

Cranfield VC Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109598
Local Authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	337331
Inspection dates	14–15 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Kevin Corrigan

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	5–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	287
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Rossiter
Headteacher	Anna Black
Date of previous school inspection	18 January 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Nineteen lessons and 11 teachers were observed. Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, staff and governors. They observed the school's work, and looked at school data and documentation, including the school's safeguarding records. Questionnaires were analysed that were returned by 214 parents and carers, 100 pupils and 16 members of staff.

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

- at the following:
- the impact of the more rigorous and comprehensive tracking of pupils' progress
- the impact of the provision for those pupils joining the school who speak English as an additional language
- the accuracy of the school's judgements on its effectiveness.

Information about the school

Cranfield Lower School is a larger than average co-educational Church of England school catering for pupils from Reception to Year 4. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. However, a greater proportion of pupils than are found in most schools join or leave the school from different countries during the school year because their parents are attending postgraduate courses at the local university. The percentage of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals is below average, as is the proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The highest group of these are pupils in the autism spectrum. The school has Healthy Schools status and the Activemark 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

Cranfield Lower School is a good school. It has several outstanding features, including the way it cares for and supports its pupils and how it engages with parents. The clear focus and vision provided by the headteacher has brought about significant improvements since the last inspection. Pupils enter the school with attainment broadly in line with national expectations although those entering the school during the year, which is much higher than in other schools, have little or no English. However, all pupils reach standards well above national expectations in reading by the end of Year 4. A focused approach to developing writing and numeracy skills has ensured that pupils are achieving above national expectations in these areas by the end of Year 4, although writing skills remain relatively weaker for those pupils who speak English as an additional language. Pupils feel safe at the school and know what to do if they have a problem or are upset. They behave well and have a positive attitude to their school work and this contributes to the good progress in their learning. Meticulous recording of pupil attainment and progress enables teachers to set appropriate and challenging targets for individual pupils and groups of pupils. Pupils have excellent Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.

The good teaching is characterised by meticulous and consistent lesson planning, clearly focused learning objectives for different groups of pupils, and a confident and encouraging style. Pupils work productively and harmoniously as individuals or in groups. However, not all lessons are delivered in a way which responds flexibly to the different pace of learning by individual pupils, particularly the most able, who could be challenged even further. Support for learning by teaching assistants is well planned and effective. The school's good curriculum focuses appropriately on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills and is enriched by a wide range of clubs and activities. The school makes excellent use of the diverse backgrounds of pupils to develop an awareness of the wider community. However, pupils do not have enough opportunities to use their basic skills across subjects in a more stimulating way. The quality of care, support and guidance for pupils is outstanding and is characterised by an individualised approach to the academic and personal development of all pupils. Pupils stated that they can approach any of the adults at the school, should they have problems or concerns, and this is reflected in the outstanding safeguarding procedures the school has in place.

The headteacher is committed to providing a rich and rewarding experience for all pupils, a vision which is communicated to and shared by all staff. She is well supported by the governing body who share this commitment. The school promotes community

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cohesion well using the experiences of pupils effectively to promote an understanding of the context of their school and their place in the wider community. The school's current development plan is clear in its commitment to making the school outstanding in every aspect and this, and the significant improvements already made, illustrate the school's good capacity for further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure all teachers respond more flexibly to the pace of learning by different pupils by:
 - ensuring the most able pupils are always challenged and engaged
- Develop the curriculum further by:
 - using a more cross-curricular, theme-based approach which uses and develops pupils' skills across subject areas
- Continue the focus on improving pupils' writing and numeracy skills so that they match the standards achieved in reading.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Pupils enter the school with levels of literacy, numeracy and social skills broadly in line with national expectations. However, those joining from abroad during the school year speak little or no English but receive additional, highly effective support to enable them to access the curriculum. By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils consistently attain above the national average in reading, writing and numeracy, including the pupils joining from abroad. For example, pupils in a Year 2 class could identify and explain clearly the different features of fiction and non-fiction texts. Pupils' ICT skills are very well established, as witnessed in a Year 1 class where pupils were confidently and competently using computers to write, edit and save imaginative stories as word-processed text. Those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress as good as their peers.

Pupils are friendly and supportive of each other and have a good attitude to learning. They enjoy their time at school and behave very well in lessons and around the school. Pupils from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds work and play together harmoniously. They feel safe at school knowing that adults are ready to listen to them and deal with their problems. Most pupils understand the importance of healthy foods and they participate enthusiastically in a good range of sports activities and this has resulted in the school achieving Healthy Schools status and the Activemark award.

The pupil council is active in the life of the school, for example, in planning and designing improvements to the range of playground equipment. Pupils are well prepared for moving on to the next stage of their education, although some lessons do not provide sufficiently challenging activities for the more able pupils who may have completed lesson tasks quicker than their peers. Attendance is above average, unauthorised absence is rare and procedures for dealing with daily absence are robust

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and effective. The school makes excellent use of the varied background of their pupils to promote their multi-cultural awareness and to reflect on and appreciate the richness of the world's cultures. They have an excellent understanding of right and wrong, for example stating how they often resolve arguments in the playground among themselves.

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	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Teachers prepare their lessons meticulously, making good use of the school's comprehensive range of data on pupil attainment. Learning objectives are clearly stated and explained for the different ability groups in classes. Resources are used expertly, including technological aids, and lessons proceed with enthusiasm and at a brisk pace. Teachers make excellent use of the wide variety of pupils' backgrounds, for example in Year 2 lessons where pupils had researched the experiences of their grandparents. Teachers use targeted questioning well to check pupils' understanding. However, occasionally teaching can be too rigid in covering lesson content at the expense of being flexible and responsive to individual pupil contributions, particularly those of more able

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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pupils.

The curriculum is enriched with a very good range of extra-curricular clubs, activities and trips. Themed days and weeks such as 'Evacuee day' and 'Africa week' promote pupils' understanding of the wider world well. Provision for ICT is excellent, with regular and effective use of the computer room, classroom computers and interactive whiteboards by both teachers and pupils. The school is developing a more flexible and creative curriculum which will further stretch, challenge and enthuse pupils, particularly the more able.

The quality of care, guidance and support provided by the school is outstanding. The school provides a welcoming, friendly learning environment in which all pupils feel safe and well cared for. Pupils are confident in the school's ability to advise and support them. Pupils joining the school during the year invariably have little or no English but receive highly effective individualised support to improve their literacy skills. Teaching assistants provide effective, well-targeted, support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Parents are kept very well informed of pupil progress and, where pupils need support, through the well used 'home-school book'.

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	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The significant improvements since the last inspection have been mainly as a result of the headteacher's clear focus on improving all aspects of the school's provision and outcomes. Expectations are high at the school and this is communicated well to pupils and adults. The school is a vibrant, harmonious and caring community. Significant staff changes have been handled robustly but sensitively and the relatively new senior leadership group are now also beginning to have an impact on the work of the school. Formal monitoring of lessons is now well established, although the school's grades tend to be a little generous.

The relatively new governing body discharges its statutory responsibilities well, particularly in ensuring the school is a safe environment for pupils. The Chair has a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and how to challenge as well as support the headteacher and her staff. The school's engagement and communication with parents are outstanding and they are reflected in the high level of satisfaction expressed by the vast majority of parents. Partnerships with other schools and organisations are good, particularly the local university, which supports school

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events such as International Week.

The school's promotion of equality of opportunity is good, particularly in the way it ensures pupils joining the school during the year are encouraged to participate in the range of activities and clubs on offer. Safeguarding procedures are outstanding, with meticulous records kept and very robust procedures in place for the recruitment of staff. The school uses its mix of pupils very well in promoting an understanding of its religious, ethnic and socio-economic context and has developed an awareness of this in pupils. Celebrations of different cultures feature strongly in lessons and themed events, and pupils regularly fundraise for local and international charities.

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	1
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	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

The school's two Reception classes provide a safe and harmonious environment for children, who enjoy their time in lessons and at break-times. Pupils join with levels of attainment and development broadly in line with national expectations, although children who join later in the year often speak little or no English. Children quickly learn their letters and sounds because of the good teaching they receive and lots of encouragement for speaking and reading. Support in class is well targeted and individualised. Relationships are good and children are confident in sharing successes as well as issues with adults. Robust and accurate assessment of children ensures they make good progress by the end of Reception, although writing for some pupils remains relatively weak. At times, there is too much emphasis on adult led activities at the expense of those initiated by the children. Pupils have access to a good range of stimulating indoor resources but there are not enough learning facilities outside for

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children to widen their learning experiences. The early years programme is well planned and managed, and takes account of the views of parents and their children.

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

Virtually all parents and carers responded that the school is a safe environment, teaching is good and the school is well led and managed. They say their children enjoy school and this was corroborated by the pupils who were spoken to during the inspection. A few parents and carers raised individual concerns about behaviour and specific needs not being catered for, but the inspection team concluded that procedures to tackle these issues are robust. Many parents commented on the significant improvements made since the last inspection, particularly in how the school communicated with them.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Cranfield VC 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 214 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 287 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	127	59	75	35	8	4	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	134	63	76	36	4	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	91	43	108	50	9	4	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	95	44	100	47	12	6	5	2
The teaching is good at this school	109	51	101	47	2	1	2	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	91	43	111	52	8	4	3	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	84	39	125	58	5	2	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)	108	50	91	43	7	3	2	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	97	45	104	49	7	3	4	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	81	38	104	49	19	9	6	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	72	34	119	56	11	5	5	2
The school is led and managed effectively	116	54	91	43	1	0	5	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	122	57	81	38	6	3	4	2

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.



16 June 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Cranfield VC Lower School, Bedford, MK43 0DR

I am writing to you to tell you about your school's recent inspection. I would like to thank you for the help you gave me and my colleagues. We talked to many of you during lessons and outside of class and looked at your books. We also received 100 questionnaires from you, where you told us that you enjoy school and you learn a lot in lessons. You also said you feel safe and can talk to your teachers or other adults at the school if you are worried or need extra help with your work.

Cranfield Lower School is a good school which has some outstanding features, not least in the way you all work and play so happily together. Your headteacher and her colleagues lead the school well and provide many opportunities for you to enjoy your learning. The school has improved significantly since its last inspection in 2007 and ensures that you all gain the skills in reading, writing, and mathematics that you ought to. We also noticed that your work on computers is excellent. The quality of care, guidance and support you receive is outstanding. One of the reasons for this is that the school tracks your academic and personal development very closely and teachers know what to do to help you to make good progress.

There are a few areas where the school could improve even further. These are:

- ensuring teachers always take account of how well you are learning in lessons and whether you need to be given additional or different activities to keep you interested
- providing more exciting activities and lessons in the afternoon which bring together your skills from all the subjects you are learning
- continuing the work the school is doing to further improve your writing and numeracy skills.

All of you can help by telling your teachers if you find your work too easy and by continuing to work hard to improve your writing and numeracy skills even further.

Thank you again. I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Corrigan

Lead inspector

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