

Mary Bassett Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109508
Local Authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	337305
Inspection dates	20-21 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Christopher Gray

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	104
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Graham Banfield
Headteacher	Mrs Deborah Pargeter
Date of previous school inspection	23-24 April 2007
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Registered childcare provision	The Mary Bassett Pre-School
Number of children on roll in the registered childcare provision	73
Date of last inspection of registered childcare provision	NA

The registered childcare provision, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Age group	4-9
Inspection date(s)	20-21 October 2009
Inspection number	337305

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited ten lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work, conducted a scrutiny of pupils' past work and looked at data about pupils' progress in all classes. They also looked at school records, curriculum plans and the school improvement plan, and analysed 27 parental questionnaires.

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

- the progress of all pupils in every class, with a focus on the performance of boys
- children's attainment on entry to the pre-school and their progress throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage
- the impact on pupils' progress of leadership and management at all levels
- strengths in pupils' personal development, especially behaviour.

Information about the school

The school is smaller than most schools of its type. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above what is usually found. A below average proportion of pupils come from minority ethnic groups and the proportion who speak English as an additional language is low. The proportion of pupils with statements of educational need is well above average, as is the percentage who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The largest groups have behavioural, emotional and social needs and moderate learning difficulties. There is pre-school provision for 32 children, managed by the governing body, and before- and after-school clubs. At the time of the inspection, there were no children on roll in the Nursery, as these children transfer from the pre-school setting after Christmas. The school holds the SportsMark and the Healthy Schools Award.

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 is a good school which is rapidly improving, and has outstanding provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Children enter the pre-school with skills that are much lower than expected for their age and make outstanding progress, so that they start Year 1 with standards that are in line with expectations overall, and higher than expected in some aspects, such as reading. This is a recent improvement and means that standards are set to rise in future years as pupils move up the school. Standards in Year 2 and Year 4 have been broadly average over the past three years. Last year's Year 4 pupils reached standards that exceeded the expectations for their age. Pupils make consistently good progress in every class in reading, writing and mathematics. The school's own analysis shows that progress in mathematics would be faster if pupils had greater facility with simple number calculations and more experience of problem solving.

The school has emerged from a difficult period when there were problems with the poor behaviour of a number of pupils. Staff have worked effectively over the last two years to encourage pupils to speak out about any bullying or bad behaviour. As a result, pupils now say that they are confident that all adults will deal well with any problems. An indication of the vast improvement in behaviour is the reduction in the number of exclusions from 22 two years ago to two last year. Behaviour is now good throughout the school, though a very small number of pupils still need reminders as to how to conduct themselves. Mostly, they respond well. The school's recent focus on behaviour means that pupils are very critical of the behaviour of others and were reluctant to describe it as 'good'. For this reason, inspectors studied behaviour very carefully, taking into account the views of parents and the pupils, as collected by the school and the inspection questionnaires. All the parents and virtually all of the pupils who responded say that children are safe and enjoy school. This is reflected in the improved attendance figures, which are now average. Pupils need have no hesitation in saying that behaviour is good in Mary Bassett Lower School.

Teaching is good and promotes pupils' enjoyment of their learning. The curriculum is being replanned to link most subjects together, in a creative way. An example is the current topic in Years 3 and 4 on Victorians. A 'murder mystery' was the springboard for all activities. Pupils are looking at the suspects - people such as a doctor or an artist - and through these characters are studying topics such as 19th century medicine and the paintings of Turner. Each topic is being replanned as the year proceeds, to ensure full coverage of the National Curriculum and provide assessment opportunities. This work is still in progress.

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Many parents and staff commented on the improvements in the school brought about since the appointment of the present headteacher two years ago. Her commitment to the education and well-being of the pupils is exemplary and is fully shared by her staff. The improvements described above, and many others, demonstrate the school's good capacity for sustained improvement. The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation is shown by the fact that this report's areas for development are key priorities in the school's own improvement plan. Governors give good support and effective challenge to the school's work. Their contribution to community cohesion is good in the local context, but the school recognises that more work is needed in the national and international spheres. This is reflected in pupils' limited understanding of the beliefs and experiences of children from other backgrounds.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' basic number skills by
 - ensuring that pupils have appropriate resources, such as number lines and counting blocks, whenever they need them
 - developing the work already started to give pupils more opportunities to solve problems and carry out investigations.

- Build on the work to link subjects together creatively by
 - completing the planning of topics for the rest of the school year
 - increasing pupils' understanding and experience of cultures other than their own.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils achieve well because they enjoy their learning. Year 3 pupils were composing poems for performance, in the manner of a poem they had listened to entitled 'Walking with my Iguana'. The teacher involved them in exciting activities to widen their vocabulary, asking them to mime words such as 'soporific' and 'pompously'. All pupils were fully involved in the lesson because the pace was fast, the activities varied and enticing and the level of challenge was high. Pupils have challenging targets to reach in English and mathematics, though there are occasions when a few pupils would benefit from targets in terms of the amount of work to be produced. Progress is good in reading, writing and mathematics, but some pupils do not have enough experience of making simple mental calculations quickly. Pupils of different abilities and backgrounds perform at similarly good rates. Test data sometimes show that boys and girls do not perform at the same rate. The school's tracking and observations round the school show that the difference is neither marked nor follows any pattern.

Pupils make a good contribution to the school and local community. Older pupils escort younger ones around the school's complex site. The members of the school

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council listen to the opinions of their classmates. For example, they wrote a letter to the kitchen staff to request more fruit and fewer puddings - though it was difficult to establish exactly how popular this move had been. This shows that pupils have a good understanding of how to keep fit. When asked why it is important, one pupil replied, 'To stop fatness getting to your heart'; another said, 'To help you get stronger and win races.'

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They set high standards for the behaviour of others and, for most, of themselves. They are learning that freedom of opinion is an important concept, but have a less well developed appreciation of cultures beyond their own.

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	3
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?

Teachers plan well to meet the needs of the different abilities in their classes. This is done well in mathematics, though a shortage of resources sometimes means that pupils who need counting apparatus are disadvantaged. Activities designed to appeal to boys' interests are frequently included. Very good use is made of interactive whiteboards to engage pupils' attention and broaden their experience. Teachers' marking is of good quality and gives pupils pointers as to how to make it better.

The curriculum is well enriched with a wide range of visits, visitors and extra-curricular activities. The creative curriculum is popular with pupils, as could be seen in the care which a class of Years 3 and 4 pupils took in producing collages, paintings

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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and pastel drawings of Turner's 'The Fighting Temeraire.'

Good care, guidance and support are offered to pupils. Levels of pastoral support are exceptional. The school has a number of vulnerable pupils and all staff work hard to ensure that their personal needs are met effectively. The 'Nurture Group' is highly effective in building up the self-confidence and learning skills of a group of younger pupils. Pupils say that the school is a safe and happy place. 'Teachers do a good job. I am happy here,' wrote one pupil in a response to the questionnaire. Staff do everything they can to improve attendance, though figures are kept at average levels by a small number of long-term absences. The before- and after-school clubs offer children a secure environment to relax, play and extend their learning.

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?

Governors have a goal that all pupils should leave the school proud of having been a pupil at Mary Bassett Lower. This vision is evident in the work of all adults in the school. The drive for improvement is shared by all and recognised by parents. As one wrote, 'The headteacher has introduced some excellent initiatives since she started two years ago...First-rate staff.' Another observed, 'The school has made many changes for the better.' Another example of this is the success of the drive to involve parents much more in their children's learning. This was rewarded with 100% attendance at parents' consultation evenings. The establishing of groups, such as the parents' and toddlers' afternoon, has had a good impact in increasing parental involvement in school.

Safeguarding procedures are very thorough. The school has many pupils who need high levels of pastoral support and this is reflected in the rigour of arrangements to ensure their security and promote their confidence. One pupil commented, 'Every one works hard in school and they take registers to make sure they don't lose someone.' This level of concern means that all pupils, whatever their backgrounds, have equal opportunities to learn and thrive. The school ensures that there is no discrimination of any kind.

Governors' involvement in the school is at a very practical level. They play a full part in strategic planning through the school improvement plan and monitor the progress of the school's work towards its priorities. They have first-hand experience of the work of the school and offer good challenge to senior and middle leaders. Parents'

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and pupils' views are regularly sought and acted on when appropriate. They are committed to the principles of community cohesion and have included in the current school improvement plan a priority to expand the school's work in a national and international context.

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 Early Years Foundation Stage provides an outstanding start to children's education at Mary Bassett Lower School in both the pre-school and Reception. The pre-school is a very safe environment where children settle in quickly. Excellent attention is paid to developing their speaking and listening skills, since many have under-developed language when they start. Some are very reluctant to speak at first. Staff are vigilant at all times, not only for children's safety but also for the steps they make in their learning. Careful notes are made of children's learning and development and these feed into the planning of the next steps each child makes. As a result, outcomes in achievement and personal development are outstanding. A group of children in the pre-school were making and sampling porridge. They knew that it was made of milk and water and that it is generally eaten for breakfast, but were less familiar with oats. The adults reminded them of the oats by letting them feel them dry. Another group of children were trying out the feel of cold porridge. Children have a very good range of equipment outside, where they play and experiment in great safety because of the high levels of adult supervision and close attention to learning. Parents are well involved, especially at the beginning of each session. Leadership and management are outstanding and ensure a seamless experience for children from the time they begin aged two to leaving Reception aged five. All statutory requirements are fully met and hygiene requirements for the youngest are in accordance with requirements.

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Children in Reception continue to make outstanding progress. Outcomes in achievement and personal development are excellent. Teaching is outstanding and the experience children receive is consistently of high quality in all groups, reflecting outstanding leadership and management.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Views of parents and carers

The responses to the questionnaire were about average for this size of school. Parents' views are very positive on every aspect. One correspondent summed up the views of many: 'I am very happy with the school. Both my children are thriving here.'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Mary Bassett 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 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 27 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 104 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	16	59	11	41	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	20	74	6	22	1	4	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	18	67	9	33	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	18	67	8	30	1	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	18	67	8	30	1	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	13	48	12	44	1	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	17	63	9	33	1	4	0	0
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)	11	41	9	33	0	0	1	4
The school meets my child’s particular needs	15	56	11	41	1	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	17	63	9	33	0	0	1	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	15	56	10	37	0	0	1	4
The school is led and managed effectively	19	70	7	26	1	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	19	70	7	26	0	0	0	0

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

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.



22 October 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Mary Bassett Lower School, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 1AR

Thank you for making us so welcome to your school. We enjoyed talking with you, looking at your work and seeing the farm animals. I was very pleased to get a friendly reception from Thumper the rabbit.

You go to a good school where you are given good care and help. Behaviour is good. I know that this is not always so for a very small number, but you should all celebrate what a happy and safe school yours is to work and play in. You make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics and enjoy many aspects of your work. You also like playing too, and this is an important part of learning. Your teachers do a good job in making sure that you get the most out of all they do for you. The children in pre-school and Reception make a really good beginning to their education.

The school is well run by your headteacher and all the staff. They show an exceptional amount of care for all of you. To make the school even better, I have asked them to do two things. The first is to help you get better at solving problems in mathematics. You can help by practising your number skills as much as you can, and asking for things like number lines to help you if you need them. The second thing is to go on planning the topics that you enjoy in the afternoons. During these lessons, teachers will help to give you more understanding of children from backgrounds that are different from your own.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Gray
Lead inspector

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