

Silsoe CofE VC Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109605
Local Authority	Bedfordshire
Inspection number	324988
Inspection date	6 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Mike Best

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	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	107
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	Mrs Jill Liddle
Headteacher	Mrs Susan Prudue
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	High Street Silsoe Bedford Bedfordshire MK45 4ES
Telephone number	01525 860247
Fax number	01525 862941

Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- the school's effectiveness in raising achievement in Years 3 and 4
- how well teachers promote pupils' investigative, research and problem-solving skills
- pupils' awareness of their individual targets and what they need to do to improve their work.

Inspectors gathered evidence from lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work, teachers' planning and records, discussions with pupils, parents, governors, the headteacher and staff, a scrutiny of school policies and documentation and an analysis of parents' responses to the inspection questionnaire. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The school serves the village of Silsoe and the surrounding area. It is smaller than the average primary school and the number on roll has fallen since the previous inspection. Children join the Early Years Foundation Stage in the September following their fourth birthday. The school hosts a nurture unit for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural needs that serves the north and central areas of the local authority. Currently, there are five pupils attending this provision.

Most children are from White British backgrounds and a small proportion have English as an additional language. While the overall proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average, the proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs is very high compared with the national average.

The school holds the Healthy Schools, Activemark and Eco school awards and has recently been commended at regional level for its work in promoting sustainability. The governing body manages the school's breakfast and after school clubs. There are currently 70 children on the register, 19 of whom are aged between three and five years. A maximum of 32 children attend per session. The privately run pre-school group which meets on the school site was inspected at the same time as the school and is reported upon separately.

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 a highly effective school where pupils are exceedingly well motivated, keen and happy. They thoroughly enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in their high attendance levels. Their behaviour is exemplary and relationships between all members of the school community are outstanding. Pupils apply themselves diligently to their work and take an active part in the life of the school, especially in sports and the arts. The school's strong focus on fostering and nurturing pupils at all levels is firmly rooted in its emphasis on the individual. It provides full equality of opportunity for all, and this is the cornerstone of its excellent provision for pupils' care, guidance and support. As a result, pupils thrive and are extremely well-prepared for the next stage of their education.

Pupils' achievement is outstanding. When they start in the Early Years Foundation Stage class, children's skills and experiences are broadly similar to those expected for their age. They make excellent progress, with most exceeding the early learning goals by the end of their Reception Year. Pupils maintain this momentum, reaching standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 that are consistently and exceptionally high. At the end of Year 4, standards are significantly higher than expected nationally. The excellent progress the school has made since the last inspection is particularly evident in the year-on-year improvement in achievement in mathematics. This reflects the systematic development of pupils' investigative and problem-solving skills as they move through the school. The school is successfully closing the gap between boys and girls attainment in writing. Its increased emphasis on writing for different purposes has particularly appealed to boys, especially when linked to history. Written accounts following first-hand research about evacuation and austerity during the Second World War are well structured, with imaginative use made of vocabulary. Throughout the school, pupils with learning difficulties or behavioural needs make excellent progress as a result of the first-class support they receive in addressing their individual needs. Pupils for whom English is an additional language also make excellent progress. The quality of pupils' artwork is well above that expected nationally as are their skills in information and communication technology.

Teaching and learning are outstanding. Pupils' excellent learning habits are expertly promoted through the consistency of the first-class teaching. Lessons are conducted at a brisk pace, with pupils fully aware from the start of what they are going to learn. Staff make skilled use of questioning to draw out pupils' previous knowledge and understanding, and help them adapt and extend their skills in new situations. Teachers' planning takes full account of pupils' different starting points and teaching assistants give valuable support, especially to those at risk of falling behind. In this positive and vibrant environment, pupils confidently ask questions, share their ideas and come up with possible solutions to problems. They are not afraid of making mistakes because they know that staff and fellow pupils will appreciate their efforts and help them find the right answer. Procedures for checking and tracking pupils' progress are highly developed and the information gathered is promptly used to target individual support. Pupils' work is regularly marked, often with comments advising them what they can do to improve. As a result of this and discussions in lessons, pupils have a clear understanding of their next steps in learning, but the school recognises that this can be further improved by more actively involving pupils in assessing their own work.

The curriculum and other activities meet pupils' needs and interests outstandingly well. Since the previous inspection, the school has revised its teaching plans to focus on the systematic development of skills, such as research and problem-solving, and a greater emphasis on

promoting pupils' creativity and investigative work. This is particularly evident in science where pupils logically plan, carry out and write up experiments using graphs, tables and diagrams to support their writing. Pupils' excellent personal development and well-being is extremely well supported by highly effective programmes for personal, social and health education and citizenship. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to keep safe and say they have no hesitation in turning to an adult for help. They praise the work of the 'playground buddies' in maintaining a happy atmosphere and are proud of their involvement, through the school council, in decision-making and organising fund-raising for charities. Pupils say how much they enjoy the breakfast and after school clubs where they can socialise with friends and participate in a wide range of activities. They are actively involved in the local community and with pupils from other schools in the area. Pupils have an excellent understanding of keeping healthy and the importance of eating a balanced diet. The school has recently audited its provision for promoting community cohesion. This highlights many strengths, particularly the inclusiveness of the school and the links with the local community. To raise its overall provision from good to outstanding, the school is in the process of establishing first-hand international links to develop further pupils' understanding of the global community.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher provides excellent direction for the school: her vision is steadfastly focused on pupils achieving their very best. The staff team work very well together, with individual roles and responsibilities clearly defined and understood by all. The school's self-evaluation is excellent, with a detailed analysis of standards and progress in each year group of outstanding quality. As a result, priorities for development are fully informed and the school has an excellent capacity for further improvement. Targets are challenging but achievable, and middle managers are highly focused on maintaining and further improving pupils' standards and progress. The governing body, in assiduously holding the school to account, directly evaluates the impact of its spending decisions on pupils' achievement. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet current requirements and staff are familiar with child protection procedures. The school makes excellent use of the resources available, with governors' expertise and experience extremely well deployed. Links with outside agencies and partner providers are outstanding. In discussion with inspectors and in their response to the inspection questionnaire, parents express a very high degree of satisfaction with the school. As one parent writes, 'We are proud to have such a wonderful school in our village.'

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The school's Early Years Foundation Stage gives children an excellent start to their full-time education. When they join the Reception class, children's skills and experiences are similar to those expected for their age. As a result of well-established links with the pre-school, children quickly settle into daily routines and make rapid progress in this calm and purposeful setting. High quality planning provides children with an excellent range of learning opportunities across the areas of learning and there is an outstanding balance between adult-led, child-chosen and whole-class activities. Learning resources are of high quality and readily available. Although the construction of a sheltered area has been delayed by circumstances beyond the school's control, full use is made of the outside area. The staff team works very closely together, focusing closely on children's individual needs. Their excellent understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum and of how young children learn enables staff to accurately assess

children's progress and plan their next steps in learning. Children get on exceedingly well with each other and with adults, and behave exceptionally well. They are confident to 'have a go' at unfamiliar activities. Parents are very pleased with their children's progress and enthusiasm for school. The Early Years Foundation Stage is extremely well led. High quality self-evaluation, involving the whole staff team, is successfully driving plans for development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend pupils' understanding of their next steps in learning by further involving them in assessing their own work.
- Increase pupils' understanding of global communities by expanding links with international communities

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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?	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?	1
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	1
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	1
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	1

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?	2
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**

9 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Silsoe CofE VC Lower School, Silsoe, MK45 4ES

Thank you very much for making us so welcome when we visited your school recently. You told us all about your work and all that goes on in school. We think your behaviour is excellent and we are very impressed by your confidence in asking questions, joining in discussions and taking on responsibilities. You care exceptionally well for each other and respect what other people say, even if you do not always agree with them. These strengths prepare you exceedingly well for when you move on to your next schools.

Although you were all very excited about the snow, you quickly got down to your activities and we saw some high quality work. You told us how much you enjoy finding out and writing about the past, especially the Romans and the Second World War. Your artwork is very eye catching and your information and communication technology skills are developing exceptionally well. You are clearly experts in solving problems in numeracy! The staff know you very well indeed and have an excellent understanding of what you need to do next to improve your work. They explain what you are going to learn clearly and ensure that the work you do is very well matched to what you already know and can do. This means that you can make rapid progress and achieve very high standards. The staff mark your work regularly and, in lessons, they discuss with you how you are getting on. This helps you to improve your work and leads you to the next steps in learning. We think you could be even more involved in this process by checking how well you have done against the goals your teachers have given you at the start of the lesson.

All the staff and governors work very hard to make the school a happy and exciting place for you enjoy and achieve well. They are always looking to see what they can do to improve their teaching and your learning. A great deal of work has been done to involve everyone in the school and the local community in working together. You already know quite a lot about people in different countries, but we agree with the staff that to develop this further the next step is for them to establish close links with a school and village on the other side of the world.

Yours sincerely

Mike Best

Lead inspector