

Ravensden CofE VA Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109623
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	310043
Inspection dates	17–18 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Susan Aldridge

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	
School	42
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Rainbow
Headteacher	Mr Paul Stanyard
Date of previous school inspection	6 February 2002
School address	Vicarage Close Ravensden Bedford Bedfordshire MK44 2RW
Telephone number	01234 771316
Fax number	01234 771316

Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a small school situated in a village outside Bedford. About a fifth of pupils come from the village, the rest are from further afield. They enter the school the term after their fourth birthday. Most have attended the private pre-school on the school site. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average, although it varies widely from year to year. A smaller than average percentage is eligible for free school meals. The school has close links with the local church and diocese, the pre-school and middle school. It provides care before and after school. In the past three years there has been a high turnover of teaching staff. This term, all three classes have new teachers, and two are newly qualified.

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, which is how it sees itself. It provides good value for money. There is a strong, caring Christian atmosphere. Constructive links with the wider community supplement well what the school provides in terms of support and learning experiences. Despite having had a high turnover of teaching staff since the last inspection, there has been good improvement because the headteacher and governors provide good leadership and management. Pupils flourish in the school; they thoroughly enjoy coming every day. Parents are supportive and very positive about the quality of education provided. They particularly appreciate the open door policy, the approachable, enthusiastic staff and 'visible' headteacher. One described it as 'a wonderful school with a warm nurturing environment'.

Whatever their starting points, pupils make good progress because teaching is good. There is a wide range of enjoyable learning experiences and pupils are well supported and cared for. Their good behaviour and attitudes help them to learn well too. From generally average starting points, pupils reach standards that are above average by Year 4. Their personal development is good. Pupils adopt healthy lifestyles at school. They know well how to keep safe, and look after one another. In school, they take their many responsibilities seriously and contribute well to life in the local community. By Year 4, pupils have a good standard of basic skills and they are well able to work in groups and teams. They make a smooth transition to middle school, as they are well prepared for this.

The headteacher leads well. He has high expectations for the school and shares his vision with governors who are most supportive and play their part in holding the school to account. The high turnover of teaching staff has been managed well, although, inevitably, some development has been interrupted. A system for checking the progress of pupils in science was to have been established by now but two changes in subject leadership have delayed plans. As a result, the school is not sure why it is that no Year 2 pupils achieved the higher level, Level 3, in science this summer, and a few parents were disappointed by this. The school's self-evaluation is good; it involves pupils, parents, staff and governors, and the headteacher is responsive to constructive comments. The process is successful in identifying what the school needs to do to improve and the school improvement plan identifies the right priorities. However, with the new management structure, a great deal falls to the headteacher, and the scope of development planned and some of the timescales are no longer realistic. The headteacher and governors are aware of this, and have begun to revise the detailed plan for this year.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The provision is good. Effective links with the pre-school help children to settle quickly. The accommodation and planning have both improved since the last inspection and are good. Teaching is good and children are well engaged in a wide range of purposeful activities that enable them to make good progress in all areas of learning. By the end of Reception most exceed expectations for their age and they are well prepared for more formal learning in Year 1.

Further improvements to the outdoor environment are planned to enable children to learn outside more frequently.

What the school should do to improve further

- Revise the priorities and timescales in the school improvement plan so that developments are realistic and manageable in the light of the new management structure.
- Establish systems for checking pupils' progress and evaluating the effectiveness of the provision in science.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress and achieve well during their time at the school. This is well demonstrated by the school's analysis of the progress made by pupils in literacy and numeracy. For instance, pupils who entered Reception and progressed to Year 4 in Summer 2007 had average levels of attainment to start with and were above average by Year 4. Work done to raise standards in writing and mathematics has been effective, particularly the setting of individual targets that are well known to pupils and parents. Pupils with learning difficulties make equally good progress because they are well supported. This summer, no pupils in Year 2 reached the higher level, Level 3, in science, which is most unusual. The reasons for this are not clear and the school has plans to introduce a system of checking progress and provision in this subject.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They get on well with one another, and are self-confident, polite and welcoming towards visitors. They show a great respect for the environment and for differences between people, although their awareness of the multi-cultural nature of British society is satisfactory, rather than good. Behaviour is good, and sometimes excellent. Pupils' enjoyment of school is well evident in above average attendance and enthusiastic participation in school activities, particularly the wide range of physical activities. As monitors, helpers, school councillors or contributors to the newsletter, pupils discharge their responsibilities well. They make healthy choices at lunchtime and show a good awareness of how to keep themselves safe. They help one another and show concern for others by raising funds for charity and recycling. They leave well prepared for middle school and with a good level of basic, personal and citizenship skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is never less than satisfactory and is most often good. There is a calm and purposeful atmosphere in lessons and pupils are keen to learn. Although the new teachers have been briefed on the school's teaching and learning policy, they are not yet implementing this consistently. For instance, they plan their lessons well, with clear learning objectives, but these are not always shared with pupils in such a way that pupils can assess for themselves their success in achieving them. Staff have good relationships with pupils and manage them well. Tasks provide just the right amount of challenge, which gives pupils a sense of achievement. Interactive whiteboards are used effectively and hold pupils' attention well. Games and songs add enjoyment and help pupils remember facts. Personal development is encouraged when

pupils work independently, in groups or in teams. Teaching assistants make a strong contribution by taking small groups or supporting in class.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum exceeds requirements with the addition of French in Years 3 and 4, and the 'new' strategies for literacy and numeracy being implemented already. Pupils benefit from teaching by specialists in sports and music. There is also a good range of additional programmes to cater for pupils who need a boost in literacy and numeracy, or help with language development. For a small school, there is a very wide range of enrichment activities, particularly physical activities. There are many visitors to the school, often as part of themed weeks, and these bring learning to life and add to pupils' enjoyment. Lunchtime and after-school clubs are popular and well attended, and parents appreciate these very much. 'They make the school special', wrote one. The school has plans to link with a multi-ethnic school in Bedford to give pupils opportunities to mix with a more diverse group of children.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Staff know pupils and their circumstances well and they take good care of them. Pupils feel safe in school and readily turn to adults when it is sensible to do so. Pupils have a voice and the school council is influential. Pupils with learning difficulties are effectively supported by adults and their needs are met well by linking with agencies and setting individual targets, although occasionally these are too broad. Academic guidance is good. Pupils' progress in literacy and numeracy is carefully checked and good support is provided for those that fall behind. The school improvement plan acknowledges the need to introduce a tracking system in science. Since the last inspection, marking has improved and it helps pupils to progress, as do individual targets set for writing and numeracy.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Since the headteacher arrived, there have been good improvements in the school, and pupils and parents are pleased with them. Above all, the headteacher and governors are working effectively together to manage the many changes in teaching staff so that the good quality of education has been maintained and improvements are going ahead as planned. Governors are most supportive, taking on responsibility for certain developments as well as monitoring and evaluating aspects of the school, such as the library stock. Challenging targets are set for improvement and are usually met or exceeded. Accurate and wide-ranging evaluation correctly identifies areas in need of improvement, and the improvement plan reflects an ambitious vision for the school's future. However, only the headteacher and one other teacher can take on subject leadership roles this year. This makes the plan somewhat unrealistic and it is being revised to make it more manageable.

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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	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	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
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?	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

19 September 2007

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of Ravensden CofE VA Lower School, Ravensden, MK44 2RW

Thank you for making me welcome in your school, especially to those who talked to me about school life. I thoroughly enjoyed my visit.

You are lucky that yours is a good school. Even though there have been many changes of class teachers, Mr Stanyard and the governors have worked hard to make sure that it keeps on getting better. You are all making good progress and having targets is helping you to improve. I enjoyed visiting your lessons and could see that the teachers and teaching assistants are doing a good job. You are working hard too. There is lots of help for those that need it and I could see how much you enjoyed learning letter sounds in a small group in the hall. Your behaviour and attendance are both good. I was pleased to see that you choose healthy foods at lunchtime and that you take lots of exercise, as this will keep you healthy. When I asked some of you about keeping safe you answered my questions well. You all have jobs to do and you take them seriously. The school council has certainly helped to make the playground better. The good skills that pupils have by the time they leave your school, including working well together and in teams, will really help them at middle school and when they grow up and want to get jobs.

There are many things that Mr Stanyard and the governors want to do to improve because they want your school to get even better! I have asked them to do two important things first. They are going to look again at their plans and decide what they can manage to do this year while new teachers are settling in. They are also going to start checking the progress that you all make in science and see if there are any things that could be improved in this subject. I feel sure that you will help by keeping up the good work you are doing! I wish you all the best for the future.

Mrs S Aldridge

Lead inspector