

Marlow Church of England Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110433
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	310301
Inspection date	24 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Steven Hill

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4-7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	192
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Derrick Southon
Headteacher	Miss Elizabeth Toohig
Date of previous school inspection	12 January 2004
School address	Sandygate Road Marlow SL7 3AZ
Telephone number	01628 483983
Fax number	01628 478522

Age group	4-7
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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: pupils' progress and how the school keeps track of this; the school's curriculum; aspects of pupils' personal development, and how leadership and management contribute to improvements in the school. Evidence was gathered from the school's records, observations of lessons and break times, discussion with staff, pupils and a representative of the governing body, samples of pupils' work and questionnaires filled in by parents. 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 its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The school is slightly smaller than average for a primary school. There are two classes each in Years 1 and 2. Currently, there are two Reception classes and a Nursery class in the morning, but only the oldest Reception children attend in the afternoon. Most pupils are of White British heritage, with about a fifth from minority ethnic backgrounds, mostly White European, with a few from a range of other groups. Very few are at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) is generally lower than average, but varies from year to year. The school has a number of awards, including Healthy Schools, and has won the Local Authority's Swan Award several years running, for a variety of curricular initiatives.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Marlow Infants is a good school where pupils thoroughly enjoy their education. This is true right from when children start in the Foundation Stage. They soon feel at home, joining in school life with confidence. An outstanding curriculum makes a strong contribution to pupils' excellent personal development and their happiness in school.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They have a very firm grasp of social and moral issues. They show concern and respect for each other and for the adults in school. Their behaviour is excellent, in class and around the school, and they are polite, friendly and sensible. Very positive relationships are evident with each other and with adults. Pupils are very well involved in the life of the school and the wider community, particularly through the school council and their work on environmental issues, about which they are very knowledgeable. An exceptionally wide range of extra-curricular activities involves virtually all the pupils in Key Stage 1, as well as some of the younger children. This is a big factor in pupils' enthusiasm for school. They participate keenly in physical activities, including the wide range of sports, dance and fitness clubs. This, along with their good understanding of nutrition, underpins very healthy lifestyles.

Good teaching and learning, as well as thorough coverage of the National Curriculum, lead to good achievement. Standards are above average by the end of Year 2, and are particularly strong in reading. Some variations in the results of national assessments in the last few years are related to the unusual number of pupils who struggled with literacy and numeracy in these year groups. The school's thorough tracking of pupils' achievements shows this clearly. Tracking also shows that pupils across the school, including those who have problems with learning, make good progress. The school has accurately identified that standards are not as good in writing as they are in reading and mathematics, and is tackling this problem through a range of effective strategies.

The good teaching is characterised by good relationships, a positive approach to pupils, high expectations of behaviour and effort, and well-established routines. Teachers explain new ideas well, often making very effective use of interactive whiteboards to clarify things. A strength of many lessons is the searching questioning of pupils to get them to explain their thinking and put their ideas into words. Teachers plan lessons that provide different levels of work for pupils, based on the school's regular assessments of their progress and needs. However, in a minority of lessons that are only satisfactory, the match of tasks to pupils' needs is not accurate enough. This means that sometimes more able pupils get work that does not challenge them, or pupils who struggle with literacy or numeracy find tasks too hard.

The care, support and guidance provided for pupils are good. Pastoral care is strong and pupils feel relaxed, safe and secure in school. Parents, who are overwhelmingly positive in their written comments, particularly praise its '...very caring and nurturing attitude...' Typical was one who wrote, 'Both of my children are very happy at school. The teachers and all staff are caring and approachable.' The school is constantly upgrading its systems to check on pupils' progress. Any pupils who are not making good progress are identified quickly. The school uses a wide range of intervention programmes to support these pupils, either individually or in groups, to ensure that they do well. Targets in literacy and numeracy, that pupils are expected to aim for, are given to different groups in each class, and teachers use these well in their feedback and marking. This helps pupils to know how well they are doing, and how they can do even better.

The school's successes stem from good leadership and management. Clear direction from the headteacher and senior management is backed up by enthusiastic teamwork from all staff. Subject leaders provide good support to colleagues and have a clear vision for developing their areas. They are improving procedures to give them a clearer view of strengths and weaknesses across the school. Good self-evaluation by the school has accurately identified the areas that need to be developed next. This is based on regular monitoring of lessons and pupils' work, which enables clear feedback to teachers to help them improve their practice. Staff work together effectively to tackle any issues that are identified by the school's good tracking procedures. The governors have good systems for ensuring their involvement in the school's work, have an accurate view of how it is doing, and hold it to account well for its performance. Good achievement has been maintained since the last inspection, despite many changes in staff, and the strengths in pupils' personal development built on well. The school is well placed to continue to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The welcoming and friendly ethos of the Nursery and Reception classes is, as one parent wrote, '...a wonderful way to introduce children to school life.' Children feel happy and secure, quickly becoming involved in, and enthused by, the exciting range of practical activities provided. The greatly improved outdoor area makes an increasingly good contribution to children's learning. There is a good balance between activities directed by adults and those that children can choose for themselves. Recent improvements in organisation are helping the adults to ensure that children participate in the full range of experiences, and are not able to 'opt out' of some aspects, as the school identified was happening in the past. Good teaching ensures that children make good progress, and the great majority attain the expected standards by the end of Reception. This is despite many of them spending less time in the Foundation Stage than most children of their age nationally. A key factor in their good achievement is the fact that adults continually intervene effectively in children's play, talking to them to develop their thinking and understanding, and supporting their speaking and listening skills.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing to be closer to those in reading and mathematics.
- Ensure that work is matched more consistently to pupils' individual needs.

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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?	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	2
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?	1
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

01 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Marlow Church of England Infant School, Marlow, SL7 3AZ

Thank you very much for all your help when I visited your school. You told me that you enjoyed being there and I could see why. I think you are at a good school and I liked a lot of things about it.

I was very impressed by how well you get on with each other, and by your excellent behaviour. You are polite, friendly and work hard. You have plenty of exciting things to do, and you really enjoy the amazing number of clubs that the school provides. The school is a very welcoming place, and you help keep it like this. You know a lot about the environment, and are doing your best to keep the school eco-friendly.

You are making good progress in your lessons because the adults are good at helping you to learn. Just occasionally, some of you get work that is a bit too hard for you, or a bit too easy. I have agreed with your teachers that they will try to make sure this does not happen in future. You are particularly good at reading, but not quite so good at writing. The school is already trying some new ideas to help you get better at writing, and I have agreed with them that this is a good idea.

The governors, headteacher and other staff are good at organising the school, and keep a careful eye on how you are getting on. They make sure that anyone who needs it gets extra help. They are all keen to make the school even better, and you can help by carrying on working hard, particularly with your writing.

I hope you carry on enjoying school so much.

Best wishes,

Steven Hill,

Lead Inspector