

Maple Tree Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132236
Local Authority	Bedfordshire
Inspection number	315982
Inspection date	28 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Martin Newell

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	3-9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	230
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ted Rowland
Headteacher	Mrs Pauline Duncombe
Date of previous school inspection	6 October 2003
School address	Hawk Drive Sandy SG19 2WA
Telephone number	01767 699806
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Age group	3-9
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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:

- standards in mathematics, particularly problem solving skills
- the consistency of teaching
- how pupils' key skills are developed across different subjects and pupils' involvement in their own learning.

Evidence was gathered from lesson observations, sampling of pupils' work, assessment, tracking and target setting information, other school documentation and discussions with pupils, key members of staff and the chair of governors. 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 detailed in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Maple Tree Lower School is an average sized school. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The percentage of pupils with additional needs and the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need are both below the national average. Most of the pupils are from White British backgrounds and of the small percentage of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds few are at an early stage of acquiring English. The school achieved the Healthy Schools Award in summer 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Maple Tree Lower is a good school that enables pupils to leave the school well prepared for the next stage of their educational lives. Its good track record of improvement since the last inspection and the determination of staff and governors to take the school onto the next level indicate that this is a school that is well placed to make this vision a reality.

Attainment when children start at the school is broadly in line with national expectations, although their communication skills are a little lower at times. By the time that pupils leave at the end of Year 4, standards are above average, although standards in problem solving in mathematics lag a little behind. The good start that children get off to in the Foundation Stage is built on systematically as they move through Years 1 to 4 and it is this consistency that enables all pupils to achieve well. Pupils' progress is checked on a regular basis and additional support is targeted to individual pupils if their progress dips. The information gleaned from regular assessments of how well pupils are doing is used effectively to set challenging targets and teachers are held accountable for ensuring pupils' progress is swift enough.

Pupils' achievement owes much to the good quality of teaching. Teaching across the school usually ensures that work is well matched to the differing ability levels of the pupils. Relationships within lessons are often good and teaching assistants add much to the quality of learning. The consistently good teaching of writing skills has seen standards rise. Teaching is at its best when lessons are vibrant and challenging and opportunities to enable pupils to flourish as independent learners are seized upon. Just occasionally, the work set for some pupils is too easy. There are very good examples of pupils' work being marked in a way that gives clear and concise pointers for improvement. The school has rightly flagged up the need to ensure that this highly effective practice is a consistent feature of all teaching and learning.

Pupils add much to the sense of community that wraps around the school. Many pupils behave well and are keen and enthusiastic learners who enjoy school and want to do well. These are characteristics that are reflected in the above average attendance rates. A small minority of pupils behave less well. Discussions with pupils however reveal that they feel safe in school, that bullying is not an issue and if it did occur, they are adamant that it would be dealt with swiftly. Pupils show a good awareness of what is needed to follow healthy lifestyles and manage risks in their lives well. Whilst pupils confidently and maturely carry out jobs and tasks around the school, they are right in their assertion that, 'We could do a lot more because we are ready for it!' School council members take their roles seriously and have been instrumental in raising money for charities, and for improving facilities in school such as 'the pavilions.' The school recognises that the time is ripe for giving the school council a greater say in decision-making.

The school provides a wide range of learning opportunities both within and outside of the formal curriculum that add much to pupils' achievement and enjoyment. A good emphasis is given to developing pupils' literacy, numeracy and computer skills. However, not enough opportunities are provided for these skills or pupils' investigative and enquiry skills to be utilised or enhanced across different subjects or other innovative curriculum projects. Some vibrant displays around the school are testimony to the creative aspects of the curriculum. Physical education and pupils' personal, social and health education are prominent features that contribute much to pupils' personal development and their readiness to keep fit and healthy. Pupils are given the opportunity to play the guitar, violin or cello, although uptake is not always

as high as the school would like. Learning is enlivened by curriculum days such as 'Saxon Day' or 'Old School Day' and by a good range of visits, visitors and after-school clubs.

The good levels of care and support for pupils help them to feel valued members of the school community. The strong links with outside support agencies, alongside the school's own internal mechanisms, mean that help and support are readily on hand for pupils with social, emotional or other complex needs. Safeguarding procedures are consistently followed by all staff. The information from the school's robust assessment and tracking procedures is used well to set challenging targets that are often met. Pupils have a good awareness of their personalised targets in literacy and numeracy. The school is rightly embarking on the next stage of making academic guidance an even stronger feature of school life. Importantly, this is to facilitate pupils taking more responsibility for their own learning through peer evaluation and pupils setting and reviewing their own targets.

Leadership and management are good, and key to this is the good quality leadership provided by the headteacher. She has a very good grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses and articulates them well in the school's self-evaluation form, which is spot on. She has been successful in creating a strong sense of team spirit and is committed to continued school improvement. The headteacher has established good procedures for monitoring teaching and analysing assessment data, the outcomes of which are used effectively to secure improvements. The newly structured senior leadership team supports the headteacher well and is playing an increasingly effective role in school self-evaluation and improvement. The role of subject leader, which is proving successful in key subjects, is to be used as a model of good practice for other subjects. Governors are supportive yet challenging and know the school well, and the recently reintroduced rota of regular visits add further to their body of knowledge. The school benefits from the support and appreciation of many parents although a minority are less happy with areas such as communication and mixed aged classes. However, the school is committed in its determination to strengthen its partnership with all parents and to share and celebrate the school's many successes with them.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children get off to a good start because of the good teaching and the stimulating curriculum that provides a good balance between hands-on learning experiences and adult-led teaching activities. This means that by the end of the Reception year standards are a little above national expectations. Staff are aware of the need to constantly capitalise on role-play and the use of discussion to build up children's communication skills. Good ongoing assessment gives adults a good idea of how well children are progressing, although some assessments are not always dated. Staff make good use of the accommodation, including the outdoor accommodation, and make it an attractive and vibrant place for children to learn. Management is good and the effective links with parents and good induction procedures help children to settle quickly and confidently into school life.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide well-planned opportunities for pupils to enhance their literacy, problem solving, enquiry and investigative skills across different subjects and in other innovative curriculum projects.

- Ensure marking of pupils' work gives clear pointers for improvement and that pupils play a more active role in evaluating how well they are doing and setting their own targets for improvement.

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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?	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	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?	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

29 April 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Maple Tree Lower School, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2WA

You will probably remember that I visited your school not too long ago and I am now writing to let you know what I found out. Before I do, I would first like to thank you for making me feel so welcome. I have told your teachers how you were all so helpful and polite. Through my discussions with you, it was great to hear how much you enjoy coming to school. It was also good to hear about how safe you feel in school, that bullying is not an issue and that there is always someone to talk to if you are worried.

Maple Tree Lower School is a good school. Teachers and other staff help you to achieve well and reach good standards because of the good quality of teaching. The curriculum, the clubs, the visits and visitors are all strengths, as is the way in which the school helps you to keep safe and healthy. Mrs Duncombe is a good headteacher and together with all the staff and governors, makes the school a good place to learn. Another strength of the school is you - the children. Many of you behave well, are keen and eager to learn and are only too ready to take on jobs and responsibilities. In fact, you want more, and I think you are right! On occasions, some of you could behave a little better and both your teachers and I know you can do it!

Even good schools like yours can improve. I have asked your teachers to test out your literacy and other key skills in different subjects and other exciting activities, to make sure their marking of your work tells you how to get better and for you to have a greater say in setting some of your own targets for improvement. Mrs Duncombe, the staff and governors want the school to become even better and I know you will play your part by continuing to behave well and working hard. I wish you every success in your future. It was a pleasure to meet you.

Martin Newell

Lead inspector