

Shackleton Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109526
Local Authority	Bedford
Inspection number	337311
Inspection dates	9–10 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Alan Jarvis

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	5–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	295
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Debbie Nicholls
Headteacher	Mrs Ann Parish
Date of previous school inspection	10 January 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed eight teachers in fifteen classroom visits. Meetings were held with governors, the headteacher and a number of staff responsible for key areas of the school's work. Inspectors looked at planning, minutes of meetings and other documentation, including that relating to safeguarding and pupils' learning and progress. Several informal discussions were held with parents. Questionnaires returned by 77 parents and carers, 102 pupils and 25 members of staff were analysed.

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

- The extent to which attainment and progress in writing and mathematics have improved.
- How well the increasing numbers of vulnerable pupils are cared for.
- How effectively teaching and the curriculum are personalised to pupils' needs.
- The impact of the leadership team and governing body on school improvement.

Information about the school

This school is larger than average. Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds with Bangladeshi, White British and Pakistani backgrounds being the largest groups. Around one half speaks English as an additional language. Increasing numbers of pupils start school speaking little or no English. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above average. Most commonly these pupils have support for their moderate learning, speech and language or autistic spectrum disorder needs. Children enter the Reception classes at the start of the autumn, spring or summer terms. The school has achieved National Healthy School Status and the Intermediate International 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 where leaders and managers at all levels take the view that all pupils, regardless of their social and cultural backgrounds, can attain standards that are at least as good as those reached by other pupils nationally. Better teaching and a more interesting curriculum have helped attainment to rise and the progress of all groups to quicken. As a result, from a low starting point when children join in Reception, most attain nationally expected levels by the time they leave in Year 4. This represents good progress and is made possible by highly effective systems to track, identify and tackle any underachievement of individuals and groups of pupils, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who start school speaking little or no English. Attainment is stronger in reading than it is in writing and mathematics.

Pupils' personal skills are equally well developed. At the heart of this is good pastoral care and support which ensures pupils feel very safe and well supported at all times. The school works closely with families and other agencies to help its vulnerable pupils to overcome any barriers to learning and gain as much as they can from school life. Their good understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles is reflected in the school's recent awards. Pupils are very clear about what is right and wrong and the importance of considering what life is like for others. Their spiritual and cultural understanding is especially good and they appreciate and respect the wide range of cultures which shape their lives. The pride pupils take in their work and good behaviour is evident in the splendid displays, particularly in their artwork and displays representing cultural diversity, and the calm and purposeful learning atmosphere in lessons.

Teaching has improved because of good staff training and supportive monitoring which gives teachers clear pointers for improvement. Very sharp learning targets have been very carefully identified for each pupil in English and act as a spur to learning in lessons. Those in mathematics, while good, are not quite as sharp and this is one factor limiting progress in mathematics. Marking is consistently effective. There are not enough opportunities for pupils to assess their own or their peers' work in order to pinpoint for themselves exactly how to improve. The curriculum has been overhauled so as to better meet pupils' differing needs, add zest and stimulate pupils' enjoyment and creativity. Further improvement is constrained because some opportunities are missed to develop problem solving in mathematics, and links between literacy, numeracy and other subjects, while good, are not fully embedded across topic work.

The headteacher's vision and strong drive for improvement are equally shared by leaders and managers at all levels. Their self-evaluation is good and clear priorities for improvement are set and evaluated against local and national benchmarks. Good partnerships with other schools, outside agencies and parents and carers also make a

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strong contribution to pupils' academic and personal achievement. The governing body fulfils its statutory responsibilities and ensures finances are used efficiently. However, its role in self-evaluation is not fully effective because governors are too dependent on the good information provided by the headteacher and other staff. This limits their ability to identify priorities and monitor how well planned developments are progressing. Nevertheless, the rising attainment, improvements in all aspects of provision and the improvement in the overall effectiveness of the school clearly demonstrate a good capacity for further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in writing and mathematics by:
 - sharpening individual pupils' learning targets in mathematics
 - involving pupils more in assessing their own work and that of their peers
 - providing more problem solving activities in mathematics
 - strengthening the use of literacy and numeracy in other subjects.
- Within the next year, ensure that the governing body holds the school to better account and plays a greater role in shaping its development by:
 - improving governors' skills so they can fully participate in the process of self-evaluation and review
 - ensuring that governors are more active in setting priorities and monitoring the impact of the school improvement plan.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

The work seen in lessons and pupils' books confirms that attainment has risen from being below that expected to being in line with national expectations in Year 4. Attainment in reading has remained strong because pupils are targeted with an individualised reading programme and parents and carers are expected to help them read at home. A strong focus on using traditional stories as a stimulus for writing, a high focus on developing vocabulary and the link between letters and sounds have led to attainment in writing rising strongly. In mathematics, the rise is less marked, but more problem solving activities are bringing a steady improvement. The gap between the attainment of boys and girls, evident by the end of year two, is very narrow by the end of Year 4.

Most pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who start school speaking little or no English make good progress because of the careful identification of their needs and individualised support provided. Pupils from Bangladeshi or Pakistani backgrounds progress equally well, helped by the specialist language support they receive. The majority of White British pupils make good progress, but a few, who are often absent or whose families find it difficult to engage with the school, do not make enough progress. The school is doing all it can to address any barriers to learning by

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reaching out to their families. Many pupils who start school with very low starting points or only have one term in Reception make very good progress by the time they reach the end of Year 4.

Pupils relish their learning and are keen to do well in lessons. For example, in Year 1 pupils worked enthusiastically and cooperatively at a good pace when measuring soft toys in a calm and purposeful manner. In Year 4, pupils were looking at fractions and many hands shot up in response to the rapid questioning from their teacher.

Throughout the school pupils produce good, neat and well-presented written work in literacy, numeracy and different topics, reflecting the pride and care they take in their work.

Pupils have a good voice in the school through the school council. Others play an active role by helping in the school library and being buddies to new arrivals and younger children. When asked how they would keep safe, two said, 'Look carefully both ways and listen out for cars when crossing the road,' and 'Only talk to your friends when using a computer.' When asked how you could avoid being overweight they said, 'Don't eat between meals and cook your own food with plenty of fruit and vegetables.' They are interested in the lives and beliefs of other people and can tell you that 'different holy books encourage you to be kind to others and help the poor.' They are interested and respectful of other pupils in the school from different backgrounds. Pupils' average attendance and their sound ability to apply their basic skills satisfactorily prepare them for the next stage of their education.

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

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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The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teachers use a variety of techniques to challenge and successfully meet pupils' different needs. Some pupils are withdrawn from lessons for short periods so that assistants can work with them on language development or on tasks chosen to help their individual learning. Sharp questioning is targeted towards individual pupils or those of different abilities to add extra challenge. Distinctively, clear learning targets form the centerpiece of most literacy and numeracy lessons and give pupils clear goals when working on their tasks. Marking is consistently good and focused on pupils' learning targets. Teachers use comments and a marker pen to highlight pupils' work with a gold stripe to identify when a target is being met and give a star when it has been fully achieved. Opportunities are missed to fully involve pupils in assessing their own work.

The curriculum offers a broad range of imaginative experiences which promote an enthusiasm for learning. French is provided in Years 3 and 4. Pupils enjoy the theme weeks such as a recent 'International Week' in which they learnt about life in Rio de Janeiro and made carnival masks. Their experiences are enriched by the popular cheerleading, choir, Bengali and other clubs. The basic skills curriculum has been strengthened and other subjects combined in topics such as the Second World War themes 'Pack up your troubles' and 'Up the Usk and down the Nile' which focus on geography and how different people live. Good literacy and numeracy links have been planned in such topics, but they are less evident in some other topics.

Pupils rightly say that the school is a safe place to be and any concerns are listened to and acted upon. There are many examples of the right action being taken to ensure that vulnerable pupils and their families are given timely help and support to help them make the most of school life. Pupils who are not ready to be included full time into normal lessons are well cared for in the nurture group. Transition to middle schools is good. Measures taken to address the attendance of the few pupils who are persistently absent or who take term time holidays abroad are not fully effective.

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

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How effective are leadership and management?

Teaching has improved because it is monitored effectively and each teacher is given clear points for improvement. Although the success criteria for attainment in subject leaders' action plans are not sharp enough, the good impact of past plans is clearly evident in the rising attainment and the improving quality of teaching and the curriculum. Termly pupil progress meetings are used well to help sharpen targets for teaching and hone the support provided for individual pupils. The school is successful in ensuring that most pupils have the opportunity make good progress in all years. It has closed the gap between most groups and, to improve equal opportunities further, leaders are focusing on the underachievement of a few White British pupils.

The governing body is at the early stage of implementing an action plan to develop its expertise and capacity to fully participate in school self-evaluation. While the school gives governors good quality information, their own visits to school to look at practice and discuss developments lack a sharp focus. Safeguarding policies and procedures are implemented well and reflect good practice. Staff are constantly vigilant about child protection issues because of the very good training they have received, although new governors are not fully aware of some aspects of recent safeguarding guidance. The school has an in-depth understanding of the area it serves and has implemented a good plan for community cohesion. As a result, pupils thrive in a school community free from discrimination. Good links have been established with a rural school and a school in Italy so that pupils can have an extra dimension to their appreciation of how other people live.

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	3
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

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Early Years Foundation Stage

No matter what their starting point, children make good progress because of consistently good and encouraging teaching and a stimulating curriculum which is well planned to meet their individual needs. While many pupils are not yet reaching the expected levels in communication, language and literacy, and calculating by the end of Reception, their social skills, and knowledge and understanding of the world are in line. Both the indoor and outdoor environments are a delight to be in and offer stimulating areas which help develop children's skills across all areas of learning. For example, inside they enjoy dressing up and using their imagination in the role play area while outside boys and girls enthusiastically play on wheeled toys around the tyre racing track. Children enjoy singing, using the computers and learning about their own and other people's backgrounds. Each child is allocated a key worker who ensures that a high priority is given to children's welfare. Their unique learning needs are also well planned for through regular and detailed assessments made as children learn. The Early Years Foundation Stage is led and managed well and the good improvements made since the last inspection have improved its overall effectiveness. The leader is ambitious for further improvement, and key priorities are to further improve children's literacy and mathematical skills and to hone the already good links that have been established with parents.

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

The vast majority of parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire are very happy with the school. They are particularly happy with the teaching, how well the school is led and managed, and the way their children enjoy school and feel safe. Parents and carers told the inspectors how easy it was to approach the headteacher, who often welcomes them when they bring their children to school in the morning. Typical comments on the questionnaires included, 'The headteacher is extremely approachable and has gone out of her way to help my son,' and 'The best thing about the school is how well it celebrates the diversity of all the children who attend.'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Shackleton 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 77 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 295 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	45	58	30	39	2	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	55	71	20	26	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	46	60	27	35	1	1	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	36	47	34	44	4	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	48	62	26	34	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	40	52	32	42	2	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	42	55	32	42	1	1	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)	37	48	33	43	3	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	35	45	35	45	3	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	33	43	37	48	2	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	27	35	44	57	3	4	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	43	56	28	36	2	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	50	65	23	30	1	1	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 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

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 is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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 pupil's 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.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



11 June 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Shackleton Lower School, Bedford, MK42 9LZ

Thank you for making us so welcome when we made our recent visit. We enjoyed talking with you, looking at your work and seeing you learning in class. We found out that you go to a good school and here is a list of some of the things we liked best.

We can see why you say you love coming to school and feel happy and safe.

You also told us you liked the many clubs on offer and we like them too.

The young children in the Reception class are doing well.

You make good progress because you are taught well and the enjoyable curriculum is tailored well to your needs and interests.

Those of you who need extra help in your learning receive good support and you take advantage of this to make good progress.

By the time you leave school you have made good progress in reading, writing and mathematics, and your written work is neat, tidy and well presented, reflecting the pride you take in your work. Well done!

We were impressed by your politeness and good behaviour and your strong understanding of how to eat healthily and keep fit.

You know a lot about different cultures and how different people live their lives.

Your headteacher, governing body and teachers have done much to improve the school and are working hard to make it even better.

Every school has some things that could be improved. There are two areas we want your school to concentrate on now.

We would like your teachers to ensure that attainment in writing and mathematics improves further by making teaching and the curriculum even better. You can help by being more involved in assessing how well you are doing and really focusing on your targets.

We would also like your governing body to work even more closely with the school to see how well it is doing and be better at guiding improvements.

I wish you great success in the future. It was a pleasure to meet you all.

Yours sincerely

Alan Jarvis

Lead inspector

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