

Wilden CofE VA Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109627
Local Authority	Bedford Borough
Inspection number	337338
Inspection dates	6–7 October 2009
Reporting inspector	John Carnaghan

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	40
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr K Morgan Jones
Headteacher	Mrs J Overs
Date of previous school inspection	4 May 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited six lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at school records, assessment information, pupils' work, monitoring records and 27 parental questionnaires. The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

pupils' attainment and progress and how these compare with national standards

- how well the school promotes good teaching
- the school's planning and its capacity for improvement in the future,
- Pupils' knowledge about how they can improve their work.

Information about the school

Wilden Lower School is a much smaller than average school. Almost all pupils speak English as their first language and the large majority are White British. Fewer than average pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school recently gained the International Schools and Healthy Schools Awards.

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

Wilden CofE VA Lower School provides a good education. A number of its features are outstanding. Pupils and parents are very happy with the school and value the benefits of its small size, such as the very good relationships. The school works with great success to ensure that its size and isolation do not limit pupils' opportunities. One parent's comment was typical, 'the school keeps learning interesting using interactive means, such as the learning platform and educational visits.'

Wilden is a happy place to learn and grow and pupils' attendance is high. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the school and wider community. The school council is very active, raising hundreds of pounds for charities and village causes. Pupils took a leading role in designing, costing and putting into effect recent major playground improvements. This project also made a good contribution to the development of skills relevant to their future.

Teaching is good. Pupils are well managed to keep them on task. Lessons are thoroughly planned to interest pupils by offering varied, interesting activities. Pupils are confident, keen to discuss and participate and enthusiastic learners. Whilst pupils' work is regularly marked, there are too few helpful comments to move pupils to the next level. Targets are well known to pupils, but are too general to have a consistent impact on their performance. The excellent curriculum offers exciting possibilities for learning. Subjects are combined in interesting topics and these enthuse pupils. The learning platform provides pupils with interactive activities that help to consolidate their learning and offer fascinating new opportunities for study.

Good provision helps pupils achieve well. From starting points that are close to expected levels, pupils make good progress. Their attainment by the time they leave school is above that expected for their age. The school takes great care to ensure that no pupils are left behind, so all groups, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, achieve equally well.

The headteacher and staff work harmoniously to make sure the school runs well and improves. Teachers monitor the school continuously and know its strengths and weaknesses. Although much of this information is not formally recorded, it provides a good basis for planning for the future. School plans prioritise well and offer good strategies to address potential weaknesses. This cohesive, purposeful leadership and management ensure that the school's capacity for sustained improvement is good. The way the school promotes community cohesion is outstanding. Very well developed links with the local and international community offer terrific opportunities to widen pupils' horizons. Numerous visits and visitors enrich the curriculum hugely.

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Governors are keen to offer their support. However, their monitoring is inconsistent and does not provide them with a clear enough picture of the school. This, in turn, means that they lack the confidence to challenge the school. Safeguarding is satisfactory, but governors were unaware of some administrative errors in the compilation of school records.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- develop marking and assessment so they consistently give clear guidance to pupils about how to improve their work, by April 2010
 - ensure all members of the governing body monitor the school systematically and use their improved knowledge to improve the way they support and challenge the school, by January 2010
 - As a matter of urgency, ensure that all relevant safeguarding information held by the school is entered onto the single central register.

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

The school's outstanding curriculum and good teaching promotes good learning and achievement. The school's efforts to include and support all pupils mean that no groups or individuals are allowed to slip behind. Pupils are keen to progress and they work hard in the classroom to meet objectives set by the teachers. They are excited by interesting opportunities to learn, join in keenly and are delighted when they are successful. These strengths mean that pupils from all groups make good progress in both Key Stage 1 and in Years 3 and 4.

By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils' attainment is above average, especially in reading. Their progress across Years 1 and 2 is good, particularly when taking into account their close to average starting points in using letters and numbers. Pupils joining the school during the year can have a distorting influence on overall attainment, because year groups are so small. Although attainment dipped a little in 2009 due to a high percentage of pupils with special educational needs in the year group, it is usually high. Analysis of the progress being made by the current Year 4 shows attainment is back on course and pupils continue to make good progress

Pupils enjoy school life and get on well together. Attendance is high. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of their own safety and that of others, they behave well and are lively, welcoming and keen. They choose to eat healthily and most exercise enthusiastically, responding very positively to the school's strategies to promote healthy lifestyles. Pupils are enthusiastic to investigate and discuss spiritual matters and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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' 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	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	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The excellent curriculum provides a range of rich opportunities to learn. Subjects are very interestingly combined and this enthuses pupils. For example, Years 3 and 4 were working on space. This provided appealing opportunities in English, mathematics, design and technology and music for example. Areas studied are tailored to pupils' tastes and needs. The appeal of modern foreign languages is boosted by many international links. The learning platform is an excellent example of a dedicated school website that provides information on curriculum, suggested homework and forthcoming events as well as additional information on numerous areas like children's health and development. It provides a mass of useful, easily-accessible information for pupils, parents, governors and staff.

Lessons are well planned and prepared. Pupils are closely engaged with their own learning because their needs are well known and they are encouraged to act independently. Teachers question pupils perceptively, both to develop and consolidate their learning and to check their levels of understanding. They are well managed by their teachers and this encourages good behaviour and responsible attitudes.

The school has plenty of accurate assessment information about each pupil's attainment and progress. It uses this to identify areas of concern, to provide support and extra challenge when required and to set simple targets. These targets are broad and do not offer sufficient personal guidance to pupils. Marking of pupils' work is regular, but much of it does not give clear advice to pupils about how work could be improved.

The school provides a warm, caring environment for all pupils. Staff offer good support for those who need it most and pupils are happy that there are friendly adults who look

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after them well. Good links with neighbouring schools ease older pupils' transition to middle schools. Attendance is encouraged by rigorous procedures, such as calling home in the early hours of absence. Whilst safeguarding is satisfactory, some of its systems lack rigour.

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	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and staff work harmoniously to ensure the school is well run and drive improvements. While monitoring lacks formality, it provides staff with a clear picture of the school. This information is used well to develop clear, detailed and ambitious plans for the future. This effective planning has improved the school and ensures that its capacity for sustained improvement in the future is good. Assessment data is carefully analysed to ensure resources are deployed where they are most needed. This helps the school to provide good value for money.

Governors offer keen support. However, because they do not systematically monitor the school, their knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses is insecure. This limits the opportunities for the governing body to challenge the school as well as it should. Governors were unaware that some safeguarding records did not gather all the relevant information clearly in one place. However, all safeguarding requirements are met and staff have been trained in relevant safeguarding skills.

The school is fully committed to working in partnerships to overcome potential limitations caused by its isolation and size. Local school links enhance the physical education curriculum and aid pupils' transfer at the end of Year 4. As an international school, the school takes a leading role in linking with at least four other schools world-wide. These provide unique experiences and splendid learning opportunities, ranging from visits to France to e-mail correspondence with Australian pupils.

Relationships with most parents and carers are very positive. The school provides clear information about every aspect of its activities through the learning platform, face to face and written methods of communication. Information on how well pupils are learning is regularly accessible from a number of sources and this promotes good progress.

The school's work to promote community cohesion is outstanding. The school understands its significance in the village community and has a very positive impact locally. For example, it helps to raise funds for the village playgroup and provides

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professional support for other schools for example with regard to the learning platform and global learning. The school embraces all faiths, many of whose members contribute to school life. International links broaden pupils' horizons and reinforce their understanding of the strength of their own school community.

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	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children settle well into school life in this secure, welcoming environment. To them, the Reception class is a unique and exciting part of the school. The very small group of pupils are in the care of two experienced and capable adults and this means that children and their needs are very well known. Children enter the Reception class with skills and abilities that are at the expected levels for their age. They make good progress and, by the time they move into Year 1, standards are above average with strengths in knowledge and understanding of the world and personal development. Children's level of understanding of sounds and letters and numbers is a little lower. Children enjoy learning, get on well together and develop good independence.

The learning area is spacious and well equipped. Because sessions are so well planned, children benefit from the pleasant outdoor learning area, wandering happily in and out, selecting from a range of interesting activities. Ongoing assessment is very thorough, rapidly building a clear picture of each child's strengths and needs. Teaching is well planned, building effectively on a good range of assessment information. There are constructive relationships with parents and carers, which help children settle in quickly, but the potential for parents and carers to add information to children's profiles is, as yet, untapped.

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The Early Years Foundation Stage leader is well informed and focuses keenly on ensuring that children make good progress in all areas. She is working effectively to improve children's understanding of letters and numbers. Adults cooperate seamlessly to ensure that all children are included in all activities and that their welfare needs are fully met.

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

Parents and carers are very positive about the school. The rate of response to the questionnaires was high and all parents and carers are happy with their children's experiences. A very small minority express concerns over bullying. Inspection evidence reveals a few minor incidents that the school has dealt with effectively. A small number of returns mentioned a lack of accessible information about pupils' progress. The information available to all parents and carers on the learning platform and in homework diaries addresses this issue well.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Widen C of E VA 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 40 pupils registered at the school from 28 families.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	18	67	9	33	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	18	67	8	30	1	4	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	12	44	12	44	3	11	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	15	56	12	44	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	17	63	8	30	2	7	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	14	52	9	33	3	11	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	17	63	10	37	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)	13	48	12	44	0	0	2	7
The school meets my child's particular needs	12	44	14	52	1	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	11	41	7	26	4	15	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	10	37	11	41	4	15	1	4
The school is led and managed effectively	12	44	11	41	4	15	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	14	52	9	33	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.



8 October 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Wilden CofE VA Lower School, Wilden, Bedford, MK44 2PB

Thank you so much for helping us when we visited your school recently. You told us that Wilden is a good school and we agree! Most things about the school are good and some are excellent. The excellent ones are the curriculum (that is the areas and subjects you study) we especially liked the way subjects are combined together to cover exciting topics, like space and we also thought the learning platform was marvellous. You have an outstanding knowledge of how to stay healthy and you do a lot to contribute to the school and village life. Your attendance is high. The school has excellent links with other places, both near and far, and the connection with schools abroad is great.

Good elements are the way you are taught and learn. Marking could offer more helpful comments and your targets could be clearer. But lessons are interesting and well-organised and you join in activities very well. Everyone is properly supported so no one falls behind. This means that all of you achieve well in your time at school. Usually, standards at the end of Year 4 are above those expected for this age. The school is well led and managed. All teachers work together well to help the school run smoothly and to plan well for the future. Like almost all schools, some things could be better. I have asked the school to improve:

Marking and targets, so that you are given more ideas how to improve your work. If you are unsure about this, you should ask your teachers

- the way governors find out about school life, to help them ask better questions of the staff,

The way checks on keeping you safe are written down.

Once again, many thanks for all your help. It was great meeting you

Yours sincerely

John Carnaghan

Lead inspector

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