

Meppershall CofE VA Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109620
Local Authority	Bedfordshire
Inspection number	310042
Inspection date	12 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Godfrey Bancroft

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	117
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Margaret Evesham
Headteacher	Mrs Moira Coomes
Date of previous school inspection	7 March 2005
School address	107 High Street Meppershall Shefford Bedfordshire SG17 5LZ
Telephone number	01462 813293
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues.

- Why do standards in mathematics sometimes lag behind those in English?
- To what extent are the most able pupils challenged?
- How well informed are pupils about the progress they are making and what they need to do to improve their work?

Evidence was gathered from observations of lessons, sampling of pupils' work, the analysis of school documentation and discussions with pupils, 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 given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The school is popular and over-subscribed. It provides for pupils in the village and surrounding area. Whilst there are some year-on-year variations, children usually start school with standards that are broadly in line with those expected for their age. The percentage of pupils eligible for a free school meal is very low. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below average with none learning English as an additional language. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The school has been awarded Activemark.

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. Several aspects of its work are outstanding. The school evaluates its performance accurately and has robust plans for its continued improvement. Pupils benefit greatly from exceptional care, guidance and support. This enables them to become confident learners and to achieve well in a safe and secure learning environment. One parent strongly reflected the views of the majority in saying, 'The atmosphere, discipline and ethos are helping my children to enjoy learning and develop their social skills.' However, whilst the school communicates very well, some parents and carers would like more information about its activities and about their children's progress.

All, including those pupils who sometimes find learning difficult, make good progress. At the end of Year 2 standards in writing are well above average and those in reading and mathematics are above average. Standards, when pupils leave, currently exceed expectations in English, mathematics and science. In the past there were times when standards in mathematics, whilst remaining above average, fell slightly behind those in English. This is no longer the case. Pupils achieve well in a range of other subjects, including design and technology, history and information and communication technology (ICT). The combination of above average standards and pupils' good social skills means they are well prepared for the next stages of their education.

Personal development and well-being, including pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. Strong links with the church help the school make an excellent contribution to pupils' spiritual development. Pupils are eager to explain how much they enjoy school and this is further shown by attendance that is well above average. Behaviour is outstanding. Pupils are eager to do well and relationships between pupils and adults are outstanding. This helps to ensure that pupils are well-motivated and work hard in lessons. One pupil said, 'I like everything about the school. The children are kind and I will be sad to leave.' Pupils fully understand the importance of eating healthily and know how to keep safe. They also recognise the value of taking regular exercise. There are well-established links with the local school sports partnership, which provides good opportunities to do this.

Teaching and learning are good and some exceptional teaching was observed during the inspection. Teachers plan lessons well to meet the full range of abilities. Higher attaining pupils often make good progress. However, there are occasions when the work set for these pupils is not as hard as it needs to be and the pace of their learning slackens. Teachers undertake accurate assessments and keep pupils informed about how well they are doing. Pupils are very knowledgeable about their targets and about how to make their work even better. Teachers and teaching assistants are swift to respond if they identify any pupils who might be in danger of falling behind with their work. Strategies to develop pupils' speaking and listening are excellent, providing a very good basis for the ever-improving standards in reading and writing.

The curriculum and the range of additional activities provided are excellent. Teachers have established effective links between subjects that make pupils' learning meaningful. Exceptionally good use is made of ICT to enhance pupils' learning and to make lessons interesting. All pupils have French lessons and there is an additional French club. Other clubs, amongst many, include computers, gardening, street dance and a very wide range of sporting activities. Music also has a high profile and standards are high.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides a clear sense of direction, focussed on supporting staff to work effectively and on enabling every pupil to do their best.

The school goes out of its way to support every child equally. Through the school council, pupils are able to have their say and to influence developments. The roles of middle managers, such as subject leaders, have developed very well. Staff use their expertise effectively to support each other and keep up to date with current good practice. The devolution of responsibility to other members of staff is also proving a great success. For example, one member of the non-teaching staff fulfils the role of anti-bullying co-ordinator very effectively. These processes, which ensure that everyone is committed to the continued development of the school, together with the high standards evident in the Foundation Stage and in Year 1, demonstrate an excellent capacity for improvement in the future. Governors do an excellent job. They are supportive and very knowledgeable about the work of the school. They play a full part in planning for and evaluating improvements and manage the available resources very skilfully. Typical of this is the investment in the well-maintained accommodation and in the development of the Foundation Stage, contributing to the excellent overall improvement since the last inspection.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Provision for the Foundation Stage is excellent. Many children make exceptional progress from their various starting points. For example, rapid progress in their personal, social and emotional development and the exceptional development of children's speaking and listening skills lay the foundation for children to do very well in all areas of their learning. Behaviour is exceptional and children play and work together very well. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Teachers and non-teaching staff know the children's needs very well. They assess children's development accurately and respond quickly to meet the needs of any who are not making the expected progress. The curriculum is structured very effectively with an excellent balance between activities led by adults and ones in which children can develop as independent learners. The school has made massive strides in developing the provision for outdoor play, creating a seamless link between children's learning in the classroom and opportunities to learn out of doors.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the pace of learning and the work set for the most able pupils is always sufficiently challenging.

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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?	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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

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	1
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?	1
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	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

13 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Meppershall CoE VA Lower School, Shefford, Bedfordshire, SG17 5LZ

Thank you for telling me all about your school and for showing me your work when I visited recently. I think you are correct when you say your school is a good one. Many of your parents and carers also think the school is good, although some would like even more information about school events and about the work, you do.

I was delighted to see that you make good progress. This is because you work hard and have good teachers and teaching assistants who give you all the help you need. You certainly get a fantastic start in the reception class and have an excellent curriculum with lots of interesting and enjoyable after-school activities. I was particularly impressed by your gardening club and by the range of sports in which you take part. You clearly enjoy school and this is shown by the level of attendance, which is much higher than found in most schools. Well done!

I think your governors have done a superb job by improving the school buildings and they have plans to do even more work on these. Whilst all aspects of your school's work are either good or excellent, I know that Mrs Coomes, the staff and governors are always looking for ways of making things even better. With this in mind I have asked them to try to increase your rate of progress even more by ensuring that the pace of learning and the work set for those of you who sometimes find learning relatively easy is always sufficiently challenging.

I am sure that if you keep on working as hard as you do now that you will do well in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Godfrey V Bancroft

Lead inspector