

Watling Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109499
Local Authority	Bedfordshire
Inspection number	324972
Inspection date	5 March 2009
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	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	187
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	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Andrew Foster
Headteacher	Mr Ian Black
Date of previous school inspection	28 February 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Bull Pond Lane Dunstable Bedfordshire LU6 3BJ
Telephone number	01582 662232
Fax number	01582 475936

Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage, pupils' personal development, pupils' progress in literacy and numeracy and the standards that they attain. Evidence was gathered from classroom visits, scrutiny of pupils' work, parents' questionnaires, discussions with staff, pupils and governors and examination of school documentation, including assessment data and the school's self-evaluation. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation form, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This first school is smaller than average. It has seven classes including a Reception class for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and 10% are from minority ethnic families. Several pupils speak English as an additional language and a few are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is well below average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. Children's attainment on entry to the school is in line with national expectations. The proportion of pupils who enter or leave the school part-way through this phase of their education is above average and is particularly high in Years 3 and 4. The school holds the International Schools Award, the Activemark Award, the Artsmark Gold Award and the Basic Skills Quality Mark.

There is a playgroup, a breakfast club, an after school club and a holiday club, on site that are not managed by the school's governing body, and this provision is inspected separately.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. Pupils make good progress and attain standards in reading and writing that are well above average. Pupils make exceptionally good progress in Key Stage 1 and by the end of Year 2 attain standards that are exceptionally high in literacy and numeracy. Progress is good in English in Key Stage 2 and by Year 4 pupils attain standards that are well above average. Although standards in mathematics are above average by the end of Year 4, pupils do not always make as much progress as they should because sometimes teachers' expectations of pupils' performance are not as high as they could be. In some year groups high levels of mobility tend to interrupt learning and constrain achievement. Pupils who speak English as an additional language quickly become fluent and make good progress. Pupils who find learning difficult are supported well and make good progress towards the targets in their individual education plans. Work is adjusted so that faster learners are appropriately challenged and make good progress.

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall but it is uneven and ranges from outstanding to satisfactory. Pupils make excellent progress in the best lessons but progress slows significantly in some classes. In most lessons the pace of teaching is brisk and explanations are clear so that pupils quickly master new skills. A productive, business-like ethos is established in most classrooms. In both key stages there are occasions when teachers' expectations of the progress that pupils should make are not high enough. Consequently progress is uneven, especially in mathematics.

Pupils' good personal development supports their learning effectively. They are well motivated, keen to learn and eager to succeed. Their attendance is good. They have developed a good work ethic which helps prepare them for transfer to the next phase of their education and for their future lives. They thoroughly enjoy school and make friends easily. They are sensitive to the needs of others and have a strong sense of justice and fair play. The school council represents the school community well and understands its role in contributing to school improvement. Pupils show their understanding of their responsibility to the wider community through their wholehearted support of charitable fund raising events. They develop a good understanding of different cultures and beliefs through the school's International Days and through celebrating festivals, such as the Chinese New Year.

The good curriculum meets the interests of all learners well. It is enriched by a good range of after school clubs, educational visits and special events, such as World Book Day. Pupils find the curriculum interesting and stimulating and this enhances their eagerness to learn. Visitors to the school bring a wealth of knowledge to share with pupils. One of the school's key priorities is to develop the curriculum so that it fully meets pupils' needs in our changing technological society. The school has good plans to develop pupils' skills in information and communication technology and technological expertise.

Pupils report that they feel safe and secure in school. Good attention is paid to pastoral care and appropriate child protection procedures are in place. Pupils receive good guidance about road safety, and know how to lead healthy lifestyles and to look after themselves. Teachers mark pupils' work carefully and the best marking gives pupils clear guidance about how to improve their work. Pupils have clear targets to aim for in literacy and numeracy and this helps them to understand how to reach the next stages in their learning.

The leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher and the senior leadership team give clear direction. The governing body monitors the work of the school closely and governors have a clear understanding of the issues facing the school. They make sure that all legal requirements are met. The school has embraced the need to draw all parts of the local community together in a common pursuit of developing opportunities for all. It has also reached out to communities in other countries in order to foster a closer understanding of how to look after our planet. Most parents are pleased with the education provided for their children. A small minority feel that standards of behaviour have declined but inspection findings show that pupils behave well in and around the school. The school's self-evaluation is accurate in judging its overall effectiveness to be good. School development plans include a strong focus on maintaining high standards. Although leaders analyse the school's performance in detail, there is a tendency to celebrate the standards attained without noting exactly how much progress this represents from one year to the next. Consequently, the analyses do not always highlight precisely where improvements are needed. There has been good improvement since the last inspection and the school is well placed to develop further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

From their starting points on entry, children make good progress. By the end of the Reception Year, most attain above average standards in all areas of learning. They are well placed to achieve well in Key Stage 1. The leadership and management are good and staff have a clear understanding of how to promote children's learning and well-being.

The children skip happily into school each morning. Under the watchful eyes of their teachers, they quickly settle down and are enthusiastic learners. They benefit from the warm and caring ethos of the classroom, in which they are all regarded as special and important. They enjoy all the different opportunities they are offered, including the excitement of dressing up as a book character for World Book Day. The well-being and personal development of the children is carefully monitored. Staff quickly spotted that a few children without a costume on World Book Day, felt left out and action was taken at once to rectify the situation. Behaviour is good and children relate well both to each other and to the adults. Good behaviour is not by chance and teachers take care to teach and model for children how they should show good manners and consideration for others. The children have opportunities to develop independence as they choose activities for themselves. There are also carefully planned sessions in which children work directly with adults, who extend and direct activities so that all areas of learning are taught and the needs of all abilities are met. The welfare of the children is actively promoted. Healthy snacks, such as fruit are on offer and there is water available at all times. The outside environment gives lots of opportunities for physical activity and skills. Children develop coordination and balance as they bravely scramble across the big climbing apparatus. Although the learning environment both inside and outside has improved recently, there is scope for further improvement, so that it is more stimulating and children can move freely between the two. Parents are welcome in the setting and helped to support their children's learning. To encourage this, newsletters, reading books and key word activities, are all shared with home. The fortnightly shared learning activity for parents to enjoy with their children, is very much appreciated.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise teachers' expectations of pupils' achievement in mathematics in Key Stage 2.

- Improve the consistency of teaching and learning across the school, so that more lessons reach the high quality of the best.
- Improve the learning environment, both outside and inside, for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage so it is more stimulating and accessible.

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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?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
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	2

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?	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
The extent to which 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 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

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	2
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**

6 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Watling Lower School, Dunstable, LU6 3BJ

We thoroughly enjoyed spending World Book Day with you. We felt a little out of place at first as we were the only ones not dressed up as characters from fiction. You were friendly and helpful and soon put us at our ease.

You think that your school is a good school. We agree. Staff help you to make good progress. You are particularly good at reading and writing. You know how to use powerful adjectives and adverbs to make your writing colourful. Also you set out your work neatly and your handwriting is clear and easy to read. You are getting really good at spelling tricky words. You make very good progress in mathematics in Years 1 and 2 but progress is not so fast in Years 3 and 4, especially in mathematics.

You are polite and kind to each other. You make friends easily and you behave sensibly. You told us that there is no bullying and that any incidents of unkindness or rough behaviour are dealt with quickly and effectively. Your teachers work hard to help you learn. You know about how important it is to eat a balanced diet that includes lots of healthy foods and that you must take plenty of exercise. You learn about road safety and how to take care of yourselves. You know how to use the internet safely.

You told us that you enjoy lessons. You learn a great deal of interesting things in school and the big events, such as World Book Day, help to make learning fun. There are three things that we think could help to improve the school further. We have asked the teachers to help you to make even more progress in Years 3 and 4 in mathematics. There is some exceptionally good teaching in the school and we have asked the school leaders to try to bring all the teaching up to this standard. We think that facilities for children in the Reception class could be even more stimulating and exciting, both inside and outside.

We know that you all work hard and we are sure that if you continue to do your best the school will go from strength to strength.

Yours sincerely

John Messer

Lead inspector