

Queen's Park Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109437
Local Authority	Bedfordshire
Inspection number	324959
Inspection dates	15–16 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Helen Ranger

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	523
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	106
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Fred Birkett
Headteacher	Mrs Anne McComick
Date of previous school inspection	19 September 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Chestnut Avenue Bedford MK40 4HA
Telephone number	01234 352901
Fax number	01234 269426

Age group	3–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The great majority of pupils in this large school come from Asian or Eastern European backgrounds; most are from Pakistani or Bangladeshi families. About 10% of pupils are White British. The overwhelming majority of pupils do not speak English as their first language and a very high proportion are at an early stage of learning the language. Twenty-two languages are spoken in the school. This part of Bedford has been identified as one of high social and economic disadvantage. The number of pupils entitled to free school meals is twice the national average. The local population is very mobile and many more pupils join or leave the school during the school year than is usual. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, mostly in speech, communication or behaviour, is broadly average.

The school has a large Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) department on a site adjacent to the main school and next door to the Queen's Park Neighbourhood Centre, which includes a Children's Centre. The centre has close links with this school and with Westfield Middle and Biddenham Upper schools; the three schools form Bedfordshire's first Full Service Extended School. Queen's Park Lower and Biddenham Upper are part of a local project working with families who educate their children at home and 64 of those children are on the register at Queen's Park Lower. The project helps to provide educational resources for these families and enables parents to access national tests and examinations for their children.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. Since its last inspection, staff have continued to build very well on the good practice identified then. The headteacher has played a key role in establishing an extremely effective team of staff and governors, ensuring continuity and stability for pupils and helping them to overcome any challenges they face. A particularly impressive feature of the provision is the way in which staff reach out to the community and welcome and include pupils from very diverse backgrounds to an outstanding degree.

Pupils do so well because the teaching and the curriculum are excellent. As one parent commented, 'Everybody goes out of their way to improve standards and accommodate the children.' Teachers rightly place a very high priority on developing pupils' language and social skills and this is extremely successful. Children mainly start Nursery with attainment that is much lower than expected nationally for three-year-olds. Many have a very poor grasp of English and need careful nurturing to settle into school. Further up the school, a relatively high proportion of the older pupils arrive from abroad or from other schools and also need a lot of help with English and socialisation. It is a testament to the staff's success that parents' and pupils' views of the school are overwhelmingly positive. The academic standards reached by Year 4 when pupils move to middle school are often below the levels expected nationally, especially in literacy and numeracy. However, this represents outstanding achievement compared with their starting points. Pupils also make excellent progress in their personal development. The school is a vibrant and harmonious community. Pupils behave extremely well and form excellent relationships with others from a wide range of different backgrounds. They take full advantage of the many opportunities planned to help them understand how to lead safe and healthy lifestyles. The large number of parents who contributed their opinions to inspectors were unanimous about how well cared for and supported their children are, and inspectors agree with their views.

Outstanding leadership and management underpin the school's achievements. Staff and governors have forged extensive links with other community agencies to promote a strong spirit of cohesion. This is exemplified by the strong partnerships with neighbouring schools and the successful project with home-educated pupils. Such links demonstrate the richness of the curriculum. Pupils have access to a very wide range of activities. In lessons, this includes strong international and multi-cultural dimensions. Staff responsibilities are delegated well and supported by an extensive programme of professional development. Teachers and governors monitor provision closely. Each pupil's progress is tracked carefully and careful planning ensures that provision meets the needs of every individual. Although the headteacher and her staff are somewhat modest about their achievements, the school has a clear view of its strengths and how it intends to improve further. Its track record of rapid improvement in recent years demonstrates an excellent capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The highly skilled leadership and management of the school have an equal impact in the EYFS. Children settle extremely well into the Nursery following an excellent induction programme which is designed to meet individual needs and provides all with a confident and positive start to school life. The children's personal, social and emotional development is promoted particularly well. As they progress through the Nursery and Reception classes, children make excellent

progress in key language skills because teaching and learning are outstanding. Speaking and listening activities help children to become more confident, communicate with each other and gain social skills. Individual progress is assessed, tracked and catered for very efficiently.

The EYFS curriculum is highly effective in providing a broad range of activities that promotes almost all aspects of children's progress extremely well. There is a very good balance between opportunities for children to work and play independently and more structured adult-led activities such as the programme to learn letters and sounds. Both the indoor and outdoor areas are extensive and well resourced. However, staff do not always fully exploit these excellent facilities to make the children's learning as exciting and imaginative as possible.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that adults promote even more imagination and excitement in children's learning in Nursery and Reception.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

By the end of the EYFS, few children reach the goals expected nationally at the end of the Reception year because they have so much ground to cover, especially in their spoken language. However, they achieve very well in all areas of learning, especially in developing good attitudes to learning and in their physical and emotional development. The school's results in the national assessments at the end of Year 2 are often much lower than national averages but represent very good progress for the individuals concerned, especially in the key skills of reading and writing. The school's rigorous tracking of its various ethnic groups shows that pupils do equally well, whatever their backgrounds. This is also the case for those who have a particular learning difficulty that requires them to have extra adult help. The inspection did not focus on the full range of subjects but a good standard of work was evident in the numerous displays around the school, in subjects such as art, science, history and geography.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Due to the high quality of pastoral and spiritual support provided, pupils quickly develop a set of principles and values to guide them. They gain immense respect for each other and the adults who care for them. This and the almost complete absence of racism or unkind behaviour mean that pupils feel completely safe and able to enjoy their school experiences to the full. Behaviour is excellent because pupils see purpose in their schooling. Democratically elected representatives carry out key roles in pupil leadership. They make exceptionally strong contributions to the school community, such as by helping to appoint staff and taking decisions about pupil behaviour policy. This and their fast developing abilities to work co-operatively and to work hard mean that they are well prepared for later lives, despite standards in basic skills which are not quite as high as the national average. Attendance, rates have improved dramatically in recent years due to the rigorous monitoring procedures carried out by staff and the commitment made by many parents. The Healthy School Award is a just recognition of pupils' excellent understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching is confident, supportive and self-assured. The inspection endorsed the school's own observations that lessons are consistently at least good and often outstanding. Teaching is extremely effective in ensuring pupils acquire basic skills efficiently and enjoyably, especially in speaking and listening, in promoting high quality working relationships and in enabling pupils to work independently. Staff plan rigorously for the full range of needs in each class with clear lesson objectives that are communicated effectively to pupils. Teachers assess progress regularly and use the information very efficiently to support or modify their planning. Learning resources, including information and communication technology equipment, engage pupils' interest extremely well. Teaching assistants are used very well so that pupils receive plenty of adult help, including those with moderate learning difficulties and the small number with statements of special educational needs. The 'Little Sanctuary' provides a haven for pupils who need extra time and space to learn efficiently.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

There are many outstanding features of the curriculum. The recent International Schools Award recognises the high quality of the provision made. The school also holds a Basic Skills Award and Activemark. International Week is an excellent example of how teachers are creative in linking subjects together, such as art, craft and geography in a recent study of native North Americans. Well planned topics have been developed and refined over time, providing teachers and pupils with exciting ideas for learning, which are thoughtfully adjusted to meet the range of pupil needs. There is exceptionally strong provision for pupils' personal, social and health education, which is why pupils' well-being is highly secure.

Curriculum enrichment is first rate. Not only is there a good range of after-school clubs, especially sporting ones, but the school's local partnerships enhance learning. For instance, the work that the school does with the neighbouring Children's Centre encourages parents' understanding of their children's learning. A 'faith walk' in the local area linking a church, a temple and a mosque is a superb example of the very wide range of visits arranged to give purpose to pupils' learning. The project with home-educating families has resulted in that group of parents being able to broaden the social and educational experiences available to their children, for instance through visits to places of interest and by using sports facilities. Representatives of the families who participate express very positive views of the initiative.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pastoral support for all children is outstanding with particular importance being given to supporting the acquisition of English as an additional language. Parents' and pupils' views of the school are highly complimentary. Child protection, safeguarding and other health and safety procedures are taken very seriously, promoting children's safety extremely well within the school environment. Provision for pupils who need some extra help with learning is managed very well, with individual needs identified and catered for effectively. This includes support for

home-educated children and their families where appropriate. One such parent wrote, 'The scheme has been an invaluable source of support, advice and information.'

All pupils' achievements are regularly monitored to ensure that the curriculum and any additional help are targeted to ensure that all pupils make progress. Due consideration is given to the diverse nature of the school community and parents appreciate how much their children are encouraged to celebrate and share their various cultures. Children are given good quality academic support through the effective school systems for setting targets and marking.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher is clear-sighted and highly experienced. Together with three assistant heads, she manages a large staff extremely well. Responsibilities are widely delegated so that staff develop their own leadership skills efficiently and contribute very well to the school's agenda for improvement. Pupils' performance and the quality of provision are monitored rigorously, including the achievements of the schools' various minority ethnic groups. Over the past few years, a core group of exceptionally committed and skilled governors has been established and the school's complement of parent governors represents the diversity of the local community very well. Governors are active, well informed and hold the school to account. There is close teamwork among staff and governors, typified by their annual Strategy Day discussions. This teamwork results in scrupulous self-evaluation and relevant initiatives for the future, summarised in a comprehensive, well-focused development plan. The school has established excellent relationships with parents and with its local community in general.

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?	1
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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
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 learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

17 October 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Queen's Park Lower School, Bedford, MK40 4HA

I am writing to thank you all for your very friendly welcome and help during our recent visit to your school. It was a real pleasure for us to meet you all.

You and your parents told us that you go to a very special school and we agree. In fact we think that it is outstanding! The school is a lively, busy place to be and it welcomes all of you and your families. You all get on with each other extremely well. You told us how much you enjoy school and we could see why. All of you, right from the start, make excellent progress in your work and in how you grow up as young people.

The adults in your school teach you and care for you so well. You told us that school is a very safe and healthy place to be and adults help with any problems. There are so many ways the staff let you share your ideas to make your school even better and to work in your local community. A special thank you goes to the leaders of your World Families who talked to us.

The staff and governors work as an excellent team to make sure that your school does all it can for you. Mrs McCormick leads this big team extremely well. Because of this, the school has just kept on getting better since it was last inspected. There is only one thing that we have asked the staff to do even better. We think that the youngest children could be given activities that help them to use their imagination even more. For example, the Early Years building has such a lovely big outdoor area that would be perfect to use for really exciting activities.

We are sure you will carry on enjoying all that your school does for you.

Best wishes

Helen Ranger

Lead inspector