

Ursula Taylor VC Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109597
Local Authority	Bedfordshire
Inspection number	324985
Inspection dates	4–5 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Kathryn Burdis HMI

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	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	208
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 Nigel Sparrow
Headteacher	Mrs Lindsay Fraser
Date of previous school inspection	17 January 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	High Street Clapham Bedford Bedfordshire MK41 6EG
Telephone number	01234 359128
Fax number	01234 326251

Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector.

Description of the school

This is an average sized school. The social and economic circumstances of most pupils are average for England although the school identifies some areas of significant deprivation. Attainment on entry is below the expected level. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average and includes those with moderate learning difficulties and behavioural, emotional, and social difficulties. The majority of pupils are White British and a few speak a first language other than English. The school is arranged in nine classes, including two classes for the Early Years Foundation Stage. In September 2008, the school introduced 'Active Club' extending provision from 8.00am to 6.00pm.

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 and improving school. 'A warm, caring well run school which provides children with a safe, secure and fun environment in which to learn' is a typical comment that reflects the parents' unanimous support for the school. Leadership and management are good. The headteacher, who provides first class leadership and very clear direction, is well supported by enthusiastic staff and effective governors. Since the last inspection the school has introduced rigorous systems for evaluating its work and the outcomes are providing the challenge needed to raise standards further. Subject leaders have developed their roles and a strong focus on professional development has extended the range of teaching approaches. The school has good capacity to improve further.

Children get off to a flying start in the Reception classes and make good progress as a result of good teaching and motivating activities, although too few opportunities are planned for them to experiment and investigate. Activities in the outdoor area are not always sufficiently purposeful to promote learning. Standards at the end of Year 2 have fluctuated in recent years and in 2008 were below national averages in reading and writing. The school has accurately identified what needs to be done and put in place measures that have reversed a dip in standards. Currently good progress is being maintained, with pupils on track to achieve the expected levels in the end-of-key-stage assessments in reading, writing and mathematics. Action taken to respond to identified underachievement in Years 3 and 4 is leading to very good progress, with pupils predicted to exceed their targets by the end of Year 4.

The good progress now seen is due to effective assessment and tracking systems and good teaching. Activities are varied and well-planned and designed to motivate and encourage pupils to persevere. Teachers plan well for pupils of all abilities across all subjects and always explain to them the purpose of the activity and what it is they are going to learn. They do not always offer enough guidance to help pupils understand what it is they have to do next to improve their work. The curriculum is under review, as the school wants to make it even more captivating, but is currently good, offering a broad range of subjects, including French and strong music provision. Pupils' behaviour is good because teachers have high expectations and there are positive, respectful relationships between pupils and adults in the school.

The school is focused on ensuring that pupils make good academic progress, but not at the expense of their personal development, which is good. Pupils feel safe and have confidence in the staff of the school. The school promotes healthy lifestyles effectively and an exciting range of good quality sporting activities engages them before, during and after school time. The school is effectively developing its strategy to promote community cohesion. The Christian ethos of the school promotes spiritual awareness and tolerance of the views of others. Pupils willingly make an active contribution to their school and the wider community. They have made a meaningful contribution to the global community raising money for a Ugandan charity. The focus on literacy and numeracy prepares them well for the future. The Active Club, opened in response to parents' requests, provides good quality care both before and after school, which pupils thoroughly enjoy.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children scamper happily into the Reception classrooms where they receive a warm and friendly welcome. Teaching is good and there is a good balance between allowing the children to choose what to do and the direct teaching of skills. There are, however, too few opportunities for children to experiment, investigate and follow their own lines of enquiry. Children achieve well in all areas of learning and many attain the expected levels by the time they transfer into Year 1. They enjoy a wide range of interesting activities, such as whizzing around the playground on tricycles, sledging down grassy banks and blowing streams of glistening soap bubbles. Through such experiences, they develop well socially, physically and emotionally. They are fascinated by all the activities that spring from the topics they study. As part of their Chinese New Year celebrations, for example, they ate Chinese food, opened a class Chinese restaurant, made dragon kites and even learned to sing a song in Chinese. Such projects stimulate a fascination for finding out more about their world. Children have become expert at using the digital camera to record activities and they develop a good range of computer skills. There is a strong emphasis on teaching children the relationship between letters and the sounds they represent. This rigorous training in phonics gives them a secure basis for developing early reading and writing skills. Handwriting is taught well and many children are already developing a neat joined script. Children's safety and welfare are top priorities and they are all looked after with great care. The outside area is developing well as a learning resource but leaders have identified the need to develop it further so that activities are more purposeful and productive. Leadership and management are good. The new co-ordinator has introduced many new initiatives that are beginning to accelerate the progress that children make in the key areas of communication, language and literacy, as well as in mathematical development. Parents are encouraged to participate fully in partnership with the school to promote children's learning. Children's personal development is a particularly strong feature. They are extremely confident and are bursting with enthusiasm for learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Plan more opportunities for children in the Reception class to experiment and investigate.
- Provide clearer guidance when explaining to pupils what they have to do to improve their learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement by the end of Year 2 is good. Although standards were below national levels in writing and reading at the end of Year 2 in 2008, school performance data now shows that pupils are progressing at a faster rate than previously. The school can show that gaps in learning have been identified and progress accelerated for those now in Years 3 and 4. Achievement by Year 4 is good. The whole-school focus on raising achievement in writing has been successful. Good progress for all has been attained through improvements in assessment, individualised support and target setting. Robust and targeted action, including training for staff, involving pupils in their own learning and regrouping them for specific support, are leading to sustained improvement. Challenging class and whole school targets have been set to address underachievement of different groups, such as girls' writing or those with English as an additional language. This is having a positive impact on individual progress and achievement. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make at least adequate progress and some make good

progress, especially in managing their behaviour. Pupils attain the expected levels in other subjects of the curriculum.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school is a harmonious community where pupils work and play happily together. Pupils are friendly and courteous. They thoroughly enjoy school and are extremely positive about all aspects of school life. Attendance is good. Pupils behave well in class and at playtimes. They become mature and caring individuals who are sensitive to the needs of others. Assemblies are extremely well led and are very effective in promoting spiritual development. During the collective acts of worship, pupils sing enthusiastically together and reflect seriously on social issues. In religious education lessons, they develop some understanding of different faiths but their appreciation of the wide range of cultures, customs and beliefs in our society is not well developed. Pupils willingly take on a range of responsibilities and the school council takes its role seriously. Pupils have a fierce sense of fair play and are keen to support those less fortunate than themselves. They have many fund raising ideas to support a community in Uganda with which the school has forged links. They have a good understanding of how to keep fit and healthy by eating a balanced diet and taking part in sporting activities. They know how to stay safe and look after themselves. Pupils develop as confident learners. They are building a good foundation for later life and the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress as a result of good teaching and well-planned activities. Teachers often plan fun and interesting activities that motivate pupils and encourage them to persevere even when they think the work is hard. Many classrooms buzz with purposeful activity as pupils work together to explore ideas. Occasionally teachers spend too long talking and pupils lose interest. Sometimes teaching assistants are not used well enough to support learning. Pupils who find learning hard are fully included in classroom activities as work is planned at the right level and teaching assistants support them well. Pupils' behaviour is good because teachers have high expectations and they are motivated by the tasks. Good subject knowledge, especially in literacy and mathematics, lends confidence to teaching, which engages all groups of learners and encourages them to work well both independently and in groups.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad and balanced, meeting all requirements, and there is a good focus on the development of pupils' key skills in literacy, numeracy, science and information and communication technology. The school has embarked on a necessary remodelling of the curriculum, by grouping subjects together and developing a thematic approach, to provide more stimulating activities and capture pupils' interests. The curriculum is modified appropriately to cater for the needs of pupils who find learning difficult. A particularly good initiative is the Friday afternoon sessions for older pupils, who have a special programme of activities designed to enhance their social and personal skills. French is taught to all pupils in Years 3 and 4 and they enjoy learning everyday words and phrases. Music is an important feature of the school's

curriculum. The choir has won awards locally for the quality of its performances. There is a very good range of after-school activities to enhance learning, including a club for gifted and talented pupils. Sports and the performing arts are well represented. Good links with the local independent school enhance learning opportunities for music, drama and literacy.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of the caring and nurturing environment helps all groups of pupils to thrive and flourish. Staff give pupils much praise and encouragement and this promotes good levels of self-confidence. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are robust. Checks on the suitability of staff and procedures for child protection meet requirements. Teachers 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 have some understanding of what they are aiming for. There is scope to make the target setting process clearer so that pupils develop a better idea of how to reach the next stages in their learning. Teachers mark pupils' work frequently. The approach, 'tickled pink' for work well done and 'room for growth' where improvements are needed, provides a motivating and easily understood way of helping pupils see how well they are doing. However, it does not always make it clear what they need to do to improve their work. Pupils report that they feel safe and secure in school and would have no hesitation in sharing any worries with an adult. Pupils' economic well-being is promoted effectively through the strong emphasis of developing key skills in literacy and numeracy.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides inspirational and purposeful leadership. She is firmly focused on making sure the school does all it can to help pupils reach the standards of which they are capable within a caring, lively learning environment. Areas of underachievement, identified through a very effective evaluation of the school's provision, are addressed robustly. A common sense of purpose and determination to promote further improvement is shared throughout the staff and governing body: they have introduced highly effective tracking systems and undertake regular assessments of individual pupils' achievements to measure progress, target action and inform challenging whole school targets. The positive impact of the approach is demonstrated in good progress, especially in writing, during the last year. Meeting the needs of every learner is central to the school's work and the leadership team is effective in identifying the needs of different groups such as those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or the gifted and talented. Approaches to promoting community cohesion are developing well and include developing awareness of pupils' home circumstances and culture. Good relationships have been forged with local schools, parents and external agencies such as social services and health services, increasing the support for pupils that are more vulnerable. The school has a deservedly good reputation in the local community.

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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	3
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**

5 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ursula Taylor First School, Clapham, MK41 6EG

Earlier this week we visited your school and spoke to many of you and watched you learning in class. We also looked at your work and talked to your teachers. You made us feel very welcome. Thank you so much. I hope you were able to enjoy playing in the snow - I will always remember you as the school where it snowed so hard I had to go home early.

We heard from you and your parents how much you enjoy school and we could see that you had many interesting things to do. We have thought hard about all the things we saw and I thought I would write to highlight the school's good features as well as some things we think need to improve.

- Your learning gets off to a flying start in the Reception class.
- You behave well in class and around the school. We saw many of you playing happily outside and the kindness you show to one another.
- You know how to stay safe and be healthy. It is the first time I have seen children keeping fit by Street Dancing in the morning - it looked to be such fun.
- All the adults in the school are working very hard to make sure you enjoy coming to school and learn as much as you can.
- Your attendance is good.

To make the school even better we have asked the governors and your teachers to:

- make sure that children in the Reception class have time to experiment and investigate so they can find things out for themselves
- explain more clearly what it is you need to do to make progress in your work.

Keep on enjoying school and making the most of all those exciting and interesting activities.

Yours faithfully

Kathryn Burdis

Her Majesty's Inspector