school inspection	20 September 2004
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	High Street Blunham Bedford Bedfordshire MK44 3NL
Telephone number	01767 640346
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Age group	3–9
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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 following issues:

- Achievement and standards in Years 1 and 2.
- The pupils' attitudes and behaviour.
- The contribution of subject leaders to the monitoring and evaluation of the work of the school.

Evidence was gathered from observing lessons, talking with staff, governors, pupils and a representative of the local authority; analysing assessment records, parental responses to the inspection questionnaires and other school documentation. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail.

Description of the school

The school is smaller than most primary schools. It caters for children aged three to nine years in the village of Blunham and surrounding area. Children start in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) at the beginning of the term following their third birthday on a part-time basis. They become full time in the term following their fourth birthday. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils identified as having learning difficulties is broadly average. A recent drop in the number of pupils on roll has led to the reorganisation of classes and a reduction in staffing. The headteacher is due to leave the school at the end of this term.

The governing body runs an after-school club and this is attended by children under five as well as older ones.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness of the school is satisfactory, which is lower than the school's own evaluation. This reflects inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and pupils' progress as they move through the school which are reducing the impact of much of the school's otherwise good practice. The school's leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher and governing body know what is needed to improve the school but have not yet resolved specific concerns about the inconsistent quality of teaching and pupils' progress. The school's capacity for improvement is satisfactory and it provides satisfactory value for money.

Achievement is satisfactory overall. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics are broadly average at the end of Year 2 and have been since the last inspection. However they do not make enough progress from the end of the EYFS to the end of Year 2. This is because teaching at Key Stage 1 is not sufficiently challenging to meet pupils' needs or maintain their interest.

At the end of Year 4, standards are broadly in line with expectations in writing, above expectations in reading, and well above expectations in mathematics. These pupils make good progress in writing and very good progress in mathematics from the end of Year 2. The effective use of information about what pupils know and can do is at the heart of their good progress at Key Stage 2. They have a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve. As a result, last year's targets were exceeded, particularly at the higher levels. Writing, which has been a focus for improvement since the last inspection, remains one of the school's priorities. Although most pupils develop a good understanding of basic writing skills such as sentence structure, punctuation and presentation, they do not write at sufficient length or in depth either in English or in other subjects.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. There is much good teaching in the school, particularly at EYFS and Key Stage 2, which successfully promotes pupils' effective learning. These lessons are well organised with introductions that quickly engage and involve pupils, and work is suitably planned and tailored to pupils' differing needs. In these lessons, expectations are high, pupils know what they have to do and they quickly settle down to work. However, such practice is not consistent in Key Stage 1 where pupils are not always sufficiently challenged or fully engaged in their work. This is because lessons are neither consistently well organised nor managed. Although the range of out-of-school activities is good, the school's curriculum is no better than satisfactory overall. Throughout the school, teaching assistants provide a good level of personal support for pupils, showing initiative and managing pupils well.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good, reflecting the school's good provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They enjoy coming to school and get on well with each other and with adults. Pupils' behaviour is good overall. In most lessons and around the school it is often exemplary, but this high standard slips in lessons where pupils are not sufficiently challenged by the teaching. Pupils have a good understanding of keeping healthy. They are familiar with the importance of a balanced diet and enjoy participating in the wide range of physical activities the school provides both in lessons and after school through its partnership links with other schools. Pupils have a good understanding of keeping safe. Through their links with Spain, supporting a child in Ethiopia and their involvement in the local community, they develop a good understanding of their own and other cultures and how they can most effectively contribute to them. This reflects the school's good contribution to community cohesion. Pupils in Year 4 benefit from good links with the middle school which,

together with their good skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, effectively smooth their transition to the next stage of their education. Attendance, which is similar to the national average, is adversely affected by parents taking their children on holiday during term time.

The quality of the school's care, guidance and support for its pupils is satisfactory. Staff provide good pastoral care and support for pupils who say they have no hesitation in turning to an adult for help, when necessary. Pupils attending the after-school club are well cared for and enjoy themselves. Pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties are well supported in the school. Staff undertake regular risk assessments and the school maintains appropriate records of accidents, first aid and other incidents. It regularly reviews its comprehensive range of policies. Arrangements for child protection and safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirements. Academic guidance is less consistent. Where pupils are not sufficiently aware of what they need to do next to improve their work or where they are set unchallenging work, their progress slows.

Most parents are pleased with what the school provides for their children and enthusiastically support fund raising, as seen in the school's new library. However, the school's self-evaluation report is over generous, although it identifies suitable priorities for development and says how they will be addressed through a detailed three-year development plan. The headteacher undertakes most of the monitoring and evaluation of the school's work, with a relatively limited involvement of the subject leaders, teaching and non-teaching staff. The school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection. The headteacher has introduced good systems for tracking and checking pupils' progress, and is using this information to set challenging but achievable targets at Key Stage 2. However, the targets set for pupils at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2008 were not met.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The school meets the needs of children in the EYFS well. When they start in the Nursery, children's skills and experiences are broadly similar to those expected for their age. Children make good progress from their starting points. They quickly settle into daily routines, making friends and working well with each other. Staff know the children well and provide a good range of activities that encompass all the areas of learning. They achieve a good balance between child-chosen and adult-led learning experiences both in the classroom and in the outside area. A particular strength is the way in which staff use questions and initiate discussions to help children develop and improve their speaking and listening skills. As a result, children are confident in telling each other, and visiting adults, what they are doing and what they plan to do when, for example, using construction kits to make models with moving parts.

Staff plan together and maintain regular records of children's achievements and progress. The recent implementation of a programme for teaching sounds and early writing skills is helping to raise standards across the school. Staff pay good attention to children's welfare and safety, and keep parents and carers well informed about how their children are getting on. The leadership and day-to-day management of the setting are good and staff benefit from regular training courses and advice.

Attendance at the after-school club is flexible and tailored to parents' and carers' commitments. The provision is well planned, with a wide range of activities that effectively meet children's needs and provide them with a good balance of activities and opportunities to be quiet, as well

as to have a healthy snack. The provision is well managed and all the required policies are in place.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement in Key Stage 1.
- Improve the quality of pupils' extended writing both in English and in other subjects.
- Increase the involvement of all staff in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school.

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.

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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?	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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
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 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**

26 September 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of John Donne Lower School, Bedford MK44 3NL

Thank you very much for making me so welcome when I visited your school last week and for telling me so much about what you do in school. You have a good understanding of how to keep fit and healthy and take part in a wide range of sporting activities. You enjoy coming to school and have a good understanding of keeping safe. Your behaviour around the school and in many lessons is excellent. I was very interested to hear about the different things you do in the village and how you are supporting someone in Ethiopia. Those of you who attend the after-school club enjoy a good range of activities and are cared for well.

You get a good start to your time in school in Nursery and Reception and those of you in Years 3 and 4 also make good progress. By the time you leave to go to middle school, the standards of your reading and mathematics are higher than in other schools. You are achieving well in these year groups because teaching is good. However, not all of you make as much progress as you could because you are not always kept sufficiently busy. Some teaching is not always good enough to help you to do your best.

When I looked at your books, I was pleased to see that your writing is neat and that you develop a good understanding of how to write in sentences, with capital letters and full stops in the right places. You tell me you enjoy the work you are doing on sounds and writing and I can see that this helping you improve what you write. However, I think there is room for further improvement, especially in how much you write and ways in which you use different words to make it more interesting.

Miss O'Hare keeps an eye on how well everything is going in the school and makes plans to sort out those things that are not going just as well as they should. In all this, she is helped by the staff but I think it would be helpful if they could be more involved in helping her make these checks. You can help with all the things I have recommended the school should do before the next inspection: work hard and through your school council, share your ideas and help put plans into action.

Yours truly

Mike Best

Lead inspector