

Cedars Combined School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110399
Local Authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	325144
Inspection dates	17–18 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Sean O'Toole

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	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	287
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 Michael Chalmers-Hunt
Headteacher	Mr Stephen Kelly
Date of previous school inspection	28 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Bury Street Newport Pagnell MK16 0DT
Telephone number	01908 610561
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is located close to the town centre. There is designated Nursery provision for seven children with statements of special educational needs for their profound learning difficulties. An average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities that are linked to moderate learning, behavioural, communication or visual impairment. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds. Very few are at an early stage of learning English. From September 2008 the school created an Early Years Foundation Stage unit. The headteacher is new to the school, as are most of the senior leaders.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory standard of education. It has faced some challenges in recent years, especially regarding a decline in standards among the older pupils. There has been some underachievement in the past, especially in mathematics. In most years boys have performed less well than girls. Several initiatives have enabled the school to turn the corner and standards are rising. The pupils' current work shows that Year 6 are on course to reach levels that are average in mathematics and above average in English. The gap between boys' and girls' work has narrowed. Progress and achievement are satisfactory. Pupils talk confidently about their enjoyment of lessons, the improvements in their work and the ways in which they take responsibility. Their positive attitudes and excellent behaviour contribute much to making the school a friendly and safe place. They have good knowledge of how to live healthily and understand the importance of diet and exercise.

Leaders, governors and other staff share a common vision and their actions have led to satisfactory improvement in key areas such as English and mathematics. They have identified many areas for improvement, but these plans are too wide-ranging and issues are not prioritised. Targets are not sufficiently clear or measurable. Although there is a programme of monitoring, it is not linked well enough to tracking pupils' performance and the use of assessment data to pinpoint the next steps in learning. Consequently, some of the teaching is not as challenging as it should be. The focus on improving aspects of the curriculum, substantial success in the Early Years Foundation Stage and gains made in pupils' performance in English show that the school has satisfactory capacity to improve.

Overall teaching and learning are satisfactory. There are good relationships between the staff and pupils. Lessons are well organised and pupils are attentive and contribute well. However, some lessons lack pace. The teaching of mathematics is only satisfactory because assessment is not sharp enough and this affects the progress of pupils, especially in Key Stage 2. The work set does not stretch the pupils sufficiently and they lack confidence in solving complex problems. Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding because staff use observations and assessment to guide the children on how to improve. Similarly, there is outstanding teaching of those Nursery children with profound learning needs. Extra support is given to those with moderate learning, behavioural, communication or visual impairment and this enables them to improve satisfactorily. Pupils in Year 6 make good progress because of effective teaching and an emphasis on filling the gaps in their understanding. Throughout the school, the teaching of English is mostly good and there has been success in raising the quality of writing. Pupils are good readers and enjoy using the new library.

The great majority of parents are happy with the way that their children develop good personal qualities that equip them well for the future. Pupils are proud of their school and enjoy taking part in special events and celebrations, and taking responsibility, for instance as play leaders or council members. They get on well together and say that bullying and rough play are rare. Pupils say that they enjoy school and parents agree. One wrote, 'Cedars has a welcoming, friendly appeal with strong links to the broader community'.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children get off to a very successful start in the Early Years Foundation Stage and make outstanding progress. By the time they start in Year 1, almost all of the children are working at levels that are in advance of those expected for their age in all areas of learning. Children thrive in the very calm and purposeful atmosphere where they have opportunities to explore and investigate. Boys and girls respond enthusiastically to staff high expectations for their behaviour and, as a result, their personal and social skills improve rapidly. Children are happy because the adults inspire them with confidence. The classrooms are stimulating and resources are used very well to make learning fun. Children make imaginative use of the outside areas that provide an exciting level of challenge and stimulation, especially for the more capable children. The provision for those with statements of special educational needs is exemplary, because staff have an excellent understanding of every child's needs. Consequently, these children have their profound and multiple learning and physical needs met exceptionally well. Excellent leadership has led to success in integrating the work of the Nursery and Reception classes and this is paying dividends in ensuring that the curriculum is rich, challenging and inclusive. Staff know the children very well and use their observations to assess the children's progress and to plan the next steps in learning. One success of their analysis has been much improved progress in children's knowledge of sounds and letters. Very effective organisation gives the children real opportunities to make choices and to plan their own work so that they become engrossed in their activities. Staff are outstanding in meeting the welfare and personal needs of every child.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that leadership at all levels makes better use of monitoring and tracking data to accelerate improvement.
- Increase the pace of lessons and use assessment to ensure that work is pitched at sufficiently challenging levels for all pupils, especially in mathematics.
- Improve the school's strategic planning so that targets are clear and measurable, and ensure that issues are prioritised.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

For several years, standards at the end of Year 2 have been above average and pupils have made good progress in acquiring skills in reading, writing and mathematics. However, standards at the end of Year 6 have dipped in recent years, especially in mathematics, and the gap between boys' and girls' performance had widened. This trend has been reversed. Although more remains to be done, standards are improving and pupils' current work shows that they are working at above average levels in English. They are particularly successful in reading and, through the introduction of a more creative curriculum, are applying their basic writing skills in other subjects. There remain gaps in pupils' mathematical knowledge of multiplication facts and their understanding of how to solve complex problems. Standards in mathematics are average but lag behind those in English. There has been some underachievement and inconsistent progress

in the past but pupils are improving steadily. The gap between boys' and girls' performance has narrowed as staff have provided a better balance of activities to interest boys. The more able pupils make satisfactory progress but sometimes their work, especially in mathematics, is not demanding enough. The different groups of pupils with moderate learning or behavioural difficulties, or communication or visual impairment, receive sound support and this enables them to make satisfactory progress. Those at an early stage of learning English receive satisfactory support and work hard to communicate with their classmates and to join in all activities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils behave outstandingly well and show much respect for others. They say that they feel safe in school and know how to deal with the rare incidence of bullying. Pupils listen well to each other, respect different views and are always willing to help those who need extra support. One play leader said, 'I really enjoy helping the children who might feel lonely'. Pupils have good awareness of moral and social issues and are keen to support charities. They have a satisfactory knowledge of other cultures and enjoy celebrating their own and others' achievements. They work together effectively and enjoy taking responsibility such as in the school council. Pupils know the importance of keeping fit and healthy and respond enthusiastically in physical activities, although they would like more opportunities to use the sports field. The older pupils are excited about their transfer to the next school and feel that they are well prepared.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Relationships between staff and pupils are good. Pupils are confident that the staff will help them if they are unsure of anything. Lessons are well planned and prepared. Support staff work in harness with the teachers so that different groups receive appropriate support. Pupils are attentive listeners and keen to please. Their behaviour is excellent and they maintain good concentration even when introductions to lessons are too long. Sometimes, lessons lack sufficient challenge and the pace drifts so that the momentum of learning slows. This is because staff do not make enough use of assessment to pitch tasks at demanding levels. Staff regularly mark the pupils' work and add positive comments. In the best practice, there is guidance to show the pupils how to improve their work. English is taught well and older pupils have enjoyed the approaches that have enabled them to write in different styles. Pupils take pride in their work and present it well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Pupils enjoy the extra-curricular activities and say that they learn much when they go on visits linked to their topic work. The school has reviewed its curriculum and is making good headway in providing opportunities for the pupils to apply their literacy skills in other subjects. Not enough has been done to extend pupils' numeracy skills through a similar approach. Pupils enjoy opportunities to discuss sensitive issues in their lessons in personal, social and health education that contribute much to their positive attitudes and knowledge of how to live healthily.

All required subjects are taught and there is an appropriate balance between academic, creative and practical work. Pupils enjoy using the library and are proud of the food technology area, but would like more opportunities to cook. The school provides satisfactorily for pupils' cultural development, although it does not draw sufficiently on the experience and backgrounds of its minority ethnic groups to enhance the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Parents are confident that their children receive good support and levels of care and inspection evidence confirms this. One commented that, 'The staff are approachable and listen carefully to concerns'. Systems to ensure pupils' health and safety are securely in place and staff have been checked to ensure their suitability for working with children. Support for those in the designated Nursery provision for children with profound learning needs is excellent. In the rest of the school, staff provide satisfactory academic guidance through their marking but assessment and tracking systems are only just beginning to identify the needs of individuals and this means that work is not always pitched at the right level. It is clear that staff know and like the pupils and that there is mutual respect between them.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and new leadership team have made a steady start in tackling the school's weaknesses in pupils' learning at Key Stage 2. There is a shared commitment and enthusiasm. Several initiatives are underway and have begun to take effect in improving aspects of English. In addition, the new Early Years Foundation Stage leader has made an impressive impact on the quality of provision for these young children. Several important issues still need to be resolved in Key Stages 1 and 2, including using assessment to pinpoint gaps in pupils' learning so that progress is better, especially in mathematics. The school's plans for improvement lack an incisive edge, because measures of success are not sharp and relevant issues have not been prioritised sufficiently. Leaders work hard and have taken a variety of actions to improve standards but they are not always clear about the impact they have made because their role in evaluating the school's work is at an early stage of development. Governors provide good support and are knowledgeable about the school. They know that the school's performance in recent years has not been as good as it should have been and are determined to secure improvement by holding the staff to account more robustly. The school makes a satisfactory contribution to community cohesion. There are sound partnerships within the locality and good links with parents. It promotes respect and understanding between different groups of pupils and staff. The inclusive Early Years Foundation Stage helps children to work alongside and value those who are vulnerable or who have specific needs.

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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?	3
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?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

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	1
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?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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**

31 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Cedars Combined School, Newport Pagnell, MK16 0DT

Thank you for telling us about your school and making us feel welcome. We really enjoyed listening to you talk about your work and it was lovely to see how much you care for each other. It was good to hear that you like coming to school and enjoy your lessons. Your school is now satisfactory but there are several good features. We were pleased to see that you enjoy taking responsibility by being part of the school or acting as play leaders. You help to make the school a safe and happy place because your behaviour is excellent.

These are some of the good things about your school.

- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make an excellent start and really enjoy learning through lots of exciting activities.
- The adults in the Early Years Foundation Stage make sure children who have lots of learning and physical needs have the best possible support and help.
- You are good at reading and writing.
- You are kind, thoughtful and helpful.
- By the end of Year 2 almost all of you have good skills in reading, writing and mathematics.

We have asked the teachers to help the school to improve. Sometimes the work set for you is too easy, especially in mathematics. We have asked the teachers to give you more challenge and you can help by always trying hard and by doing your best. We also want the headteacher and the other leaders to make sure that they use what they know about the school to help you to do even better. At the moment the school has lots of plans but the adults need to decide the best order in which to introduce changes and to keep a check on how well they are making improvements.

We hope that you continue to enjoy school and are successful in all that you do.

Yours faithfully

Sean O'Toole

Lead Inspector