

Beech Hill Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131089
Local Authority	LUTON LA
Inspection number	315713
Inspection dates	11–12 March 2008
Reporting inspector	John Messer

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	597
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Colin Brown
Headteacher	Mrs Janice Dowson
Date of previous school inspection	2 June 2003
School address	Dunstable Road Luton Bedfordshire LU4 8BW
Telephone number	01582 429403
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Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This school is much larger than average. The proportion of pupils eligible to free school meals is above average. Nearly all pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds. Most come from Bangladeshi or Pakistani families and most speak English as an additional language. Half of pupils are at an early stage of learning to speak English. A quarter have learning difficulties or disabilities, which is above average. The attainment of many, but not all, children on entry to the school is exceptionally low, particularly in communication, language and literacy. In some year groups a large proportion of pupils join or leave the school partway through this phase of their education. The school has received the Healthy Schools award as well as the Active Mark and the information and communication technology (ICT) Mark. It is difficult to recruit teachers in this area. A children's centre has been established in the school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This school faces many challenges and is emerging from a difficult period caused mainly by staffing difficulties that have interrupted pupils' learning. It is now entering a much more settled phase and standards are rising, thanks to the good leadership of the interim headteacher and the senior leadership team. Clear leadership has helped teachers and support staff to develop a good understanding of how best to tackle the task of raising standards. The school's self-evaluation is accurate in judging that pupils receive a satisfactory standard of education. Standards are still exceptionally low, but pupils are making sound progress, especially in writing. In some year groups, notably Year 6, progress is now good. Across the school progress is faster in literacy than in numeracy.

Staff strive to raise standards, but there are many factors that make this difficult. A large number of pupils arrive at school without speaking English. They quickly develop basic English-speaking skills so that they can communicate effectively, but their depth of understanding, particularly of specialist vocabulary associated with mathematics and science, is often poor and this impedes their achievement. New pupils arrive, and a large number move away, at different times of the year. This shifting school population makes it difficult to establish continuity in pupils' learning and raise their achievement.

Teaching is satisfactory overall and much of it is good, but the good teaching has not yet been sustained over a long enough period to have made a significant impact on standards. Teachers have received clear guidance from leaders about how to teach effective lessons. Consequently, a common approach is being developed and inconsistencies are being ironed out. Teachers' expectations of pupils' performance have been raised, and pupils now have a clearer understanding of how to improve their work. Teachers are good at teaching writing. However, teaching is not always as effective as it should be, because there is insufficient emphasis on providing pupils with first-hand experiences and with visual material to extend their understanding, especially in mathematics. Interactive white boards are not always used skilfully enough to maximise their impact and there is insufficient variety in the range of teaching strategies used to ensure that learning is fully effective. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to the quality of pupils' learning.

Personal development is good. Pupils are well behaved, happy, courteous and sensible. They develop a good understanding of their responsibilities to others. They are becoming confident learners and they are prepared satisfactorily for the next steps in their education. They know how to stay safe and look after themselves. They are responsible and make a good contribution to the community. The curriculum is being developed satisfactorily and learning is based on themes or topics. These are not yet studied in enough depth to fully stimulate interest.

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory and there are significant strengths in provision. Safeguarding procedures are robust and understood well by all staff. Pupils have a sound understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles. They receive sound academic guidance. Most parents are pleased with the education provided for their children. Family workers support pupils and their parents exceptionally well.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The interim headteacher, her senior leadership team, teachers and support staff are determined to provide better learning opportunities for all pupils. The governing body monitors the school's performance and has raised concerns about low standards, but it is not until recently that the school has got a firm grip on taking measures

to improve provision, especially teaching and learning. There have been many developments since the last inspection and the school is now improving. It has sound capacity to sustain this progress and to raise the achievement of all pupils.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children settle happily in the Reception classes. Teaching is good and children achieve well, especially in communication, language and literacy in English. Staff visit children in their homes before they start school and this helps to sow the seeds for a good partnership in learning. Close relations are being forged with the feeder pre-schools so that the children feel secure when moving to Reception. When children start school many of them are unable to speak English so staff concentrate on developing children's speaking and personal skills so that they quickly gain confidence. Staff are caring, enthusiastic and promote good behaviour and values. A lively curriculum and careful planning, tailored to the needs of individual children, ensure good support for learning. Improvements are under way to create better provision for learning indoors and in the outside area.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English, mathematics and science.
- Extend the range of teaching strategies to include more practical activities, better use of technology and a greater emphasis on visual learning.
- Develop the curriculum so that it provides opportunities for studying topics in greater depth and matches pupils' interests more closely.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children's attainment on entry to the Reception class is extremely low. They make good progress but by the beginning of Year 1, standards are still significantly below national expectations. Pupils' achievement in Years 1 and 2 is satisfactory overall and is good in writing. By Year 2, standards are below average in reading and mathematics and average in writing. Pupils' achievement in Years 3 to 6 is satisfactory, but there are many factors that slow their progress. There is a legacy of underachievement and a lot of catching up to do. Standards are beginning to rise and are already higher than they were last year, particularly in writing. Nevertheless, in comparison with schools nationally, standards by the end of Year 6 are still exceptionally low in English, mathematics and science. Pupils who remain at the school from Year 2 to Year 6 benefit from this continuity. They generally make better progress and attain higher standards than those who join the school later and whose education has been interrupted. The achievement of pupils who find learning difficult and those who speak English as an additional language is satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school and attendance is good. One comment was typical, 'It is fun being in this school.' Pupils become enthusiastic learners. They get on well together and are sensitive to the feelings of others. Behaviour is good, although many of the boys are particularly boisterous. Pupils are keen to take on responsibilities and make a positive impact in their school community by, for example, becoming school councillors, prefects, peer mentors or managing the healthy tuck shop. Their support for recycling initiatives demonstrates their commitment to the wider community. Their good personal development and the range of skills they are developing give them a sound platform for tackling the next phase of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching in the Foundation Stage is good and pupils make good progress. Teaching in Years 1 to 6 is satisfactory and much of it is good. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is good in Year 6 and here progress accelerates. However, teachers do not always take sufficient account of different learning styles and visual material is not used effectively enough to support learners who are at an early stage of learning to speak English. There are too few practical activities in mathematics and science to make sure that pupils' understanding is secure. Teachers plan lessons thoroughly and describe how tasks will be modified to match pupils' widely varying stages of development. They mark pupils' work carefully and give pupils good guidance about how to improve their work. Relationships between staff and pupils are warm and friendly.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

There is an appropriately strong emphasis on developing pupils' skills in language and literacy. The school provides an exceptional range of after school activities. The ICT club is so popular that three sessions a week are organised. A large number of pupils, over 250, attend various clubs. Visits to places of interest, including a residential visit for pupils in Year 5, enliven the curriculum. A unique cycling scheme teaches children, many of whom have never ridden a bicycle, how to ride safely on the roads around the school. They are even awarded a bicycle on successful completion of the scheme. Links are made between subjects to create a topic approach to teaching the curriculum but the topics are not studied in sufficient depth to stimulate pupils' interest or fire their imaginations.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Child protection, safe-guarding and health and safety procedures are clearly understood and any pupils at risk are quickly identified and supported effectively. Pupils feel safe and know who to approach if they have any concerns. Family workers support pupils extremely well. Parents greatly appreciate the help given to their children. Support for pupils who find learning difficult and for those with English as an additional language is effective. The school has developed good procedures for tracking pupils' progress. This data is used well to help pupils

know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Extra lessons are provided on Saturdays and during the holidays to help pupils with their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

There have been significant recent changes in leadership. Since her appointment, the interim headteacher has quickly identified the school's main strengths and weaknesses. She has empowered her senior management team to develop their roles in improving provision. There is now a shared vision of how the school can improve. Staff are committed to the newly established direction and keen to improve the school's performance. Governors have raised concerns about low standards, however it is only recently that they have become involved in the school's measures to improve performance. The roles of subject managers are not yet sufficiently well developed for them to take a major role in leading improvements. Nevertheless, the monitoring of pupils' progress is thorough and helps to pinpoint where extra learning support is needed.

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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?	3
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	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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?	3
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	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

13 March 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Beech Hill Primary School, Luton, LU9 8BW

We thoroughly enjoyed our short visit to your school. Thank you for being so friendly and helpful. I am writing to you because I thought that you might be interested to know what we found out.

You are polite and well behaved, although some of the boys are a bit loud. You are well looked after and the school is a safe place to be. You were all very sensible when the fire alarms went off and we all had to stand about in the playground for a short while. Your new headteacher has done a really good job in helping everybody to understand what needs to be done to raise standards. There are clear signs that standards are rising, especially in writing. You are starting to make much better progress in your work. Some of you, especially in Year 6, are now making good progress. When we looked at your books we were pleased to see how much progress many of you have made since September. This is because your teachers expect you to do your very best at all times and you rise to the challenges they set and work hard. They show you exactly what you need to do to improve your work. You know how to stay safe and look after yourselves. You know who you can go to share any worries that you may have. You get on well with each other. You make good friends. You are kind and sensitive to other people's feelings. You go on interesting visits and welcome visitors to the school to help you learn. There is a wonderful range of clubs for you to attend. You said that you enjoy school because teachers make lessons fun.

To make things even better we have suggested that everyone tries really hard to raise standards further, especially in English, mathematics and science. We also think that lessons should include more practical activities and more use of technology like computers and interactive white boards. We think that topics could be even more exciting if you studied things in greater depth and thoroughly investigate the things that interest you most.

We think that there are exciting times ahead. We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

John Messer Lead inspector