

Shefford Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109479
Local Authority	Bedfordshire
Inspection number	324965
Inspection dates	13–14 October 2008
Reporting inspector	John Messer

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)	317
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	81
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Glenda Tizard
Headteacher	Mrs Tracey Callender
Date of previous school inspection	20 October 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	School Lane Shefford Bedfordshire SG17 5XA
Telephone number	01462 629123
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Age group	3–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This lower school is larger than most. It has eight classes for pupils from Years 1 to 4 as well as two Reception classes and a Nursery for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and a small proportion are from minority ethnic groups. Several pupils speak English as an additional language and a few are at an early stage of learning to speak English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The attainment of children on entry to the school is in line with expectations for their age. The school has the Activemark for its work on developing physical education, the Foundation Level International Schools Award and the bronze Eco-school Award. The governing body manages a newly opened Children's Centre which serves the needs of the local community. There is a privately run 'before and after school' club and a playgroup on site.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school's self-evaluation is accurate in judging its overall effectiveness to be good. It has some outstanding features. Pupils' personal development supports their learning exceptionally well. They are happy, sensible, eager to please and keen to succeed. Relationships are excellent. Pupils are friendly and support each other extremely well, sharing ideas and tackling problems together. They have a keen sense of justice and support charitable fund raising events wholeheartedly in order to help those who are less fortunate than themselves. They participate in local events and make a very strong contribution to the community.

Outstanding care, guidance and support promote health, welfare and well-being especially well. Pupils' safety is given top priority and the school maintains high levels of pastoral care. Pupils with physical problems are looked after sensitively. Pupils' knowledge of how to stay safe is excellent as is their understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles. They say they would have no hesitation in sharing worries with any member of staff. Pupils receive very good guidance about how to reach the next steps in their learning. The informative way that teachers discuss and mark pupils' work, together with clear targets in literacy and numeracy, helps pupils to understand what they need to do to improve. Pupils who find learning difficult are supported especially well and their achievement is often outstanding.

The exceptionally rich curriculum is relevant to pupils' needs and promotes a well-rounded education. Pupils are prepared well for transfer to the middle school. There is an appropriately strong emphasis on literacy, numeracy, science and information and communication technology (ICT). Music, drama, dance, art and design feature prominently. French is taught well and the Spanish club is over-subscribed. Pupils also enjoy a wide range of sporting activities. The school has redesigned its curriculum so that the requirements of the National Curriculum are taught through a thematic approach that matches the interests of pupils and stimulates their curiosity.

Pupils make good progress. By Year 4, they attain standards that are above national expectations in reading and mathematics and well above average in writing. The high quality of pupils' writing is a key strength. This is the result of a whole school concerted effort to improve the teaching of writing, which has borne fruit. Girls' performance is better than that of boys, particularly in literacy. The school's analysis of its performance has revealed the need to concentrate on improving the performance of boys, particularly in reading.

Teaching is good and occasionally outstanding. Teachers plan and prepare lessons carefully and interactive white boards are used well to support learning. Teaching is often imaginative, as when a teacher entered the room dressed as a Japanese girl, to help pupils develop descriptive writing. In some lessons time is not always used to best effect and teachers spend too long explaining things rather than getting on with practical activities. There is sometimes a lack of urgency about packing as much learning as possible into a teaching session.

The headteacher's outstanding leadership gives the school very clear direction. There has been significant improvement recently, particularly in developing the roles of subject leaders, whose efforts to raise standards further are beginning to have an impact. The governing body has developed good systems for monitoring the school's performance and holding it to account. Governors correctly report that the school is certainly pointing in the right direction. They conclude that the school is poised to improve further once curricular developments become fully embedded. The majority of parents are pleased with the education provided for their

children. One commented, 'Although it is a large school, it has somehow managed to establish a feeling that it is really one big family where everybody matters.'

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Nursery and Reception classes are hives of activity and children make good progress in all areas of learning. Staff work well together as a team and provision is led and managed well. All adults make sure that pupils are safe and feel secure. Children's welfare is safeguarded exceptionally well. Children receive a warm welcome when they start in the Nursery. They make good progress, with personal development being a notable strength. There is a strong emphasis on encouraging their confidence and independence. Staff concentrate on communication skills and extending children's vocabulary. They maintain high expectations of children and encourage deep discussions about why things are as they are.

A wide range of activities is provided for children in the Reception classes. They enjoy pedalling furiously around the playground and screeching to a halt when the traffic lights turn red, being careful not to crash into other traffic. The links between letters and the sounds they represent are taught rigorously. This gives children a flying start in developing early reading and writing skills. However, sometimes lessons lack sufficient imagination to capture children's interest. Real fruit and vegetables are sold in the greengrocer's shop and children are making sure that customers pay the right amount of money. Traditional stories and themes, such as learning about autumn, are designed to add structure to learning. The wide range of activities is not always sufficiently linked together across the EYFS to provide a completely purposeful curriculum to maximise learning. Children develop as confident learners whose curiosity is stimulated well.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make sure that time is always used effectively to promote learning.
- Raise the attainment of boys, particularly in reading.
- Forge clearer links between activities in the EYFS to make learning even more purposeful.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

All groups achieve well and make at least good progress. Pupils who find learning difficult and those with physical disabilities receive such good support that they often make exceptionally good progress. Boys make good progress but not as much as girls, especially in reading. Pupils who speak little English when they arrive soon become fluent and make as much progress as their classmates. In national assessments for pupils in Year 2, the school's performance was well above average in reading and mathematics and exceptionally high in writing. Pupils' good progress continues in Years 3 and 4 and by the end of Year 4, pupils attain standards that are above national expectations in reading and mathematics and well above in writing. The quality of writing produced by some of the pupils is outstanding. They achieve well in mathematics and are particularly interested in shape and space. A pupil in Year 4 explained that the only one-dimensional 'shape' is a line. Pupils' achievement across the curriculum is good. They develop a particularly good range of skills in ICT, music and French.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils enjoy school immensely. They talk enthusiastically about what they learn. Attendance is above average. Behaviour is excellent. Pupils say that they feel very safe in school. Pupils listen attentively to each other. Paired activities work especially well because pupils offer each other support in a very mature manner. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They greatly appreciate celebrating natural beauty through art, design and music. Pupils are friendly, considerate and show great respect towards each other and to adults.

Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to stay healthy. They are very aware of healthy diets and a good number participate keenly in the after school sporting activities. Pupils of all ages feel very pleased when given special responsibilities. They consider themselves very much part of the local neighbourhood, helping senior citizens and a local care home. Pupils are very happy and have a genuine willingness to do their best, to help others and develop their own independence. These values, together with good standards in literacy, numeracy and ICT, means they are well prepared for the next stages of education and future life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good so children learn effectively and achieve well. Some lessons are taught creatively and these fire pupils' imaginations. In a literacy lesson for pupils in Year 1, for example, a special box was introduced that contained a magical gift to help them on their journey through a magic mirror. There were gasps of excitement as the box was unwrapped and pupils thrilled with anticipation. Here, teaching was outstanding and provided great stimulus for writing. In some lessons the point of the activity is not fully explained and so pupils' interest is not always captured and the pace of learning slows. In a numeracy lesson, for example, pupils were not clear about why knowledge of fractions might help them in everyday life. Sometimes teachers talk too much rather than allowing pupils to get on with practical work and on these occasions learning is less effective.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school has improved its curriculum very significantly. New strategies have helped teachers to plan interesting and relevant ways to link pupils' learning across different subjects. Such links are not so well established in the EYFS. Opportunities for enrichment, through the many extra-curricular activities, visits and events, such as the multi-cultural music workshops, are often outstanding. The school proudly displays vibrant examples of pupils' work in writing, art and design and ICT. Pupils think hard about what it would feel like to be an Australian aborigine and be invaded by Europeans and this helps them to understand different cultural perspectives. Music plays a key part in the school's life with individual music tuition and performances in and out of school. Teachers and teaching assistants go out of their way to ensure that pupils who find learning difficult do not miss out on any aspect of the exciting curriculum. Links with other schools are excellent and support learning very well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The high quality of the nurturing environment helps all groups of pupils to thrive and flourish. Staff willingly provide additional medical care for particularly vulnerable pupils so they feel included, safe and valued. Partnerships with a wide range of agencies and professionals, particularly through the children's centre, enhance the school's work well. There are good procedures to ensure pupils are kept safe. Checks on the suitability of staff and procedures for child protection meet requirements fully. Teachers and other staff use assessment information effectively to identify and support pupils who are at risk of underachieving. Pupils have personal targets in literacy and mathematics and most know what they are aiming for. Excellent targeted support is given to pupils who have specific learning needs. Pupils in one class are taught sign language to help them share an understanding of communication problems and so that each and every member of the class can communicate with each other.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and her deputy share a passion for making sure that the school provides well for each and every pupil. Many of the leadership team are relatively new and are still establishing their leadership roles. They have produced good action plans with a strong focus on improving the quality of provision and raising attainment. The effect of their good leadership skills is still to have a major impact but all are pulling together. Governors bring a good range of expertise. They make sure that the school makes a good contribution to community cohesion. They monitor the work of the school closely and are in tune with the school's senior leadership team in its efforts to further improve the quality of provision. The school has a good capacity for continued development.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
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?	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/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?	2
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?	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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

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

15 October 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Shefford Lower School, Shefford, SG17 5XA

What a lovely school! We thoroughly enjoyed the short time we spent with you. Thank you for being so friendly and helpful.

We think that you get a good start to your education and there are many good things about your school. You are keen to learn and eager to succeed. You are extremely sensible and thoughtful. You are sensitive to the needs of others and hate it when anybody is unhappy. You like learning new things. You work willingly but also enjoy having fun. Those of you who find it rather difficult to learn new things get excellent support for your learning. You make good progress in literacy, numeracy, learning French, ICT and sport. Girls tend to do better than boys in literacy, especially in reading. You keep yourselves fit by having plenty of exercise. You know how to stay safe and look after yourselves and others. You told us that one of the best things about the school was the friendships you make. You and your parents also appreciate all the help that the teachers and support staff give you. All the grown ups try hard to help you to feel happy and to learn successfully. Mrs Callender and all the staff are keen to make the school even better and to make your lessons even more exciting.

We think that there are three main things that would make your school even better.

- We have asked your teachers to make even better use of time in lessons to improve your learning
- We have asked that teaching helps some of the boys to make as much progress as the girls, especially in reading.
- We have asked that teaching in the Nursery and Reception classes makes clearer links between all the activities offered so that children gain a deeper understanding of their world.

We know that you want to do your best and we think that if you continue to work hard you are capable of attaining even higher standards.

We wish you every success in the future.

John Messer

Lead inspector