

Courthouse Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109819
Local Authority	Windsor and Maidenhead
Inspection number	310108
Inspection dates	17–18 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Selwyn Ward

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	395
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Hugh Forster
Headteacher	Mr Peter Brooks
Date of previous school inspection	27 January 2003
School address	Blenheim Road Maidenhead SL6 5HE
Telephone number	01628 626958
Fax number	01628 671931

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This school is much bigger than average. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) is average but an above average number have statements of special educational need. The school has been awarded the National Healthy Schools Award and ActiveMark Award. In December 2005, the school had an Ofsted survey visit to look at achievement of different groups.

The headteacher retired in July 2007 but the school has not yet appointed a new permanent headteacher. In the meantime, the retired headteacher is returning part-time, sharing temporary responsibility with the headteacher of the neighbouring infant school. The retired headteacher was not present at the time of the inspection; however, the acting headteacher was present throughout.

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 with some outstanding features. Parents are pleased with their children's progress and they voice praise for the fact that their 'children are very happy at this school and their confidence has grown'. The school has been particularly successful in creating a climate where pupils are keen to learn and do well, and not just at academic subjects. One of the features that stands out at Courthouse is the way in which so many pupils take on responsibilities, for example as school councillors, prefects and peer mediators. This contributes to their growing maturity and prepares them well for their move to secondary school. Pupils feel safe at school because they are exceptionally well looked after. They thoroughly understand the need for healthy diets and exercise and, in the main, they practise what they preach.

Some parents are apprehensive at the prospect of a period without a permanent headteacher. However, school leaders at all levels work very effectively as a team, with a shared commitment to maintaining the school's many strengths and driving forward improvement. School leaders have demonstrated their success in arresting and reversing the dip in English standards in 2006, so that standards in the 2007 national tests were significantly above average in English, mathematics and science. Given that the pupils in last year's Year 6 joined the school with only average scores in their Year 2 tests, this represents good achievement. In light of this, school leaders show good capacity for continued improvement.

Standards in academic subjects have not, however, been achieved at the expense of the broader curriculum. The school is especially proud of its success in sport and music, and parents comment that, 'The school manages to maintain an excellent balance between encouraging hard work and fun.' Sometimes opportunities are missed to use information and communication technology (ICT) as a tool for learning. School leaders have initiated plans to revise and extend the curriculum in ICT to raise standards in the subject, which, though broadly average, are not as high as in other subjects.

Pupils do well at this school because they are set work that is matched to their abilities and because lessons move their learning on at a good pace. Pupils generally have a good idea of how well they are doing and some benefit from cracking marking that involves them in assessing for themselves what they have done well and which spells out what they need to do to next to improve. Not all marking, however, is as good as this. Some offers pupils encouragement but little practical guidance on how to do better.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all marking gives pupils clear guidance on what they need to do to improve their work.
- Raise standards in ICT by giving pupils more opportunities to use ICT in other subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards in science have been consistently very high at Courthouse because it is a subject where teachers instil pupils with a sense of discovery and excitement. A pupil cited as one of the best things about school that he had been able to learn 'what the inside of a worm is like'. Standards dipped in 2006, particularly in writing, but the school has successfully reversed this decline, so that standards in English, mathematics and science rose sharply in 2007 and are

significantly above average. Pupils make good progress throughout the school in these core subjects. As the 2005 Ofsted survey confirmed, pupils of all abilities achieve well, including the most able and those with LDD, who are very well supported. Standards in ICT are average, which means that pupils' key skills in this subject are not as good as in literacy and numeracy.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils demonstrate outstanding attitudes, behaviour and enthusiasm about almost all aspects of school. They are assured in their views of why this is so. They explain that, although they have to learn 'hard stuff', this is compensated for by interesting and well-planned topics which make learning fun. Attendance is above average and pupils arrive punctually to school and lessons. Outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is underpinned by a comprehensive programme of personal, social and health education. This means that pupils put into practice those elements that promote good health, being safe and showing high levels of care for each other. Pupils demonstrate outstanding levels of social awareness and personal responsibility and this is evident in the way everyone in school works together so successfully. On the rare occasion pupils have a disagreement, peer mediators intervene to ensure the problem is solved quickly. As a consequence, bullying is very rare. All pupils contribute to the life of the school with poise and maturity, for example when setting up assemblies, in charity activities and concerts. They are proud of the contributions they make to others less fortunate than themselves. The school council is well established and has ensured improved playground conditions. Pupils feel their views are respected. Pupils' key literacy and numeracy skills prepare them well for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers know their pupils well and establish a strong rapport with them. This helps to create a secure environment where pupils can investigate and try out new ideas with confidence. Pupils concentrate and work hard because most lessons are interesting and enjoyable. Questioning is generally used well to challenge pupils and to check how much has been understood. In most lessons, teachers have high expectations and set challenging work, which pupils respond to with enthusiasm. Lessons move at a good pace with pupils fully engaged throughout. Sometimes, however, teachers do not clearly identify what it is that pupils should be learning. This makes it difficult for pupils to assess what they have achieved in the lesson. Teaching assistants make a good contribution; the support they give, particularly to pupils with LDD, helps to ensure that they gain the maximum benefits from the lessons. Marking and discussions with pupils are used effectively to guide and improve learning, but the quality of marking is not consistent throughout the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad and balanced with a wide range of relevant and interesting learning opportunities that stimulate pupils' interest and imagination. The school's continuous focus on writing has resulted in dramatically improved standards in the 2007 national tests, despite the complaint from some parents that 'class sizes are too big'. The curriculum is modified to

take account of the needs of those with LDD as well as those with particular talents. The curriculum is made more enjoyable through careful links between subjects, learning, for example, about healthy living through both science and physical education. While the skills learnt in literacy and numeracy are used across the curriculum, opportunities are sometimes missed to use and develop ICT skills across other subjects. An excellent range of popular clubs and activities, including school visits and visitors, adds a further dimension to pupils' learning. Music is a particular strength and offers additional opportunities for pupils to develop their creative skills and imagination.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school's outstanding care, guidance and support contribute significantly to pupils' progress, happiness and well-being. Policies and procedures are well established to ensure pupils' health and safety, and to safeguard their welfare. The school takes appropriate steps to vet all adults who work with pupils. This is a very inclusive school where pupils of all abilities and aptitudes are valued and praised for their contributions. Adults have high expectations for pupils' all-round development and progress is tracked carefully so that any who have difficulties are identified quickly and given extra support. Very good links exist with other agencies including social services, educational psychologists and other schools, contributing very well to the progress pupils make over time. The school works closely with parents who are kept well informed of what their children learn and how well they are succeeding, although some parents say they would like even more information about their children's progress. Targets are discussed at regular meetings and this enables parents and the school to give very well focused support to pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership team has a clear vision of the school, which is shared by all staff and governors. School leaders were quick to identify where standards had slipped in 2006 and successful in putting in place measures that resulted in the dramatic improvement in 2007. The school works with a wide range of partners to improve provision and support achievements. Links with the neighbouring infant school are particularly strong. Parents describe Courthouse as 'a very well run school' and a number, inevitably, are seeking reassurance that the school will not be disadvantaged during the period pending appointment of a new permanent headteacher.

The strong teamwork within the school provides staff with much confidence to go through this period of transition. Staff and governors have a clear picture of where the school's strengths lie and where they want to see improvements, for example, the continuous focus on developing writing. Self-evaluation is rigorous, honest and accurate, with school leaders already having pinpointed the areas for development identified in this report. Governors are very supportive and challenge the school to continue to achieve more.

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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?	1
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?	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

28 September 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Courthouse Junior School, Maidenhead, SL6 5HE

Thank you all for making us so welcome and helping us when we visited you. You and your parents are obviously very proud of your school and we think you have every right to be. It is a good school with some features that are outstanding.

We were very impressed with how well behaved you are and with how keen you all are to learn and do well. Many of your parents told us how confident you were by the time you got to Year 6, and we think that is an important strength of your school. You take on a lot of different responsibilities as you progress through the school, and that is preparing you well for when you move on to secondary.

The school looks after you exceptionally well, and that helps you feel so safe and secure. Teachers check carefully how well you are doing and they quickly spot when some of you need extra help. This, and the good teaching throughout the school, means you make good progress, and the standards you are achieving are good. You do not just do well in English, mathematics and science. We were pleased to see how much you enjoyed and do well in so many other subjects, especially music. We think, though, you could do better in ICT, and we would like you to have more opportunities to use ICT in other subjects.

Most of you know how well you are doing. Some of your teachers involve you in checking how well you are doing and give you exceptionally clear feedback on what you need to do to do better. We have asked the school to look carefully at marking and try to ensure that all is as good as the best.

Many of your parents told us that they were worried about what might happen in the gap between Mr Brooks's retirement and a new headteacher being appointed. We certainly think your school is well run, and we hope they will be reassured to know that we found that all of the staff work well together as a team to make sure the school's many strengths are maintained and that it continues to improve further.

You can help too by continuing to work hard and do your best, and by asking your teachers how you can make your work even better.

Thank you again for being so helpful and friendly when we came to see you.

Yours faithfully,

Selwyn Ward

Lead Inspector