

Gamlingay First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110609
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	325181
Inspection dates	11–12 November 2008
Reporting inspector	John Messer

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	Community
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	185
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 K Mingay
Headteacher	Mr Jonathan Newman
Date of previous school inspection	7 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Green End Gamlingay Sandy Bedfordshire SG19 3LE
Telephone number	01767 650208
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Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This first school is smaller than most. It caters for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and pupils from Year 1 to Year 4. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and a small proportion are from minority ethnic groups. Several pupils speak English as an additional language and a few are at an early stage of learning to speak English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities is average. The attainment of most but not all children on entry to the school is below expectations for their age.

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 where pupils make good progress, achieve well and attain standards that are above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding and makes a major contribution to their effective learning. They are keen to learn, eager to succeed and thoroughly enjoy school. Behaviour is excellent. The skills they develop and their positive attitudes to learning prepare them well for the future.

Good teaching and learning help all groups of pupils to achieve well. Teachers plan interesting lessons and maintain high expectations of pupils' performance. Pupils are well motivated and listen intently to teachers' explanations. Good strategies are used to support pupils who find learning difficult and teaching assistants are becoming increasingly skilled at supporting these pupils. In lessons, teachers often group pupils according to ability and make sure that all groups, including the faster learners, are appropriately challenged. Gifted pupils are given opportunities to extend their learning by, for example, attending special classes for mathematics in other schools.

The curriculum includes a good range of educational visits and after-school activities to enrich and extend learning. Visitors to the school, such as story-tellers and theatre companies, contribute to pupils' enjoyment of learning. The school uses a thematic approach to teaching much of the curriculum. This is achieved by linking subjects together into topics designed to stimulate pupils' interest. This approach is developing well but is still not fully embedded. Special events, such as Arts Week, provide excellent opportunities for pupils to learn new skills. Themed weeks, such as the film and media studies week, often provide particularly challenging learning opportunities for gifted pupils. The school makes sure that all pupils have equal access to all aspects of the curriculum.

The good care, guidance and support boosts pupils' self-confidence and helps them to feel safe and secure. Safeguarding procedures are robust and pupils' welfare is given top priority. Pupils have a good understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles, stay safe and look after themselves. They have targets to help them to reach the next stages in their learning in literacy and numeracy but these are not always clearly understood by pupils or referred to enough by teachers in lessons.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher leads the school exceptionally well. He has established a team of teachers and support staff who share a commitment to exploring every avenue as they strive to accelerate pupils' progress and raise attainment. Pupils' progress is measured meticulously and ambitious goals are set for the amount of progress that pupils are expected to make each year. Data is used to pinpoint any pupils who might not be making as much progress as they should and to identify where extra learning support might be needed. Parents are very pleased with the education provided for their children. One commented, 'We are delighted with the school which has improved tremendously over the past two years so that there is now a vibrant, exciting learning environment where children flourish'. Some parents expressed concerns about splitting the Year 1 pupils into two groups but observations show that both groups are making equally good progress. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and helps to identify key priorities for further development. Improvement since the last inspection has been good and the school is now going from strength to strength.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Parents greatly appreciate the warm welcome their children receive, 'I thought the whole process was fantastic.' They are delighted with the way that the school introduces their children to the EYFS, particularly the visits that staff make to children's homes before they start school. Children are cared for well and all welfare requirements are met. Some children are taught in a class with Year 1 pupils but the school takes care to ensure that the needs of all children are met, providing a good curriculum for both age ranges. Children make good progress through the Reception classes, from what for many is a low starting point. By the time they transfer to Year 1, most have reached the goals set for them nationally. Children achieve well because the quality of teaching is good and adults make learning fun. For example, children enjoyed testing items to find out if they were magnetic, marvelling at how a large magnet clung to the railings in the courtyard. A particular strength is the teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants. All know the children very well and strive to meet their individual needs.

Behaviour and personal development are outstanding. Children show a high level of maturity for their age and carry out tasks with minimal adult support. Routines are very well established and staff make their expectations clear. Children are confident and able to work independently. Much has been done to improve the outdoor area since the previous inspection and it now provides a delightful environment in which to play and learn. Good leadership and management of the EYFS ensures that the curriculum is well planned with a good balance of adult led and child initiated activities. The school has identified a need to further improve children's language and literacy skills. The book area is not as well developed as it could be and there are too few displays of children's writing to celebrate their successes. The introduction of a programme to teach letter sounds is having a major, positive impact on attainment.

What the school should do to improve further

- Review target setting and make sure that pupils have a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve.
- Review the way that the curriculum is taught and make more links between subjects to extend the thematic approach.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

All groups of pupils, including those with learning difficulties and /or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language, achieve well. Children do well in the EYFS and by the end of the Reception year most have attained the standards expected. They achieve particularly well in communication, language and literacy because the relationship between letters and the sounds they make is taught rigorously. Pupils achieve well in Years 1 and 2 and by the end of Year 2 they attain average standards in literacy and numeracy. Pupils continue to make good progress and by the end of Year 4 they attain standards that are above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Good standards are attained in art and design and some of the pupils' pictures are stunning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils are very friendly and polite to visitors. They enjoy school enormously and are extremely positive about all aspects of school life. Attendance is good. They become tolerant, mature and caring individuals and develop an excellent understanding of different cultures and customs. For example, the recent International Week and studies of Africa, contributed much to their understanding. Pupils willingly take on a range of responsibilities and the school council takes its role seriously. Older pupils happily act as play leaders and playground partners, ensuring that no one is left out at lunchtime. The school is a harmonious community and incidents of poor behaviour are very rare. Pupils are encouraged to work together. There are many examples where pupils work together from across the classes during themed weeks, with older ones helping younger ones. They have a good understanding of how to keep fit and healthy by eating a balanced diet and taking part in sporting activities. The way in which they learn how to keep safe is excellent. For example, they know how to use scissors and digital cameras sensibly and they are trusted to use them independently. They demonstrate outstanding care for others by raising funds for a wide range of charities. Pupils are building a good foundation for later life and the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Warm relationships and a purposeful learning atmosphere typify most classrooms. Teachers make learning fun and pupils enjoy lessons. Teachers are particularly good at asking searching questions that challenge pupils' thinking and this often stimulates good discussions. In one class pupils considered how scientists might capture the DNA of woolly mammoths and perhaps by implanting elephants, bring mammoths back from extinction. Teachers plan lessons carefully and modify tasks to match the learning needs of all groups in the class. Targets for learning are clearly displayed in each class but teachers do not refer to these frequently enough and pupils are not always sure what they need to do to reach the next stages in their learning. Class groups are flexible. Some faster learners join older pupils' classes, for example, and teaching assistants take small groups for special booster classes. This good management helps all groups of pupils to achieve well. Pupils listen intently and throw themselves enthusiastically into practical activities so that learning is highly productive.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum meets pupils' needs well and is matched to their interests. It includes regular themed weeks, such as the recent creative arts week, where pupils worked with a theatre company to develop their skills. The school is reviewing the way that the curriculum is taught to extend this thematic approach and to make more meaningful links between subjects. Provision for literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology is good. The curriculum, for pupils from Year 2 to Year 4, is extended well by the use of a specialist French teacher. A well-planned programme for social and health education encourages pupils to stay safe and healthy and to show mature attitudes to each other. A wide range of activities such as Spanish, gardening and puzzle clubs give good opportunities to learn new skills. Although all pupils in Year 3 and 4 learn to play the recorder, provision for music is underdeveloped. The school

makes good use of the local area to enhance learning with a variety of visits to support the curriculum. A visit to Colchester Zoo, for example, has provided a good stimulus for work on Africa for the older pupils. Artwork on display is of high quality. Pupils are encouraged to look beyond their own immediate locality and learn about cultures and beliefs different to their own. An International Week, culminating in tasting foods from a range of cultures, developed an awareness of how other people live.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

This is a very caring and friendly school. All staff work closely together to ensure that pupils are well cared for and kept safe. All procedures for safeguarding and child protection are in place. The school fosters a high level of self-esteem in the pupils and this contributes significantly to their very positive attitude to learning. Good tracking systems allow teachers to match work closely to pupils' needs, especially when classes include more than one age range. Pupils have their own targets that are shared with parents, but not all have a good enough understanding of what their targets are and what they need to do to improve. They are beginning to assess their own work and that of others but this is not yet firmly established. Pupils who need extra help with literacy and numeracy skills are identified early and programmes to support them are put in place. Support staff are encouraged to undertake training to help these pupils and have qualifications to help with specific difficulties. Consequently, they provide a high level of support that is contributing very positively to pupils' progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher leads the school exceptionally well. His enthusiasm for improving provision for all pupils is infectious and so staff, parents and governors are keen to work together to develop the school further. The long-term absence of the deputy headteacher due to illness has reduced the scope of the senior leadership team. The strong governing body includes many skilled members who offer a wide range of talents to support the school. The governing body's most recent success has been the development of the grounds to provide a rich outdoor learning environment. Governors monitor the school's performance closely and ask searching questions about how standards might be raised. Some of the subject leaders are new to the school and have yet to have a major impact on raising standards. Communication with parents is exceptionally good and includes a detailed and regularly updated web site. The school promotes community cohesion exceptionally well by forging close links with the local community and by helping pupils to gain a good appreciation of people's different customs and beliefs across the United Kingdom. Pupils' studies of different countries, such as Kenya, help them to develop an understanding of the diverse nature of the global 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?	1
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	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	2
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	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	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	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**

13 November 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Gamlingay First School, Sandy, SG19 3LE

What a lovely school. We thoroughly enjoyed the short time we spent with you. Thank you for being so friendly and helpful.

One particular strength of the school is how extremely sensible you are. You enjoy talking and we heard many interesting discussions about space travel, aliens, DNA and about some of the 52 African countries. You develop an excellent understanding of how people in different parts of the world live. Your behaviour is excellent and you love learning new things. You work willingly but also enjoy having fun. Those of you who find it rather difficult to learn new things get lots of help and often do really well. Those who speak languages other than English at home get good support and are soon making as much progress as the rest of you. You achieve well and attain standards in reading, writing and mathematics that are above average. You produce some high quality art work and some of the paintings and pastel crayon drawings we saw were stunning. Some of the sculptures of African animals were also beautifully made. You are good at sport and keep yourselves fit by having plenty of exercise. You know how to stay safe and look after yourselves and others. Your headteacher is a really good leader and you told us that the teachers and support staff are all very kind and helpful. Everybody is keen to carry on improving your school and to make your lessons even more exciting.

We think that there are two main things that would improve your learning. We think that it would be helpful if you all had a clearer understanding of your targets in literacy and numeracy and knew exactly what you need to do to improve your work. We also think that your learning would be even more exciting if there were more links made between subjects during lessons. We know that you want to do your best and we are sure that if you continue to work hard the school will go from strength to strength.

We wish you every success in the future.

John Messer

Lead inspector