

Millfield First and Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117309
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326568
Inspection date	5 February 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	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	219
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	71
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Paull-Wills
Headteacher	Mrs Kathy Willett
Date of previous school inspection	23 February 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Monks Walk Buntingford Hertfordshire SG9 9DT
Telephone number	01763 271717
Fax number	01763 274178

Age group	3–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. They evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and the Early Years Foundation Stage. In addition, the following issues were investigated.

- Do pupils achieve as well in science as they do in English and mathematics?
- What are the key strengths in the quality of teaching and learning?
- How well is pupils' progress tracked?

Evidence was gathered from the school's analysis of pupils' progress, a scrutiny of samples of their work and observations of pupils in lessons. Discussions were held with staff, governors and pupils. In addition, the responses of 121 parents to the 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

Millfield is an average size first school. Almost all the pupils live in the immediate vicinity, though a few come from surrounding villages. The Early Years Foundation Stage consists of two year groups. There is a Nursery class, which children attend during mornings. There are two classes for children in the Reception year, one of which consists of about half Reception and half Year 1 pupils. There is a breakfast club and also childcare for the Nursery children, 'Little Stars', which operates from the end of the Nursery session in the morning until the end of the school day. The governors of the school manage this provision.

Almost all the pupils are of White British heritage and none is at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. Most of the pupils in this group have either behavioural, emotional and social difficulties or speech, language and communication difficulties. The school has a new headteacher who has been in post for less than two years. The school has gained Healthy Schools status and has been awarded the Sports Active Mark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Millfield First and Nursery School provides an excellent education for its pupils. The school has many strengths that ensure that pupils make outstanding progress in their personal and academic development. Parents are almost unanimous in their support and are delighted that they have chosen the school for their children. The many positive comments parents made are typified by this observation: 'We are thrilled to be able to say that our child genuinely enjoys school. She comes home happy and keen to tell us about her day every day.'

The headteacher provides excellent direction for the school and she has built effectively on the many positive features identified in the previous inspection. Teamwork is highly effective, and staff and governors are united in their commitment to include all pupils and to enable them to fulfil their potential. The school provides a rich and nurturing environment. Behaviour is exemplary and pupils' highly positive attitudes to school and learning are reflected in their exceptionally high levels of attendance. Systems to check and improve the quality of teaching and learning are well developed and staff make very good use of the information to improve pupils' achievement further. For example, close analysis of pupils' achievement in science revealed a need to strengthen the teaching and learning of investigative skills. This resulted in a well-conceived improvement project that has considerably improved standards in science. In addition, a strong and effective focus has been made on strengthening pupils' learning more widely. As a result, pupils are clear about what they have to learn and also what they need to do to meet lesson targets. Teachers also ensure that pupils' preferred learning styles are utilised and this is assisted by their excellent use of new technologies. In addition, teachers' behaviour management skills are highly developed, enabling all classrooms to have a thriving and purposeful atmosphere. These key strengths, linked to the pupils' highly effective learning, demonstrate high quality teaching.

Pupils' achievement is excellent. From starting points broadly typical of children nationally in most areas of learning, children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and through Years 1 and 2. In national tests for pupils at the end of Year 2, standards have been and are above average and are particularly strong in mathematics. Because the quality of teaching and learning continues to be outstanding in Years 3 and 4, standards are well above average at the end of Year 4 in English, mathematics and science. In science, over half the pupils reach the expected level for pupils at the end of Year 6, which is exceptional. Standards are higher than at the time of the last inspection. This is a direct result of excellent leadership, teamwork and teaching. Pupils' excellent progress in their basic skills means that they are extremely well prepared for moving to the middle school.

Excellent academic progress is not at the expense of the pupils' personal development and well-being. Staff know and care for the pupils exceptionally well and keep a close check on their welfare. Systems to protect vulnerable pupils are excellent and all current safeguarding regulations are met. Pupils thrive in the supportive environment and make excellent progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Very many opportunities are provided for pupils to take responsibility and to contribute to the school community. For example, there is an influential school council, an ecology action team and an assembly committee who organise celebration assemblies each week. There are reading buddies and a 'Reading Rockets' group that work to promote reading throughout the school. This results in pupils developing a keen sense of responsibility and community. As one school council member said, 'We don't let anyone hurt anyone else in our school because it would upset them.' Pupils develop a good

understanding of the local and global communities through their work in various subjects. In addition, pupils have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe and lead a healthy lifestyle and the Healthy Schools award recognises this.

Even though the school's guidance for pupils was excellent at the time of the previous inspection, improvements have been made. The headteacher has introduced more rigour and structure to the checking and tracking of pupils' progress. These systems are robust and enable any pupils in danger of slipping behind to be identified quickly. There are then excellent procedures to support them. In addition, the school's exceptionally close partnership with outside agencies ensures that additional support is provided as necessary. For example, those pupils that have speech and language needs have specialist speech and language therapy.

All teachers with responsibilities make an excellent contribution to school improvement, and the governors too provide excellent strategic direction for the school. The improvements made since the previous inspection indicate an outstanding capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Parents are delighted with the start their children receive in the Nursery. One wrote: 'My daughter is excited about school; every morning she is eager to know what she will be doing.' The 'Little Stars' day care which many children attend helps children to transfer happily to the Nursery and provides a valued resource for parents. Children make good progress through the Nursery and the Reception classes. By the time they transfer to Year 1, virtually all have reached the goals set for them nationally and a minority exceeds them. Some of the children in the Reception Year are accommodated in a class that also includes pupils in Year 1. Good leadership and management ensure that children enjoy the same interesting, well-planned curriculum and a good quality of teaching in all the classes in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Children achieve well because the quality of teaching is good and teachers make learning interesting. For example, children in the Nursery eagerly worked together to complete a large jigsaw puzzle, helped by adults. Younger children in the Reception class enjoyed joining in with sounds and actions to help them build words. Older children busily ordered pictures from a story and matched captions to them. The high ratio of adults to children helps them to do well because they get a lot of individual support. The children behave extremely well because adults make their expectations clear. Children work well independently. Staff make appropriate use of the outdoor areas, but there is no cover outside the Nursery and this limits outdoor work in winter. Although resources for outdoor learning have been improved recently, there is scope to extend them further and provide more exciting learning opportunities. Children are cared for exceptionally well. For example, in snowy weather during the inspection, great care was taken to ensure that children were suitably dressed before going outside. All welfare requirements are met.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that curriculum planning in the Early Years Foundation Stage for outdoor areas is as comprehensive as that for indoor spaces.

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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?	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?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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**

6 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Millfield First and Nursery School, Buntingford, SG9 9DT

I am writing to thank you for the help you gave us when we visited your school, and to tell you what we found out. We were sorry that we had to put off the inspection so many times because the school was closed due to the snow, but when we came, we thoroughly enjoyed listening to you. We were particularly impressed with your singing in assembly and also with the many beautiful displays of your work. Many of you and your parents told us that your school is excellent, and we agree.

There are many things that make your school outstanding. Your headteacher and the other adults work very hard to make sure that your school is such a safe and exciting place to learn. We can understand why you enjoy learning and lessons so much because your teachers and the classroom assistants do such a good job to make learning exciting. Their teaching is excellent. You make outstanding progress and achieve well above average standards by the end of Year 4.

Your behaviour is excellent and everyone gets on very well together. This is because one of the best things about the school is the way it helps you to develop as a person. This means you know right from wrong, are always willing to help others and you learn very well how to keep safe and healthy. Well done!

Your headteacher and staff take excellent care of you and they keep a close check on how you are doing. Even though your school is outstanding, the governors and staff want to make it even better. We have asked them to do one thing. This is to make sure that staff in the Nursery and Reception classes plan a wide range of exciting activities for the outside areas.

Best wishes for your future.

Yours sincerely

Keith Sadler

Lead Inspector