

Dropmore Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110223
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	325112
Inspection date	12 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Keith Sadler

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	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	57
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	Ms Jean Horwood
Headteacher	Mrs Hazel Watt
Date of previous school inspection	5 July 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Littleworth Road Dropmore Burnham Slough SL1 8PF
Telephone number	01753 644 403
Fax number	01753 644 403

Age group	4–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school. In addition, the following issues were investigated.

- How well are pupils achieving and are they on course to attain high standards?
- Is pupils' personal development and well-being outstanding?
- What does the school need to do in order to make teaching and learning outstanding?

Evidence was gathered from the school's analysis of pupils' progress, a scrutiny of samples of their work and observations of lessons. Discussions were held with staff, governors and pupils. In addition, the responses of 29 parents' questionnaires were analysed and their comments taken into account. 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, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Dropmore is very much smaller than most infant schools and is oversubscribed. It is located in the hamlet of Dropmore, though there are very few houses within the parish. Hence, most pupils come from surrounding villages, though an increasing number live further afield. Almost all the pupils are from White British backgrounds and there are none at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is much lower than found in most schools. These pupils have speech, language and communication or emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The school has recently been extended to provide a further learning area for Year 1 pupils and the school's information and communication technology resources. The Early Years Foundation Stage children are taught in their own Reception class in the mornings, as are Years 1 and 2 pupils. In the afternoon all the pupils are taught in two classes. The school has gained the Healthy School and Sports Activemark awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well during their time at this good and effective school. Successful and strong teamwork by the staff ensures that every pupil is supported and cared for extremely well. Standards are high and under the clear guidance of the headteacher, the school is on an upward trend. Every parent who returned an inspection questionnaire was unanimous in all aspects of their support for the school. The school's popularity is reflected in the very many positive comments that were made. These are typified by the parent who wrote: 'We think Dropmore provides an excellent foundation for our children's education. There is a wonderful, caring and nurturing atmosphere which makes for happy children who learn well.' The headteacher's outstanding leadership and management are pivotal to the school success. She has ensured that the good features found at the previous inspection have been well built upon. Her highly focused actions have resulted in the school having some outstanding academic and pastoral strengths: for example, pupils' personal development, the curriculum and leadership and management.

Staff know the pupils very well and are keen to develop all aspects of pupils' development. The close checking of the school's provision and pupils' progress provides an accurate picture of the school's position. This enables clear and incisive improvement projects to be implemented and monitored. There have also been improvements in the accommodation, both in the provision of an additional classroom area and the Reception class outdoor learning area. The organisation of responsibilities in the school is excellent and benefits staff development extremely well. All the staff willingly take the lead with the many new and successful initiatives being introduced. The development of the curriculum is a good example of this. Even though the curriculum was evaluated as outstanding at the previous inspection, much work has been done to make sure that it has been further developed and adapted to meet the learning needs of Dropmore pupils. There has been an excellent and strong focus on making sure that topics link subjects together. These frequently stem from either the school's rich outdoor environment or build on its long history and help to make learning meaningful for pupils. For example, a large part of the science curriculum is based around the school's popular gardening club, which provides a starting point for many topics. Pupils are keen to point out their successes in growing the potatoes, plants and trees in the school grounds. The curriculum continues to be exceptionally well enriched by the wide range of visitors to the school and also the many extra-curricular activities available. This is recognised in the school's Sports Activemark which is awarded for providing a range of sporting opportunities. Staff are adept at ensuring that any parents with interests or skills talk with the pupils. Hence parents who are Muslim or Hindu have spoken to the pupils about their religion and this helps them to understand the wider world.

Staff work closely together to ensure that the quality of teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. In addition, due to the excellent care, guidance and support, all groups of pupils achieve well in both Years 1 and 2. The school successfully builds on pupils' prior skills and knowledge because their progress is carefully tracked and work is set at a challenging level for all pupils. Standards are currently well above average in reading, writing and mathematics. This marks good achievement from pupils' above-expected starting points. However, the school is keenly aware that the proportion of pupils gaining the higher level at the end of Year 2 in writing, although above the national average, is not as high as in reading or mathematics. A good programme, based on strengthening pupils' speaking and listening skills through drama, is starting to impact positively on writing standards. Pupils who learn more quickly and those

with speech and language difficulties benefit from the skills and high expectations of staff. Careful planning matches activities to pupils' needs well. The recent focus on making pupils more independent learners is paying dividends. Teachers ensure that pupils are clear about what is being learned and what they have to do in order to meet lesson objectives. They are also careful to ensure that pupils' preferred learning styles are addressed in lessons. Hence the interactive whiteboards are used well to excite the imagination and interest of those who like to learn visually. The headteacher accurately states that there needs to be a consolidation on the focus to make pupils independent and to develop their thinking skills in order to make teaching and learning outstanding.

The school is highly committed to develop the pupils' love of learning and there is a strong emphasis on spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This, and the pupils' personal development, is outstanding. Behaviour is excellent and the pupils have highly positive attitudes to school, and this is reflected in the high levels of attendance. In addition, relationships are outstanding. As one Year 2 pupil said, 'We don't want anyone to be sad, and anyway we can always go to a playground pal.' Pupils have an excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles and this is reflected in the Healthy School award. 'We learn to be healthy in science', said a boy. They also know about staying safe and say they feel safe because teachers are there to help them. Systems to safeguard health and safety are securely in place. Pupils are very proud of the changes that they have brought about in the school, for example through the influential 'Our Voice' assemblies, in which all pupils have an opportunity to express their views about the school. A good recent result of this is the new honeycombed matting on the playing field which meets the pupils' request to use the school field in any weather. Pupils are encouraged to organise fund-raising ventures, including cake sales in the summer term, and they talk enthusiastically about the money raised for the Sargeant charity and other local charities. Even though there are few houses in Dropmore, pupils are given an understanding of citizenship by having strong links with a nearby day centre for elderly, disabled people. These people visit the school for plays and harvest, and the pupils visit the centre regularly. There are also strong links with the local church. Pupils have a good knowledge of a school in Zimbabwe through a grandparent. This led to them writing and receiving letters from the school. These various initiatives ensure that community cohesion is outstanding. Pupils' high level of literacy and numeracy skills, when linked to their personal skills, prepares them well for the next stage in their education.

Governance is good, though there is a comparative weakness. Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and they play an important part in the strategic management of finances and the buildings. However, currently they are over-reliant on the headteacher for information regarding the school's provision and standards achieved. This limits their ability to support and question issues of school improvement. The school's good improvement since the previous inspection, when linked to the clear and incisive leadership of the headteacher and staff, demonstrates an excellent capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Many parents commented on how quickly and well their children settled into Reception. This is because there is close contact with families before children start school and this ensures that parents are effectively involved. This even extends to parents being 'buddied' together. Parents feel quite rightly that their children make excellent progress. They make rapid progress across all areas of learning and reach standards that are above those typically found, even though

their skills on entry to Reception are in line with those expected. Exceptionally good organisation of the curriculum and teaching ensures that children quickly become confident and secure learners. Staff plan a wide range of exciting activities both indoors and outdoors and they ensure that there is a very good balance between independent activities and those led by adults.

The children love learning. They concentrate well and quickly become engrossed in activities. They enjoy learning in small groups. In a role play session, for example, children were quick to explain who was the vet, the assistant vet and the nurse and they were very vocal in explaining what they needed to do in order to operate on the guinea pig to make it better! There is an appropriate strong emphasis on developing basic skills. Direct teaching and small-group activities enables key skills to be taught effectively. This was evident when children were using structured apparatus to create sentences about their pets.

Children are exceptionally well cared for. Both the staff have a calm approach and they constantly seek out opportunities to praise contributions and this ensures that they feel very happy and secure. The strong focus on children's personal and social development has a strong impact on their learning and friendships.

The Early Years Foundation Stage is led outstandingly well by the headteacher. She ensures that children's progress is tracked carefully and accurately and that the whole staff team has a consistency in approach.

What the school should do to improve further

- Embed the good plans to increase the number of pupils gaining the higher level in writing.
- Strengthen the role of governors in the monitoring of the school's provision and pupils' standards.

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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?	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?	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?	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	1

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?	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?	1
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	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 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Dropmore Infant School, Slough, SL1 8PF

We enjoyed meeting with you and listening to what you had to say about your school. Yours is a good school.

We particularly enjoyed hearing about how you have planted your potatoes and we are also amazed at how well they are growing. Dr Milliband thought your singing in assembly was wonderful! This letter is to tell you what we found when we came to your school.

- You make an excellent start in the Reception class where you enjoy lots of really interesting activities.
- We can understand why you like school because all the adults look after you exceptionally well and make sure that you are happy and safe and you enjoy your time at school.
- Your headteacher is doing an excellent job and makes sure that your school runs smoothly and that all the adults work closely together to make sure that you learn well.
- You work hard, behave outstandingly well, and your teachers make sure that you make good progress by making lessons interesting. Teachers also make sure that there is an excellent range of things for you to do both in lessons and in the many clubs that you enjoy.
- You have an excellent understanding of how to keep healthy. You told us about what you like to eat and the sports you like to play.

Even in a good school like yours, there are things which could be improved.

- The number of you gaining the higher level in writing at the end of Year 2 could be improved. Your teachers have good plans to help you to do this and these involve you having even more opportunities for drama. We know you will enjoy this!
- The governors in your school do a good job, but they are going to check and review how well you are doing at school more closely.

I hope that you will all keep on working hard and enjoy your time at school.

Yours faithfully

Keith Sadler

Lead Inspector