

Shortstown Lower School

Canberra Road, Shortstown, Bedford, MK42 0UZ

Inspection dates 24–25 April 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher's strong and effective leadership motivates all staff and pupils to develop their talents to be the best they can be.
- Leaders and managers, including governors, have ensured that teaching is good and that pupils' achieve well, despite major disruptions to staffing in the last few years. The school continues to improve.
- Progress is good because teaching is good. Teachers plan interesting and well-organised lessons and question and challenge pupils to think. This engages their interest so that they learn well and develop good skills in different subjects.
- Effective teaching and extra support for those who need it mean that all groups of pupils make good progress.
- Behaviour is good and pupils care for each other and show a pride in their school. They feel safe, enjoy learning and work hard.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Sometimes, the marking of pupils' work does not show them clearly enough what they need to do to improve.
- Progress in mathematics, although good, is not as high as that in English. The recent change to teaching children of similar ability levels in small groups has not yet had time to improve their skills in calculation.
- Only a few teachers share the responsibilities for leading subjects and helping each other to improve their teaching. Too few teachers have the opportunity to develop these management skills. This slows the rate of improvement.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 14 lessons and part lessons of which three were joint observations with the headteacher. They also observed some teaching of small groups, and saw how pupils who needed extra help were supported.
- They looked at many documents including records of progress and attendance, plans for school improvement and policies to keep pupils safe.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read, looked at their books and talked to them about their behaviour and their views about their school.
- They visited and observed assembly, break times and lunchtimes.
- Discussions were also held with school staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of 19 responses from the on-line questionnaire (Parent View), of informal discussions with parents at the end of the school day and of responses from the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Jenny Edginton, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Kate Robertson

Additional Inspector

John Greevy

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well above the average, but fewer pupils speak English as an additional language than in most schools.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs who are supported at school action is above average. The proportion supported at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is slightly below.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which is extra funding provided in this school for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, is high.
- There has been considerable disruption to staffing in the last few years, with almost all teachers new to the school since the last inspection, including the headteacher.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop the use of the school marking system so that teachers make sure that pupils always know how well they have done and how to improve their work.
- Develop the leadership roles of more teachers so that they can:-
 - take on responsibilities for leading the teaching of different subjects and developing subject plans
 - improve their coaching skills to help raise more of the good teaching in the school to be outstanding.
- Raise standards in mathematics by extending the recently-introduced system of teaching pupils in smaller groups to develop their skills in calculations.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Many children start in the Reception Year with skills which are lower than those expected for their age. Their starting points can vary from year to year, but all children make good progress.
- Pupils continue to make good progress in older classes so that, by the end of Key Stage 1, their attainment is broadly average. The good progress continues in Key Stage 2.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs receive support well matched to their needs. This can be in a Nurture Group, which supports pupils who sometimes find it difficult to learn with a whole class, in smaller group sessions for particular subjects, or through one-to-one teaching. The impact of this is carefully checked by senior staff and ensures that pupils make good progress from their starting points.
- The attainment and progress of pupils from minority ethnic groups and those for whom English is an additional language, are at least as good as, and sometimes better than, those of others in the school.
- Until recently, the attainment of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium was about a year behind that of others, in both English and mathematics. Now, because of the extra support they are receiving, these pupils make good progress and the gap is closing.
- In a recent Year 1 reading screening check, pupils eligible for pupil premium support had higher scores than other groups in school.
- Most pupils enjoy reading. The attractive library, the extensive range of new books and the promotion of reading through book days and visits from authors has a positive effect on those who need encouragement.
- Pupils use their knowledge of the sounds that letters represent (phonics) to read new words and they enjoy developing these phonic skills through lively lessons.
- The achievement of pupils overall has improved over recent years but attainment in mathematics is not quite as high as in English.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching seen by inspectors was good. Records kept in school and pupils' work show that teaching is mainly good with some which is outstanding.
- Teachers question pupils carefully to check their understanding and challenge their thinking, and this results in good progress.
- The use of discussion between pairs of pupils in most classes helps pupils to share and develop ideas. This enabled pupils in Year 3 to understand the attitudes and behaviour of characters in a story. They were then successful in acting out their own interpretations of the story.
- In the Reception class, children were 'buying' food in a café to practise and improve their

language and number skills in a real-life situation. Teachers and support staff used questioning well to help children to improve their knowledge and understanding.

- Pupils are enthusiastic about the topics they study and the way in which subjects are linked. One class learnt a lot about perimeters by exploring the size of an Egyptian pyramid. In another class, pupils identified types of angles in the shapes of famous buildings. This clearly linked their school learning to practicalities.
- Recent changes in the teaching of mathematics, by grouping pupils according to their attainment for a few lessons each week, is starting to increase the rate of progress for the older classes as they concentrate on gaining good number skills.
- Marking is regular and often detailed. However, the marking policy is not used consistently, so not all pupils are told how to improve their work or given time to do so.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils' good attitudes to learning mean that behaviour in lessons is usually attentive and involved. They co-operate well and work together in a calm and organised way. Skilled and calm behaviour management by adults means that any less positive behaviour is not allowed to disrupt the learning of other pupils.
- Pupils say they enjoy school and are proud of taking on responsibilities. A Year 4 pupil explained that being a member of the School Council '...means you have to be a good role model for the little ones'.
- Attendance levels have risen to be broadly average and the staff and governors have set targets above national attendance levels. The school works hard with parents to ensure that these are maintained.
- The great majority of parents are positive about the behaviour in school and, along with the pupils, say that any problems are rapidly and effectively dealt with.
- Bullying is seen as rare and this is shown by the behaviour logs kept by the school. Pupils understand different types of bullying and say that they feel safe and cared for in school, as there is always someone to help them.
- Pupils understand the need for good manners and their polite and friendly attitudes reflect the positive values in the school. Behaviour in the playground is good and they share the space and their games fairly. They usually move around the school sensibly, although a few pupils need careful supervision as they find it difficult to remember and observe the rules which each class sets for itself.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has high ambitions for all in the school. Her drive, high standards and care are reflected in the attitudes of staff and pupils. She has welded a largely new and inexperienced staff into an effective team who are ensuring all pupils make good progress.
- Leaders have a clear and accurate knowledge of how well the school and its pupils are doing and have developed clear plans for future progress as the size of the school expands and moves

into its new building.

- The school works successfully with the local university and colleges for training teachers. School support staff are enthusiastic and appreciative of the headteacher's support in their own training and career progression.
- The school works successfully to develop good links with families. Responses to Parent View and discussions between inspectors and parents were positive, with the great majority of parents prepared to recommend the school to others.
- All aspects of safeguarding requirements are met. The school makes sure that all pupils are given equal opportunities and that discrimination of any kind is not tolerated.
- The local authority provides a representative who holds professional conversations with the headteacher, which give her good support in analysing the school's performance.
- The wide range of topics and subjects taught promotes the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils well. They enjoy many opportunities for dance and music, working with visiting artists, authors and sports coaches as well as taking part in residential activity courses, visiting places of worship, attending local festivals and much more.
- Senior leaders work hard and effectively with other teachers to develop teaching skills and improve subject knowledge and teaching but there are not currently enough teachers with extra responsibilities to develop this work further.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The strong and experienced governing body is well informed about the quality of teaching in the school. It has considered current performance data and is aware of both strengths and weaknesses in pupils' achievement.
 - Governors understand the links between pay and performance and reward teachers appropriately. They set clear targets for the headteacher and both support and challenge her.
 - Finance is carefully spent after clear identification of need and its impact is carefully checked. For example, they have spent pupil premium funding wisely and so raised the progress of eligible pupils.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	109498
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	413351

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	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	156
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lesley Adams
Headteacher	Denise Cottam
Date of previous school inspection	2 December 2008
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