

Dunton VC Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109599
Local Authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	337332
Inspection dates	11–12 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Anthony Green

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	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	57
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Susan Myler
Headteacher	Mrs Heather Curry
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The majority of time was spent observing learning. Inspectors observed all teachers, visited seven lessons, and held meetings with governors, teachers, all subject leaders, office staff and groups of pupils, including members of the school council. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including assessment data, information on the progress of pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable, internal monitoring files, governors' minutes and reports from the school improvement partner and the local authority. Joint observations of lessons were also carried out with the headteacher. Thirty four parents' questionnaires were scrutinised, as well as responses from pupils and staff.

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

- attainment and achievement in mathematics, especially by the end of Year 4
- the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support the curriculum
- the opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy and numeracy skills across a range of subjects.

Information about the school

In this small, but oversubscribed, school most pupils are of White British heritage. There are no pupils who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average but rising. Almost half the pupils travel to the school from outlying areas. The school is 'soft' federated with another voluntary controlled lower school in a neighbouring village, which means that both schools have separate staff and governing bodies but work together on curricular initiatives. The headteacher shares her time equally between both schools. The three classrooms are housed in temporary buildings. There are plans to replace these rooms with permanent classrooms but no date has been set. The school has a number of awards including the Healthy School Award, the Active Mark and full International School Accreditation.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Dunton VC Lower School provides an outstanding quality of education, enabling pupils to attain well above average standards by the end of Year 4. Central to the school's success is the excellent leadership of the headteacher, who is very ably supported by her senior teacher and all staff. Parents are overwhelmingly appreciative of the work of a dedicated team of staff and governors. One parent typically wrote, 'Dunton VC Lower educates the whole child superbly. The pastoral care is second to none.'

Outstanding teaching and learning, together with a rich and stimulating curriculum, have a significant impact on pupils' achievement. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make excellent progress despite some constraints in provision due to planning restrictions and a lack of covered facilities for the outdoor area. Older pupils continue to make outstanding progress. By Year 4, standards in the past have been well above average in reading and writing and above average in mathematics. The school recognised that standards in mathematics were not as high as in reading and writing and implemented strategies to address the difference. Inspection evidence shows that the strategies implemented are working well and standards in mathematics are now as high as in the other subjects. All groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those whose circumstances make them vulnerable, achieve equally well.

In all year groups, well-informed teaching assistants support small groups and individuals very well. Assessment is used extremely well by teachers to plan for mixed age, and mixed ability, classes in Years 1 to 4. As a result, work is very well matched to individual needs. Teachers' marking is conscientious and sets targets for improvement. Older pupils are also involved in the marking of their work or in peer assessments. Year 4 pupils have a good understanding of what they need to do to improve their work. However, although teachers set individual targets, not all pupils are fully involved in setting their own targets.

The outstanding curriculum is enriched by visits and visitors and a range of clubs and activities. One pupil commented that 'it never gets boring here'. Music is a particular strength of the school. Sporting activities also play an important part, which is reflected in the Activemark award. Opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy and numeracy skills, in a range of subjects and through homework, are planned for very well. The provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is good, with a small suite of computers and an interactive whiteboard in each class.

Contribution to community cohesion is excellent. The school is a focal point for the village community and is also very active in the wider and global community. This is

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reflected in the ideas submitted by pupils for the proposed development plans for Dunton Village and Biggleswade town, and its International School Accreditation. Very strong links have been made with schools in Africa.

Personal development and well-being are outstanding and underpinned by excellent care, guidance and support. Pupils' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development results in exemplary behaviour and attitudes. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school. They feel very safe and know who to go to should they have any problems or concerns. One commented, 'It's like a family and the teachers look after us a lot.'

One

Leadership and management are outstanding. Together with a dedicated and committed team of staff, the headteacher has created a learning environment where pupils thrive. She manages her time very well between her two schools. Despite the high standards achieved, there is no complacency but a strong commitment to move the school forward. Staff are enthusiastic about their roles and are proud to work in the school. One wrote, 'I always look forward to coming to work and am regularly reminded of how important my contribution is to the smooth running of the school.'

The school is highly accurate in its self evaluation, deriving its knowledge of its strengths and areas for development from rigorous monitoring. It uses this information extremely well for school development and is doing enough to maintain its very high standards. Consequently it demonstrates that it has an outstanding capacity for sustained improvement. The school provides outstanding value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure pupils are fully involved in the assessment of their own work, so that they have a deeper understanding of how they can achieve progress through greater involvement in setting their own targets.
- Improve the outside area for the Early Years Foundation Stage by installing a covered area to support the use of the outdoor environment in all weathers.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

During the inspection, children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and pupils in the older year groups were seen to be enjoying high quality learning experiences and making consistently rapid progress in their work. The levels of attainment seen in pupils' books and in lessons reflected the high standards recorded in the school's own data. In the lessons observed, pupils' learning was excellent as a result of the high quality of teaching and support given. All groups, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable, make equally excellent progress against their targets. Pupils are very motivated by their work. They are polite and engaging when talking to adults and visitors, and confirm that they feel very safe. As a result, attendance is above average. They are developing excellent skills to prepare them for their next stage of learning and later life.

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Pupils have an excellent understanding of the need to eat healthily and to take plenty of exercise, as reflected in the school's Healthy School Award. They enjoy having responsibilities and supporting the wider community through, for example, fundraising for local and international charities, and helping in the local community garden. The school council make an excellent contribution to school life. They have recently canvassed their peers and, as a result, have introduced a gymnastics club and art club. Pupils are developing an excellent awareness of other cultures through curricular themes, visits and visitors.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

Teachers' very good planning and use of a wide range of high-quality resources, including teaching assistants, make a valuable contribution to learning. As a result, pupils work hard in lessons within a highly productive learning environment. Teachers set targets for pupils to work towards. However, not all pupils are fully involved in their own target setting. Very good use is made of assessment data to track pupils in all subjects. The school has developed its own system of tracking to ensure that it

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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accurately informs teachers of the levels achieved by pupils and the next steps needed to build on those levels.

Very good links are made between different subjects to make them relevant and interesting for pupils. Themed activities capture pupils' imagination. Pupils enjoy using ICT to support other subjects. For example, Year 3 and Year 4 pupils were observed using a word processing program to write about the life of a Dickensian child, as part of their literacy work.

The personal, social and health education programmes, assemblies, visits and visitors and the whole-school work every Friday on 'values' ensure that there are many opportunities for pupils to reflect on their experience and on the world around them.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The strong leadership of the headteacher has been the key to sustaining the outstanding outcomes of the school. One parent wrote, 'An exceptionally supportive school. The headteacher has worked tirelessly to ensure that that the school meets my child's needs.' Because of the small number of teaching staff, each has a number of subjects to lead. They prioritise their subjects well. The evaluations made are accurate and reflect the high expectations they set for themselves.

Safeguarding and child protection procedures are outstanding and meet government requirements. Pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable are supported extremely well by staff and by the excellent links with outside agencies. The progress of all groups of pupils is tracked very well to ensure that all have the same opportunities to succeed. Practices for promoting equality of opportunity within the school are outstanding, reflecting the outward-looking promotion of cohesion within the wider community. The 'Global Classroom' and the International School Accreditation initiatives have forged very strong links with schools in Ghana and Nigeria and an Antarctic expedition. There are developing links with a school in London and a school in Australia. Governors bring a wide range of experiences and backgrounds to the school. They are extremely supportive and they contribute very well to monitoring and development. The governing body is both challenging and evaluative.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enter the Reception class with knowledge, skills and understanding that are generally in line with those expected for their age, though often above in problem solving, reasoning and numeracy. They settle into Reception well because of the excellent transition arrangements in place with the local pre-school. Children make excellent progress and by the end of the Reception year they are very well prepared to enter Year 1. Behaviour and relationships are very well managed. The learning environment is resourced and organised well to provide a mixture of interesting activities. However, the class is housed in a temporary building. Due to planning restrictions, it has had to be sited in a part of the school with only a small outdoor area that is not directly overlooked. This restricts the degree to which children can enjoy free-flow activities from indoors to outdoors. The outdoor space also has no all-weather covering. The restrictions imposed are managed as well as possible. As a result of outstanding leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage, there is good teamwork and cohesive planning. Ongoing assessment is used very well to plan for individual children, which results in their outstanding achievement.

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	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

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Views of parents and carers

The overwhelming majority of the 34 questionnaires were positive and parents believe that this is a caring and supportive school, where pupils are taught well and individual needs are met; views that agree with those of the inspectors. Almost all are happy with the school and are pleased with the progress their children are making.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Dunton 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 inspector received 34 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 57 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	23	68	9	26	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	26	76	8	24	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	17	50	16	47	1	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	24	71	9	26	1	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	26	76	8	24	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	21	62	13	38	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	20	59	14	41	0	0	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)	18	53	15	44	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	25	74	8	24	1	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	15	44	19	56	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	14	41	19	56	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	19	56	13	38	1	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	25	74	9	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 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 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.



13 January 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Dunton VC Lower School, Biggleswade, SG18 8RN

Thank you for your extremely friendly welcome when we visited recently to inspect your school. We very much enjoyed talking to you. We would like to thank the groups of pupils who spoke to us about their views of the school and those who took the time to complete our questionnaire and to write extra comments. We really enjoyed your singing in your assembly and the song 'My name is...', where you responded with 'We're very pleased to meet you'. We were also very pleased to meet you.

As a result of what we found out during the inspection we judged your school to be outstanding. There is too much for us to list, but what is particularly outstanding is:

- the progress children make in the Early Years Foundation Stage
- the progress you make from Year 1 to Year 4 and the high standards you achieve by Year 4, especially in reading, writing and mathematics
- the excellent teaching in the school and the way in which all staff work hard to keep you safe and to ensure you are well cared for
- the excellent links your school has with the local community and communities abroad, especially in Africa; many of you also proudly commented on your present links with an expedition in Antarctica
- the enriched and enjoyable curriculum that is offered to you
- the excellent leadership and management of the school.

Even in an outstanding school, things can be improved. These are what we have said can be improved, and your school agrees:

- you can become more involved in the assessment of your work, so that you know exactly what you need to do to improve
- the outside area of the reception class needs to be developed, and to have a covering, so that children can use it in all weathers.

Thank you again for your contribution to the inspection. We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Anthony Green

Lead inspector

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