

Mary Exton Junior Mixed and Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117329
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	312571
Inspection date	9 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Roderick Passant

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	222
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sharon Hodgson
Headteacher	Mrs Karen Ireland
Date of previous school inspection	23 May 2005
School address	St Michael's Road Hitchin Hertfordshire SG4 0QA
Telephone number	01462 456997
Fax number	01462 451756

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the school's overall effectiveness, including that of the Reception class; (although, because of a planned trip there was little opportunity to see it in action) the current progress and learning of pupils; pupils' personal development and aspects of leadership and management.

Evidence was gathered from test data; the information that the school has on tracking pupils' progress; the school self-evaluation form and lesson observations. Discussions were held with the senior leadership team, Foundation Stage leader and staff, members of the governing body, the local authority link adviser and a group of Year 6 pupils and representatives from the school council. Parents' questionnaires were read and the school's systems for safeguarding pupils were checked. Other aspects 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 within the report

Description of the school

The school is popular and oversubscribed. It is average in size. Eligibility for free school meals is below average and many pupils have relatively advantaged backgrounds. The percentage of pupils who require additional support for their learning is about average but there is a lower proportion than average of pupils with statements detailing their entitlement to support. Roughly, three quarters of the school's pupils are White British, the rest come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. About 10% of pupils have a first language other than English and a few pupils are at an early stage of learning the language. Very few pupils join or leave the school other than at standard times. The attainment on entry of children joining the school varies; it is sometimes slightly above but is generally typical of that normally seen, with the majority of children having received some form of Nursery experience from a wide range of providers. The school is accredited as a healthy school and is a partnership school with the University of Hertfordshire and Bedford University.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This highly effective school has many strengths and has the confidence of most parents. Since the last inspection, it has made significant improvements to leadership and all other aspects of provision. These have led to considerably improved standards over the past three years, both in pupils' personal development, which is now outstanding, and academically. It is not a complacent school and has the leadership capacity to secure consistently high achievement and standards. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. She has constructed highly effective teamwork across the school by involving and valuing staff contributions, and building their leadership skills. High expectations, clear accountability and strong support systems have been established. There is a very professional staff culture. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities, share core values and want to improve. The very effective senior leaders know the pupils and school extremely well, share their views openly with staff so that all are clear about the priorities for improvement. The school has an excellent understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and a strong sense of direction. Governance is good, debate is open and strategic leadership is effective. The governing body has the commitment and capacity to improve further.

Results in English and mathematics at the end of Year 6 were well above average in 2007 and current Year 6 pupils are on track to attain challenging targets. Standards in Year 5 are also high. Pupils make good progress in Reception and across the infant phase so that standards by the end of Year 2, historically and currently, are above average. Pupils achieve well and now make good year-on-year progress across the school because of good teaching but also because the school tracks their progress carefully. It makes excellent use of demanding targets to set high expectations of staff, and checks the progress of individual pupils carefully. High quality support, including very strong links with other agencies, ensures that pupils with specific learning needs make good progress against their targets. The school challenges able pupils so that they perform well; the proportion of Year 6 pupils gaining the higher level was significantly above average in 2007. Staff know the pupils extremely well and value them as individuals. They are very committed to meeting their needs, whether, language, learning, or medical to ensure that they make the best possible progress.

Pupils are enthusiastic and enjoy school a great deal, as shown by their excellent attendance. They have very positive attitudes to learning; they say that school is 'interesting' and 'fun', particularly the good curriculum and enrichment opportunities that they experience. Links across the curriculum are being developed to make learning even more meaningful. Pupils show sensitivity, consideration and respect for others because the school encourages them to consider the other person's point of view. They have a good understanding about other cultures. Their behaviour is excellent because they have a very clear understanding about right and wrong. Teachers manage behaviour in a calm, positive, unobtrusive manner, modelling courtesy and respect extremely well. They listen to pupils carefully, valuing what they have to say. This, along with their exceptional care, ensures that relationships are excellent and a key element in the school's calm, productive ethos, helping pupils to feel extremely safe and secure. Child protection, health and safety arrangements and safeguarding systems are all in place and rigorous. Pupils report that there is no bullying and they always feel able to approach an adult if there is something troubling them. There is a strong sense of community because older pupils play with, and assume some responsibility for, younger ones. The school council has given careful consideration to ways of ensuring that playtimes can be both fun and exciting. Members

have identified, very carefully and thoughtfully, what is needed to achieve this. Pupils have an excellent understanding of what a healthy lifestyle is and how to look after themselves. Given their excellent attitudes, maturity and academic skills, the school prepares pupils very well for the next steps in their education.

Teachers are skilled, enthusiastic practitioners who manage classrooms well and consistently foster good attitudes to learning. There is strong teamwork with good contributions from effective teaching assistants, whose high quality of support is a particular asset. Because teachers plan in detail, pupils are clear about what they are learning and why. Pupils are self-confident learners who are not afraid to make a mistake. They are perceptive about what makes a good lesson; it is one in which 'they are actively involved rather than the teacher talking' and according to them, 'this happens 90 per cent of the time... at least'. The school is working very hard to capitalise on pupils' high level of motivation by ensuring that they receive high quality feedback and know how to improve their work. There is good practice with assessment but this is not yet consistent across the school. Increasingly it encourages them to take even greater responsibility for their own achievement. Given pupils' outstanding personal development, and good and improving achievement, the school provides good value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

There has been significant improvement since the last inspection brought about by the move to single age classes and improvements to the overall provision and quality of accommodation. Children make good progress. Almost all pupils reach a good level of achievement, working securely within the expectations for the end of the Foundation Stage and many go beyond these. The last report noted that physical development lagged behind other aspects; this is not the case now. The planned curriculum is a creative and imaginative with a balance between adult and child initiated activities. There is careful on-going assessment of children's progress and careful evaluation of data. Energy and fun are evidently valued ingredients to learning. There are high expectations regarding children's independence and talk is encouraged particularly well. There is excellent care and guidance, good teamwork amongst the staff and very good links with parents and younger siblings through the regular open door shared reading policy. There are clear links and smooth transfer to Year 1.

What the school should do to improve further

- Refine and embed the good assessment strategies currently used in order to encourage pupils to take even more responsibility for their learning and achievement.

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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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
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	2
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	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?	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?	1
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	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
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

10 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Mary Exton Junior Mixed and Infant School, Hitchin, SG4 0QA

Thank you for making me so welcome in your school. I enjoyed my day with you very much. My particular thanks to those Year 6 and members of the school council who gave up part of their lunchtime to speak with me. What you had to say was thoughtful and very helpful.

You should feel proud of how you all help make this a good school. You reach higher standards than in most schools by the time you leave. Year 6 pupils are clearly on track to attain their challenging targets and you all make good progress across the school because the teachers are skilled at helping you learn well. I agree with you that lessons are interesting and this means that you are keen and enjoy learning. Teachers have been working hard to improve the way they mark your work so that you know how to make your work even better. There are many good methods in the various classes but these need to be worked on and shared between teachers so that they decide the best way forward. Teachers want to make learning even more a partnership between you, and to help you develop the skills to work on your own.

The school helps you develop as young people extremely well. It was good to hear that you feel safe in school but that you also felt able to approach an adult if you were troubled about something. You clearly have an extremely good idea of what makes a healthy life style and how to look after yourselves. I thought that this was an extremely friendly school; you clearly get on well with each other. Playtimes looked fun. I thought that the older pupils were very mature and considerate towards other pupils and was particularly impressed how supportive and constructive Year 6 pupils were when commenting on other pupils' drama work. I think the school prepares you well for the next steps in your education.

One of the impressive things about the school is how very well everyone works together. The pupils are an important part of the team and you play your part very well. The way you behave around the school and in lessons is impressive. The school has improved a lot in the last three years and is continuing to improve under Mrs. Ireland's very skilled leadership. With your continued help she will be able to make further improvements even faster.

All good wishes in your future school careers.

Roderick Passant Lead inspector