

Shelton Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109471
Local Authority	Bedfordshire
Inspection number	337296
Inspection dates	30 September & 1 October 2009
Reporting inspector	George Logan

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4-9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	55
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Marian Palmer
Headteacher	James Smart
Date of previous school inspection	1-2 May 2007
School address	Lower Shelton Road Marston Moretaine Bedford MK43 0LS
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited seven lessons and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at pupils' work, records of their progress, lesson planning, lunchtime activities and the school's self-evaluation documents, including the main improvement plan. Inspection questionnaires were received from 19 parents.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the effectiveness of the school's actions to raise standards in writing in Years 1 and 2 (particularly for boys), in mathematics in Years 3 and 4 and for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities across the school
- how successfully teachers meet pupils' varied learning needs within the mixed year classes, including the development of self-assessment by pupils and the setting of targets for individual pupils
- the school's success in strengthening the role and impact of middle managers, including subject leaders
- the extent to which pupils engage with and develop an awareness of the diverse faiths and cultures which characterise contemporary Britain.

Information about the school

The school is much smaller than the average primary school, with three mixed-age classes. It serves the villages of Shelton and Marston Moretaine and the surrounding rural area. Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds, although relatively few are entitled to free school meals. Almost all pupils are White British. There are no current pupils whose first language is not English. In September 2009, just prior to the inspection, the school opened a nursery class with, initially, five children. A below average proportion of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities, although in most years this includes at least one pupil with complex physical needs.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This good school provides a welcoming and secure environment for its pupils. Adults provide good pastoral care and support and this is reflected in pupils' good behaviour and consistently good attitudes to learning. The school supports pupils' personal development effectively and children say that they enjoy school and feel very safe. Pupils have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles. Parents' positive views suggest that this is a successful aspect of its work.

Achievement is good. Pupils' good progress builds well on the good start they receive in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Effective teaching across the school promotes good learning. Standards have risen since the last inspection. However, pupils' progress in Years 3 and 4 is neither as rapid nor consistent in mathematics as it is in reading or writing. The school provides a good range of activities which engage pupils' enthusiasm. Recent very effective partnerships with external providers and other schools have significantly enhanced pupils' opportunities in music and physical education. The school itself has funded specialist teaching in information and communication technology and this underpins the competence pupils demonstrate in their use of computers.

Teachers use the good assessment and tracking systems effectively to support the planning of lessons and to guide them in providing additional support. However, while teachers do regularly check on pupils' understanding, the marking of pupils' work does not consistently provide clear guidance as to what pupils need to do to improve. Only in Year 4 do pupils actively evaluate their work against individual targets. This approach, which has contributed to the significant rise in standards at Year 4, has yet to be extended to other year groups.

The drive for improvement which is so evidently shared by staff, governors and parents, the positive impact of the school's response to declining standards in writing in 2008, together with an ongoing programme of improvements, demonstrate that the school has good capacity for the future. The provision of a safe, attractive and stimulating environment for learning has been a priority. Self-evaluation systems are used well and are generally effective in ensuring that the school continues to improve. Governors are involved in this process and, through their active work in school, have a clear understanding of pupils' performance and how it compares with other schools. They have not been so aware of the national initiative to promote community cohesion, other than at the local level.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the pace of learning in mathematics in Years 3 and 4 through:
 - providing greater challenge for more able pupils
 - more systematic recording of mathematical procedures
 - developing more opportunities for pupils to use their mathematical skills to extend their learning in other subjects.
- Involve pupils more in their own learning by ensuring that marking provides a clear evaluation of what pupils have achieved and indicates the next steps in their learning.
- Ensure that staff and governors enrich and extend pupils' learning opportunities through engaging more systematically with the principles of community cohesion, particularly in relation to the national and international dimensions.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils very much enjoy school and their enthusiasm and commitment provide a very positive context for learning. They settle readily in lessons, work well independently and in groups and form positive relationships with those around them. This was evident, for example, in the concentration of Year 1 pupils when attempting a delicate drawing task on their computers and of Year 2 pupils while eagerly using technical terms to describe mathematical shapes.

Records indicate that, across the school, pupils build well on their previous learning and make good progress when they start Year 1. Staff pay close attention to individual needs, supported, where appropriate, by effective adult support. As a result, learning is consistently good for all groups of pupils. In spite of potential variability because of the small number of pupils in each year, standards in key academic skills by the end of Year 4 have shown steady improvement in recent years. In 2009, overall standards in Year 4 were well above expectations. Standards in reading were equivalent to what is expected of Year 6 pupils. This represented rapid progress from the end of Year 2. Although standards in mathematics were slightly above average, progress in the previous two years was only satisfactory. Particularly in Years 3 and 4, the pace of learning in mathematics is slower than in either reading or writing. In part, this reflects some lack of challenge for the more able pupils. Not enough priority is given to the systematic recording of mathematical procedures. Analysis of pupils' performance at Year 2 in 2008 had indicated weaknesses in writing, particularly for boys, and this became a focus for improvement. Effective action and close monitoring of progress had a very positive impact, so that, by summer 2009, standards in Year 2 were above average in all subjects, with boys now outperforming girls in writing.

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Pupils' overall spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They feel very safe in school and have great confidence in the adults around them. They have few concerns about the behaviour of others nor do they feel at risk of bullying. Their well-developed social skills and good levels of academic success ensure that they are well-prepared for their future education and adult life. Attendance is broadly average, largely because of family holidays taken in term time. Pupils contribute well to the school through the school council, which provides a forum for their views. As yet, opportunities for them to learn about, or mix with, children from areas of the United Kingdom with greater ethnic diversity, are limited.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is good throughout the school. In some aspects seen during the inspection, such as the dynamic specialist teaching of information and communication technology, it is outstanding. Small class sizes and close relationships ensure that lessons are a positive experience for pupils. The school has improved the quality of planning so that tasks set are better matched to pupils' abilities. This is reflected in steadily rising standards by the end of Year 4. Teaching assistants are well prepared and work closely with class teachers. The school has become increasingly effective in checking and extending pupils' learning. Assessments are used regularly to check progress and to determine where support is needed. However, the marking of pupils' work is a weaker aspect. Pupils are not always given a clear view of what they need to do to improve. There is, at times, insufficient rigour and pride in the presentation of written work. Individual learning targets have been identified for Year 4 pupils and

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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they mostly have a good awareness of the next steps in their learning. However, this good practice has yet to be fully implemented in other years.

The school has been creative in developing the curriculum. In some aspects, such as the support for gifted and talented pupils, provision is relatively new. Partnership arrangements have been very effective in supporting curriculum development in, for example, music and physical education, through joint venture and specialist support initiatives. These activities have provided good quality opportunities for pupils, including the chance to work, on occasion, with pupils from other schools. There are missed opportunities to apply pupils' mathematical skills in other curriculum subjects. There is good provision for personal, social health and citizenship education and this underpins pupils' good personal development. The range of extra-curricular activities is good and activities are well-supported by pupils.

Staff care for pupils well and there are close links with most parents who appreciate the easy access to the school and its staff. The school works effectively with outside agencies to support the more vulnerable pupils who have identified learning or welfare needs.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account:	
The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Staff and governors are highly effective in supporting pupils' pastoral development and in building links with the local community. While there are still initiatives, such as individual target setting, which have yet to be fully implemented, the school has significantly improved its effectiveness since the last inspection. The headteacher has a clear vision for what needs to be done and most parents value the strong ethos which he and the governors have established. More effective subject leadership has underpinned rising standards in the last two years, particularly in reading and writing. The main school improvement plan identifies appropriate objectives for the future, criteria for judging success and timescales for action. On occasion, the timescales for improvement could be more tightly defined, so that the pace of school improvement is accelerated.

The governing body encompasses a wide range of professional expertise and local knowledge and deploys this information shrewdly in support of the school. The vision and determination of governors have sustained a programme of refurbishment and improvement, resulting in good, modern accommodation and attractive grounds.

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Many governors regularly give time to help in the classrooms and consequently have a close knowledge of pupils' learning. They understand the school's strengths and weaknesses and actively involve themselves in shaping its future direction. They successfully fulfil their role as 'critical friends' to school leaders. They ensure that statutory requirements are met, including the school's thorough procedures for safeguarding pupils.

The school engages closely with community interests and parental expectations, tackles any potential discrimination resolutely and promotes equality of opportunity well. Although the school has not fully evaluated its practice, a close knowledge of its immediate community ensures that the school makes an effective contribution to community cohesion at that level. The school has not yet systematically identified opportunities for pupils to extend their awareness of a broader range of cultures and communities within the United Kingdom and in the wider world.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

The number of children entering school, and the extent of their prior experience, varies widely from year to year. Over time, children typically enter Reception with skills and knowledge that are broadly at the levels expected for their age. This appears similar for the new Nursery group. Children settle quickly as a result of the well-organised induction arrangements and the high ratio of adult support. Effective teaching helps children, particularly those with additional learning needs, to make good progress. They are well cared for and have good relationships with staff. They feel safe and secure, are enthusiastic about learning and behave well. Outcomes are particularly good in pupils' personal development, in speaking skills and in reading and writing, where they are supported well by effective teaching of the linking of

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sounds and letters. By the end of Reception, standards are usually above those expected nationally. Leadership and management are good and recent changes have been efficiently managed. The monitoring and recording of progress are rigorous and information collected is used systematically to inform planning. Occasionally, in the stimulating outdoor area, staff do not intervene as promptly as they might and there are some missed opportunities to engage with children and move their learning on. The new Nursery room provides a purposeful learning environment. The school intends to review existing resources in Reception and enhance these as necessary.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Most parents speak highly of Shelton Lower School and this was reflected in the very positive response to the questionnaire. 'This is the way all schools should be,' wrote one parent, 'small, friendly and a key part of the community', while another commented that 'this is a very special school'. A small number of parents feel that the school is not as attentive to children of average ability as it might be, while other groups receive a greater proportion of the additional support. Overall, the consensus suggests that this is a happy, caring school where most pupils flourish academically and personally and which is effectively led and managed. Inspection findings generally endorse parents' positive views of the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Shelton Lower School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 19 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 55 pupils (43 families) registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	13	68	5	26	1	5	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	10	53	6	32	2	16	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	6	32	9	47	2	16	1	5
My child is making enough progress at this school	7	37	9	47	1	5	2	11
The teaching is good at this school	7	37	9	47	1	5	2	11
The school helps me to support my child's learning	5	26	11	58	2	11	1	5
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	7	37	10	53	0	0	1	5
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	5	26	10	53	0	0	1	5
The school meets my child's particular needs	6	32	10	53	1	5	2	11
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	3	16	11	58	2	11	2	11
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	3	16	13	68	1	5	1	5
The school is led and managed effectively	4	21	12	63	2	11	1	5
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	10	53	7	37	0	0	2	11

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.



3 October 2009

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of Shelton Lower School, Marston Moretaine MK43 OLS

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you and spending time in your lessons. We found that your school is good, with some significant strengths.

Our main findings are these:

- You behave well and work hard.
- Standards in Year 4 are well above average, and are very high in reading.
- Teaching is good and this helps you to make good progress.
- Children in Nursery and Reception get off to a good start.
- The school makes sure that you are cared for extremely well. You conduct yourselves very safely and know how important it is to eat healthily.
- The curriculum is good, with strengths in information and communication technology, music and physical education and with good out-of-school opportunities. Those of you who need extra support are well provided for.
- Those in charge of the school make sure that it runs very smoothly.

We are asking the school to make these changes so that you do even better:

- Provide greater challenge in lessons so that the pace of your learning in mathematics is closer to what you achieve in reading and writing.
- Make sure that when teachers mark your work they give you clearer guidance as to how you can improve.
- Make sure that you develop a greater understanding of the varied cultures and faiths which make up our country and world.

You can help by continuing to work hard and do your best. We hope that you will have every success in the future.

Yours faithfully

George Logan
Lead inspector

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