

Little Missenden Church of England School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110457
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	310314
Inspection date	7 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Peter Thrusell

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	38
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev John Simpson
Headteacher	Mrs Patricia Bridges
Date of previous school inspection	10 February 2004
School address	Little Missenden Amersham HP7 0RA
Telephone number	01494 862021
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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, teaching and learning, and leadership and management, gathering evidence from lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work and documents. Parents' questionnaires and discussions with children, governors and staff also contributed to the judgements. 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

Little Missenden is a very small, rural infant school. It is situated in an area of comparative advantage, with no pupils known to be eligible for free school meals. A very small proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school has a basic Skills Quality Mark and Activemark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Little Missenden is a good school. It has some outstanding features. The headteacher is in her second year at the school. She has very quickly set a clear direction for its development, identified areas for improvement and achieved much in a relatively short space of time. In doing so, she has been careful to work closely alongside staff, helping them to improve their performance and to take developments on board, whilst maintaining a very positive school ethos. Parents recognise this with comments such as, 'Mrs Bridges brings an enthusiasm to school that is infectious for children and parents'. Parents provide extremely strong support for the school in their children's learning, their regular support for school activities, and fundraising. Governors are supportive of the work of the school, and are increasingly aware of its particular strengths and weaknesses. The chair of governors gives an excellent lead and works very closely with the headteacher in discussing, planning and monitoring school improvements.

Although the numbers in each year group are relatively small and standards can therefore fluctuate from year to year, there was nevertheless a slow decline in standards at the end of Year 2, from 2003 when they were extremely high, to 2006 when they were average. This trend was reversed in 2007 when standards overall were well above average, but with a relative weakness in writing. A similar picture of well above average standards is emerging in the current Year 2, with an improvement in writing, particularly of more able pupils. Pupils achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics, given their above average starting points in Year 1. These improvements have been brought about by developments in teaching and the curriculum.

Teaching is good. A past reliance on worksheets and formal exercises has largely been stemmed. Much more use is now being made of assessment, both to group pupils by ability and to plan appropriate and challenging work, so that all make good progress. Literacy and numeracy lessons are well-structured and planning provides opportunities for pupils to develop the different skills within these subjects. Throughout the school, however, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to respond to questioning and discuss the work they are doing more fully, in order to further their learning and understanding. This lessens their enjoyment of learning and restricts the contribution they are able to make through sharing their experiences and ideas. Teaching assistants also do not always adopt this interactive way of working with the pupils they are supporting. Teachers, within the small classes, generally give immediate oral feedback to pupils on how well they are doing. Marking in books includes some constructive comments for pupils, showing them how to improve their work. In writing, pupils have individual targets to aim for. They understand their purpose in helping them to improve their work and raise standards. Once a week, they look at a piece of writing in greater depth, and record whether they are meeting their targets.

The curriculum has started to make links between subjects that make learning more interesting, practical and purposeful. These provide opportunities for pupils to use and develop their different skills. This has contributed to the recent rise in achievement and standards, particularly in writing. A more practical and investigative approach to mathematics and science, with an increased time allocation for science, is helping pupils to work independently and gain greater challenge and enjoyment from their learning. The school has recently improved resources for information and communication technology, which are already helping pupils to improve their computer skills and enliven their learning. Pupils appreciate these changes, but also comment that 'we want more exciting stuff everyday' and that 'some lessons are boring'. The school

recognises that more still needs to be done to actively involve pupils in their classroom learning. It does, however, plan exciting events as part of the school's extremely full enrichment programme. Pupils dressed up as different characters for World Book Day and took great delight in acting out these roles. The school provides a very good range of popular after school clubs as part of its provision for pupils' personal development.

Pupils' personal development and well-being, along with their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are excellent. They attend school regularly and generally have very positive attitudes to learning. Behaviour is excellent, contributing to the good progress they make in their learning. Pupils are encouraged to play a full part in church and village life. They are looking forward to the coming Palm Sunday celebrations, when one of them will be chosen to ride on the donkey as others act out the scene. They are fully aware of the needs of others who are less fortunate, saying that, 'We must help others who don't have anything'. They have an excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles. There are many opportunities for sport, supported through links with local clubs and a sports' partnership with a local school. All pupils go swimming regularly throughout the year. Weekly cookery sessions, with a trained chef, encourage pupils to look at different foods and to consider healthy options. Excellent care and support for pupils ensures their full safety and security, and they themselves know how to stay safe both in school and in the community. Two pupils currently have difficulties with fine motor skills. They are very well supported through daily exercises, which have helped to raise their self-esteem and confidence in school. Given this level of personal development and the progress they make in basic skills, pupils are well prepared for their later life and learning.

The positive impact of recent school improvements shows that the school has a good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children are well provided for in the Reception class. Very strong links with parents and a caring environment ensure that children quickly settle into school and its routines. When they start in Reception, their level of attainment is above that expected at this age. They make good progress and, when they start in Year 1, the majority are working securely within the learning goals expected at this age. A significant number fully meet these goals. Planning, following a recent review, now shows an improved balance between activities directed by staff and times for children to explore and discover for themselves. Recent developments of the outdoor area and the reorganisation of classroom space have further improved the provision. The school recognises that fuller use has to be made of these areas, to further encourage children to be more independent in their learning and the choices they make. Planning further identifies points for observation and assessment, so that an ongoing check is made and recorded of children's progress in the different areas of learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that pupils are encouraged to become more active in their learning, particularly through opportunities to talk about and draw on their own ideas.
- Provide well-planned opportunities for children in the Foundation Stage to discover and learn for themselves.

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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 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	1
How well learners enjoy their education	2
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	1
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	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

20 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Little Missenden Church of England School, Amersham, HP7 0RA

I am writing to let you know what I found when I visited your school. Thank you for taking part in the inspection. I spoke with some of you during my visit and you were interesting to talk to, very polite and helpful. You spoke very enthusiastically about school and all of the things you take part in. Little Missenden is a good school.

I liked these things the most.

- Children in Reception get a good start to their time in school.
- You work very hard and make good progress.
- You behave extremely well.
- The school makes sure that you are extremely safe and very well looked after.
- You have a very good range of clubs to choose from and take part in many community and church activities.
- You know the importance of eating the right things and staying fit and healthy. I was impressed that all of you go swimming each week.
- Your headteacher and chair of governors are doing a really good job.
- Parents and carers provide extremely good support for the school.

I have asked the school to work on the following. It needs to provide more opportunities for you to be more actively involved in your classroom learning. For example, you must be encouraged to say more and to share your thoughts and ideas with each other, so that your work becomes even better. Children in Reception are taught well, but need to have better opportunities to choose what they do and to find out things for themselves. It was good to see some of you already starting to make choices.

I did enjoy visiting your school and watching you learn.

Yours sincerely

Peter Thrussell

Lead Inspector