

Mrs Bland's Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109887
Local Authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	325051
Inspection dates	15–16 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Nick Butt

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	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	195
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 Crossley
Headteacher	Mrs Janet Tyas
Date of previous school inspection	8 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Jordans Lane Burghfield Common Reading RG7 3LP
Telephone number	01189 832332
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Age group	3–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This smaller-than-average school has Early Years Foundation Stage provision in the Nursery and Reception classes. While the large majority of pupils are of White British heritage, a small number of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The school serves a Traveller community and a Royal Air Force base. Hardly any of the pupils speak English as an additional language. There is a high turnover of pupils, especially in Year 2. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is low. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average; these needs include speech and language difficulties. The school, which is designated as a children's centre, shares the site with a local high school, library and leisure centre. Among many other awards, the school has the Basic Skills Agency's Quality Mark and the Eco-Schools Green Flag Award. A private provider makes use of the school building to run a breakfast club and an after-school club. This is reported on separately and available from the Ofsted website.

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 with many strengths. It is a hidden gem in West Berkshire, with an outdoor learning environment that is second to none, winning many awards for the excellence of its gardens and wildlife areas. Parents are enthusiastic about its caring and orderly atmosphere. One said, 'I am over the moon with this infant school!' The school's positive ethos and academic success arise from the excellent leadership of its headteacher, whose quiet persistence has built up a strong team which cares deeply about the needs of each individual pupil.

Children enter the Nursery with a very wide range of skills and abilities similar to those typically found. Achievement across the school is good, so that standards in reading, writing and mathematics are above average by the end of Year 2. An effective and exciting curriculum gives pupils a thirst for learning, and is outstandingly enriched through a wealth of clubs, visits and visitors. Pupils enjoy their lessons, and participate energetically in the many practical activities that are planned carefully for them. They have a good understanding of living healthily, especially through growing their own fruit and vegetables and taking plenty of exercise. The school's achievement of the Healthy Schools Award and the Activemark confirms the pupils' commitment to a healthy lifestyle. Pupils say they feel safe in school and that behaviour is good. They are considerate and polite, and help one another out, with the older pupils supporting the younger ones. Pupils have an acute awareness of the world around them, spending profitable time learning outdoors. In response to the question 'What can we do to make our world a beautiful place?', a pupil responded, 'We can tidy up our world instead of littering everywhere.'

Teaching and learning are good, and have improved considerably since the last inspection. Teachers have high expectations of the pupils and maintain a brisk pace in lessons, taking good account of pupils' interests and aspirations. Teaching includes all pupils well, matching work to suit those with learning difficulties, and challenging those who find work easier. Pupils develop their independence through designing their own projects, and cooperate well in working as a team and sharing resources. Marking is effective, especially in English, and shows pupils clearly how to improve their writing. This is not so well developed in mathematics. Pupils all have targets for improvement, which they know well and refer to during lessons, completing a 'target wheel' to see how they are progressing in meeting them.

The impact of leadership and management on pupils' personal development and well-being, and on their academic achievement, is good. The headteacher is very ably supported by the assistant headteacher in monitoring closely the work of the school, and in tracking meticulously how well the pupils are doing. Leadership responsibilities are devolved well to subject leaders and team leaders, enabling the wider staff to contribute effectively to strategic planning and school improvement. Governors play a full part in the life of the school, helping out in many ways, and also taking their responsibilities seriously. They have a good understanding of what the school does well and how it can improve further, and ask searching questions. The school has made good progress in all areas since its last inspection, and is well placed to continue to improve in the future.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Outstanding provision in the Nursery means that children get off to the best possible start, and make very rapid progress. The outdoor area is exceptionally rich in giving children the

opportunity to experience all the areas of learning in exciting and stimulating ways. A handcrafted climbing frame provides real physical challenge, and the beautiful mature grounds offer secret places to explore and hide in. Children were busy taking messages and writing reports in the role-play police station, while others were organising the traffic of the bikes and pedestrians. Children make good progress overall in the Early Years Foundation Stage, mainly meeting and often exceeding the expected early learning goals by the end of the Reception year. Their basic literacy and numeracy skills are developed well. While the Reception classes have an attractive and well-used outdoor area, the indoor environment is rather more cluttered and it is not as easy for children to access resources as it is in the Nursery. Movement between activities is not always smooth. Staff have a good understanding of how well children are doing, and respond imaginatively to their interests, adapting plans to take account of their individual needs. Evidence of progress is recorded well in the Nursery's 'All my own work' books. In the Reception classes, the records of achievement are not filled in systematically to ensure that there is sufficient coverage of each child's progress. The Early Years Foundation Stage is led and managed well, with a committed and cohesive team that has a good understanding of how young children learn, and provides extremely well for their welfare.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the indoor learning environment and record-keeping of the Reception classes to match the best practice in the Nursery.
- Give pupils a clearer understanding of how they can improve their work in mathematics.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils make consistently good progress throughout the school because the teaching responds well to their needs, and planning takes good account of their differing abilities. Standards are above average in Year 2 overall, maintaining an improving trend in recent years. The school has made progress this year in helping more pupils to attain the higher Level 3 in reading and mathematics by setting up 'challenge groups' and ensuring that tasks are sufficiently demanding. Good analysis of the progress of different groups shows that there are no differences between how boys and girls achieve, or between that of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who are not. Pupils who have learning difficulties make good progress towards their individual targets and receive effective support from teaching assistants. Pupils who are learning English as an additional language also achieve well, and are included fully in lessons.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils respect the values that the school promotes, and benefit from clear boundaries for behaviour. They socialise well, and welcome new pupils so that they settle quickly. They have a heightened understanding of the wonder of the natural world through growing plants and observing wildlife. The lack of a projector in the hall limits the extent to which assemblies can use technology to raise pupils' spiritual awareness. Pupils have a good understanding of their own and different cultures, receiving visitors from other countries such as China and Turkey. They also celebrate Traveller heritage and culture through finding out about the Stow Horse Fair and how Travellers have lived through the ages. Most pupils regularly attend school, and there are acceptable reasons why a few others are absent. Pupils are active in their local community, putting on a harvest

presentation for up to 90 elderly people and serving them tea afterwards. They display their work in the local library and take part in music and sports festivals. They leave the school with good basic skills, confident about learning. They work together well, with the resilience to persevere, so are prepared well for junior school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils spoke highly of their lessons and learning when asked what they liked about school. One said, 'Maths is a bit of a challenge but I kind of like challenges!' Another said, 'You can use your imagination whenever you like.' There are good relationships between pupils and staff, with clear expectations of what pupils should be learning. Pupils have a good understanding of what they are supposed to be doing and why they are doing it. They are keen to take a full part in lessons and like the fact that there is plenty of practical activity. Year 1 pupils cooperated very well in designing and making shelters for the owl and the pussycat, sharing resources sensibly. Well-trained and effective teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning, ensuring that they make good progress. Teachers make good use of the outdoor areas to support learning. On the rare occasions that teaching is only satisfactory, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to evaluate their learning at the end of the lesson.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

There is good provision in the core subjects of literacy and numeracy, evidenced by the school's Basic Skills Agency's Quality Mark, and pupils make good progress. The curriculum is flexible and is developing in many ways. Staff are careful to evaluate what pupils already know about a topic to help them plan in more depth, and seek their views about what they would like to find out. The curriculum is thus tailored very closely to pupils' interests and aptitudes. Pupils often surprise their teachers by their knowledge and by the complexity of their questioning. A Year 2 class, for example, thinking about plants, said that 'flowers sleep inside seeds' and wanted to know how many different types of seed cases there were. There is good work linking subjects, especially in Year 1, which has been trialling some new approaches this year. This is being built upon in Year 2. The outdoor curriculum is outstanding, and affords a wide variety of opportunities for pupils to explore the natural world and environmental issues. This culminated in the school obtaining the Eco-Schools Green Flag Award.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school takes good care of all its pupils, treating them with respect and valuing their individuality. All safeguarding requirements are met. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties, such as speech and language delay, is good, with good links to outside agencies. Interventions are well chosen to meet the needs of the pupils, and are successful in helping them to make good progress. The school promotes attendance well, and takes a strong line on term-time holidays. Academic guidance is good, particularly in showing pupils how they can improve their writing. While there is some useful guidance given to pupils in small mathematics groups, marking is not so effective in helping them to move forward in their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Parents are full of praise for the school, appreciating that their children are happy and learning well in a caring family atmosphere. They find leaders approachable and accessible. One said, 'They don't make us feel useless if we ask silly questions about phonics, etc.' The headteacher runs the school with calm assurance, putting everybody at their ease and building confidence. Her understated approach belies an innovative and exciting vision which has seen the school at the forefront of environmental education long before it became fashionable, with a strong emphasis on teaching basic skills well. The school enjoys a collaborative and reflective culture that develops leadership potential and devolves responsibility well. Teachers are held accountable for the progress of their children. Tracking is very detailed, but uses several different formats, making comparisons across subjects more difficult. Thorough monitoring of teaching and learning ensures that leaders know where strengths lie and what could be improved further. This is reflected in generally well-written strategic plans that clearly evaluate progress to date. However, some of the desired outcomes are not given as specific targets that can be easily measured.

The school has a good understanding of its local community and promotes community cohesion well, working particularly successfully with its Traveller community and other agencies. The designation of children's centre status recognises the diverse needs of the locality and presents opportunities for the school to serve its community in new ways. A baby clinic is held there once a week, and there is a toy library, meaning that the school gets to know young families early on. There are good international links, supported by special events such as International Arts Week. Promotion of links with other parts of the United Kingdom are not so well established.

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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?	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	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**

26 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Mrs Bland's Infant School, Reading, RG7 3LP

We enjoyed visiting your school. Yours is a good school. These are some of its strengths.

- You make good progress in your studies and reach above average standards.
- The outdoor gardens and wildlife areas are outstanding.
- You have a good understanding of how to stay healthy and safe.
- You enjoy school and attend well.
- Teaching is good and makes learning interesting and fun.
- There are plenty of things to keep you busy in lessons.
- The school cares for you well, and everybody is friendly and kind.
- There is good leadership of the school.

You get good advice about how to improve your writing. We have asked your teachers to make sure that the advice you receive about improving mathematics is just as helpful. Children do well in the Reception classes, but we have asked for them to have a bit of a tidy-up, so it is easier to find everything they need. We like your records of achievement; it would be good if they contained similar amounts of work covering all the different things you do in school.

Thank you once again for your help. Our best wishes for the future.

Yours faithfully

Mr N Butt

Lead Inspector