

Chestnuts Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132733
Local Authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	316004
Inspection dates	13–14 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Margaret Goodchild

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	273
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ramesh Mistry
Headteacher	Mrs Alison Wright
Date of previous school inspection	16 September 2002
School address	Buckingham Road Bletchley Milton Keynes MK3 5EN
Telephone number	01908 373748
Fax number	01908 374126

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average primary school although there has been a decline in the number of pupils from the time of the last inspection. An above average percentage of pupils are eligible for free school meals, though pupils come from a mixture of private and rented accommodation. The number of pupils of minority ethnic heritage and for whom English is an additional language is broadly average. The school has more pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and with a statement of special educational needs than most schools. It has a specialist unit for pupils with hearing impairment who come from across Milton Keynes and integrate into mainstream classes. In some year groups, over a third of the pupils have learning difficulties and disabilities. Attainment on entry to the school is below average. The previous headteacher left in July 2005 and the present headteacher was appointed in January 2006. The school was without a permanent deputy head until the appointment of the current deputy in September 2006. The school has been part of an intensive support programme for literacy and numeracy. It hosts an out-of-hours and after-school club that takes pupils from other local schools. It has Investors in People status, Activemark and the Healthy Schools Award (bronze).

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school which has made good improvement over the last two years.

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership: her clear vision and resilience are bringing about systematic and continuous school improvement. She is supported very well by the deputy head and well by other senior managers. As a result of their work, the school has been brought up to a satisfactory level through improving the quality of teaching, systematically tackling a legacy of underachievement, introducing very thorough systems for tracking pupils' progress and transforming the learning environment. The school now provides a high quality environment, for example with an excellent library and a very imaginative room, that evokes a jungle setting, which is used for small group work. Resources are easily accessible and effective systems have been put in place to ensure funding is linked to appropriate development priorities. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

A number of parents comment favourably on the improvements that have been brought about and say, 'The headmistress has made noticeable changes to the school'. Many parents are delighted with the work, describing it as 'a forward thinking school' where 'each child is treated as an individual', but a few express concern about times when their children's progress slowed down in the past as a result of weaknesses in teaching.

Standards are below average but achievement is now satisfactory overall. Underachievement has not been fully resolved but standards in National Curriculum tests have risen significantly in mathematics and science in Year 6 and to some extent in reading in Year 2. In the school as a whole, standards are lower in English, and particularly in writing, than they are in other areas. Teaching is satisfactory and there has been an increase in the amount of good teaching. There remain shortcomings in some lessons, however, where work is not matched closely enough to what the pupils already know. The Foundation Stage provides a satisfactory start for children's education. However, the school is working closely with the local authority to enrich learning opportunities in the Foundation Stage and there are some shortcomings in the range of activities provided.

The unit for pupils with hearing impairment provides a good quality of education and these pupils are integrated very well into the life of the school. Teaching in the unit is of high quality and communicators support pupils effectively in mainstream classes.

Pupils' personal development is satisfactory. Pupils are well cared for and learn in an atmosphere that is generally productive. Most are willing to work hard and behaviour is good. Pupils say how much they enjoy school and most attend regularly, but the irregular attendance of a small number adversely affects their progress. The school prepares pupils satisfactorily for the next stage in their education.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

As a result of recent improvements, the school provides satisfactorily for children in the Foundation Stage. Children are making broadly satisfactory progress in all areas of learning. They join the school with below average attainment and most are unlikely to reach the Early Learning goals by the end of the Reception Year. The school has identified the need to improve children's literacy skills and children are now making satisfactory progress in linking sounds and letters, although tasks are not always matched well to the interests of children of this age.

Teaching is satisfactory and a fair range of activities provides a mixture of child-initiated and adult-led activities, but these are not yet as stimulating as they should be. The school has effective systems for checking what children can do when they join the school but there has been insufficient assessment of their ongoing progress. Staff are now beginning to observe children's development and record their findings to inform future work. There has been a complete change of staff this term, with ongoing support from local authority advisers. The Foundation Stage has just moved to spacious new accommodation, including a suitable outdoor area. Strategic leadership is effective but there is insufficient day-to-day involvement of managers in the work of the Foundation Stage while the school attempts to appoint a new Foundation Stage co-ordinator.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement throughout the school, especially in English.
- Substantially increase the amount of teaching that is at least good.
- Develop provision in the Foundation Stage to increase the progress that children make and ensure learning opportunities are suitably stimulating.

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

Pupils reached below average standards in tests at the end of Year 2 in 2007, indicating satisfactory progress overall. Attainment was below average in reading and mathematics and well below average in writing. In tests at the end of Year 6, pupils reached broadly average standards overall, average standards in mathematics and science, but standards in English were significantly below average. Standards were reduced somewhat by the results of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, but all pupils underperformed in English. There has been good improvement in mathematics and science in recent years but the school is still working to raise standards in English. Pupils who took tests in 2007 made satisfactory progress during their time in Key Stage 2. Over time, progress has generally been average at Key Stage 2, with better progress in mathematics and science than in English. The school's very detailed tracking system shows that a number of pupils underachieved last year in Years 3 to 5, and that the attendance of several of these pupils was below average. The work the school is doing to identify and tackle underachievement is successfully reducing the number of pupils who are making less progress than they should. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, those with English as an additional language and of minority ethnic heritage make similar progress to their peers. Pupils with hearing impairment make good progress in developing communication skills.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Behaviour throughout the school is good. Pupils are usually attentive in lessons and apply themselves to the work they are set. They have positive attitudes to each other, there are good levels of mutual respect and relationships are secure. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall. They can articulate clearly what to do to maintain a healthy lifestyle and to keep themselves safe. Their contribution to the school community is strong,

for instance they take responsibility for the regular 'surgeries' that provide an opportunity for pupils to discuss any ideas or concerns they might have. The school council has an active membership from each of the year groups in the school, from Year 1 onwards. These opportunities to take responsibility mean that pupils are gaining useful skills and personal qualities. Overall, the school prepares them satisfactorily for their future and pupils gain a satisfactory range of basic skills. Variations in the quality of teaching mean that in some classes, pupils develop a stronger sense of self-belief and higher expectations for themselves than in others.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory overall. The school has worked systematically and tirelessly to deal with shortcomings in teaching. Classrooms are well-organised, behaviour is managed well and resources are prepared and put to good use in lessons. Staff usually plan lessons with a fairly clear indication of what pupils are expected to learn. However, pupils sometimes complete the same work without due regard being taken of the different abilities within the class. Work is generally marked regularly: it sometimes provides pupils with very good information about how to improve their work but this is not the case in all classes. The deployment of support staff means that pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make similar progress to their peers, and the support given in lessons to pupils with hearing impairment is good. Expectations of what pupils can do and achieve are variable. In some of the work seen in Key Stage 1, over-use of worksheets limits opportunities for practical work and open-ended activity. However, staff make good use of information and communication technology, using the interactive whiteboards to illustrate and reinforce the points being made.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

A wide range of school clubs, activities and visits together with good levels of instrumental tuition boosts the curriculum and makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development. A special feature is the Friday 'Smart Time' in which pupils of different ages develop their talents in areas such as Irish dancing, pottery and sign language. Visiting Spanish students help to develop pupils' linguistic skills and pupils' cultural understanding is enhanced by strong links with a school in Murcia, Spain. Specialist sports coaches from local secondary schools strengthen the curriculum in gymnastics, basketball and netball. Some useful initiatives have been introduced to raise the achievement of different groups of pupils, for example, 'Talking Partners' to extend pupils' speaking and listening skills. However, the curriculum is satisfactory overall because planning in English and mathematics, whilst stronger than it was, does not always ensure that pupils are consistently well challenged. This results in uneven progress and there are too few opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills across the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school is a caring community in which the contributions and suggestions from pupils are valued and respected. It provides good personal guidance and the support it provides for pupils is underpinned by effective links with external agencies. Pupils have some awareness about

what they should be learning next, but their knowledge of how to improve their work is inconsistent. There are appropriate procedures to make sure pupils feel safe and to ensure they are protected. A great deal of work has been done to create an effective assessment system which gives a very graphic analysis of what pupils have achieved and how far they still have to progress to meet national expectations. Pupils with learning difficulties, including those with hearing impairment, are supported effectively. Those who are eligible for free school meals gained particularly low scores in tests in 2007, however, indicating that they would benefit from greater support. There are good procedures in place for promoting good attendance and the school is rigorous in its efforts to tackle irregular attendance. Partnership with parents is satisfactory: the school is working to involve parents more closely in its work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Self-evaluation is highly focused and an exceptionally thorough tracking system has been put in place which enables senior managers to identify exactly how well pupils are progressing. This is being used very well not only to judge the school's effectiveness but also to tackle shortcomings in teaching. Rigorous monitoring by the headteacher and deputy, with regular input by the local authority, has significantly reduced the amount of inadequate teaching but there is more work to do to ensure all pupils are suitably challenged. Freeing the deputy head from a regular teaching commitment is now enabling him to provide coaching to bring all teaching up to a consistently satisfactory or better level. Senior managers have gained valuable skills, for instance through completing leadership courses, and performance management is now being used well to make teachers more accountable for pupils' progress. Leadership and management are satisfactory rather than good, however, because senior managers are overburdened with too many responsibilities. Their energies are spread thinly because there are too few other experienced teachers leading school improvement. Governance is satisfactory and improving and a number of new governors have recently been appointed. Governors provide good support to the school and are developing their skills in challenging its effectiveness.

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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	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
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	3
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	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	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

22 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Chestnuts Primary School, Milton Keynes, MK3 5EN

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed our visit, and now I am writing to tell you about what we found.

This is a satisfactory school. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and she and the other senior managers are working very hard to improve the school for you. Most of your parents are pleased with its work and some of them have noticed how much the school is improving. For example, you now have an excellent library and a magical room to use for activities like 'Talking Partners'.

Most of you are making satisfactory progress with your work and you are learning a lot in some classes. By the time you leave, you generally reach higher standards in mathematics and science than in English. Teaching is satisfactory and there is more good teaching than there was. Those of you with hearing impairment receive a good education. Teaching in the unit is of high quality and communicators support you well in other lessons in the school.

You are all well cared for and some of you told us how much you enjoy school. Behaviour is good and you have many opportunities to take responsibility. There are interesting things to do, for instance, during the 'Smart Time' on Fridays and through links with other schools.

The headteacher, senior managers and governors want to make the school as good as they can for you. In order to do this, we have asked them to:

- help you to learn more, especially in English
- increase the amount of teaching that is at least good
- improve the Foundation Stage so that children make more progress and are always given interesting things to do.

You can help them with this by working really hard, especially with your writing.

Best wishes

Margaret Goodchild

Lead inspector