



Shortstown Lower School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109498
LEA BEDFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 278208
Inspection dates 23 November 2005 to 24 November 2005
Reporting inspector Mrs. Joyce Cox LI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Canberra Road
School category	Community		MK42 0UZ
Age range of pupils	5 to 9		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01234 740148
Number on roll	136	Fax number	01234 743644
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs.Susan Gaszczak
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Mrs. Alison Bray

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This small lower school serves the community of Shortstown near Bedford. The majority of the pupils are from White British backgrounds. The others are from mixed heritage or minority ethnic backgrounds. Virtually all speak English as their main language. This is a community where levels of social and economic disadvantage are high. Almost half of all pupils are entitled to free school meals and many enter the school with knowledge and skills that are below average for their age. About a quarter of the pupils have learning difficulties and disabilities. Frequent changes in leadership, along with considerable staff absence have posed barriers to improvement in recent years, although the school is now in a phase of greater stability.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The inspection findings agree with the school's view that it provides a satisfactory quality of education. Parents are full of praise for the 'breath of fresh air and tremendous vitality and enthusiasm' which the new headteacher brings to the school. Numbers are increasing as news of the school's revival spreads and the school gives satisfactory value for money. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Pupils, including children in the Foundation Stage, achieve satisfactorily. Standards, which declined significantly in 2003 and 2004, are now average at the end of Year 2 and slightly below the expected levels at the end of Year 4. This is due to considerable difficulties with staff absence in Year 3 and 4 and inaccuracies in the past in assessing pupils' abilities. Teaching, particularly in terms of marking and setting targets, varies throughout the school but is predominately satisfactory. The atmosphere in the school is very positive. The school is welcoming and works hard to make all children feel valued. The views of staff, parents and pupils are sought and acted upon. Leadership and management are satisfactory but the leadership of the headteacher is particularly effective. The school derives significant benefit from working closely with staff from other schools, and local advisors provide very good support. The capacity for improvement is good as demonstrated in the much improved test results in 2005 and in the skilful and sensitive management of complex staffing issues by the headteacher.

What the school should do to improve further

- Stabilise the staffing in the Year 3 and 4 classes. - Raise standards and achievement in English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT) throughout the school by continuing the current strategies. - Improve the quality of marking and make sure that all teachers set clear learning targets for pupils. - Continue to seek and benefit from the close links and effective guidance provided by local advisors to secure further improvements.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Many children start school with weaknesses in their mathematical, language and literacy skills. They make satisfactory progress in the reception class. By the time they join Year 1 not all have reached the expected levels and attainment is still below that normally found at this age. After a dip in standards in 2003 and 2004 Year 2 pupils' progress improved significantly in 2005 as the vast majority reached the expected levels in the national tests. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics rose dramatically this year because of improved teaching, higher expectations and accurate assessment information. The school's many lower attaining pupils and those with learning difficulties did exceptionally well to attain the expected levels for their age in mathematics. Children from minority ethnic groups make satisfactory and, in some cases, good progress. The progress pupils make from Year 2 to Year 4 has fluctuated

during recent times due to considerable staff absence which resulted in some pupils not always achieving as well as they might. On her appointment, the headteacher immediately set out to rectify this by putting measures in place to improve standards in response to the low test results in 2004. The school is determined to raise standards even further by the end of Year 4.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils do well in moral and social development and behaviour is good, despite a number of pupils with potentially challenging behaviour. A supporting adult, known as a 'learning mentor' successfully helps pupils come to terms with feelings of anger and frustration. Parents say they have noticed vast improvements in behaviour recently and are now confident that any bullying issues are tackled swiftly and successfully. Pupils develop well socially because staff are consistently modelling good manners, respect, consideration and courtesy. In assemblies, pupils are encouraged to care about each other and the headteacher gives an uplifting start to the day. Pupils make good progress in spiritual and cultural understanding through trips and special events that broaden their outlook, such as visits to Whipsnade Zoo and filling Christmas boxes for children in Africa. Pupils understand healthy lifestyles and how to keep safe. Physical activities include extremely exciting and lively daily aerobics sessions led enthusiastically by a teaching assistant. Community links are strong. Pupils enjoy fundraising, and the summer production of 'Grease' raised 1000 pounds. They leave with satisfactory basic skills to help them in their future economic well being. Attendance levels are average and improving as the school gives certificates and books to the pupils for perfect attendance.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. The headteacher and governors have worked tirelessly to minimise the disruption caused to pupils' learning by prolonged staff absence and are close to stabilising the situation. In addition the local authority and a consultant headteacher have provided effective support to help raise teachers' expectations and expertise. In the best lessons teachers use questioning and discussion well to make pupils think carefully. Targets help pupils understand what they need to do to improve although these are not used consistently in all classes. Work is normally planned to meet pupils' various needs but the lack of challenge restricts pupils' achievements. Pupils with learning difficulties enjoy all lessons because they are supported very sensitively and effectively by a competent team of talented teaching assistants. Pupils with behavioural difficulties benefit from regular meetings and counselling sessions with the recently appointed learning mentor. Assessment information is used effectively, particularly in Year 2, to set targets and direct additional

help to individuals. The quality of marking varies between classes and older pupils are not always told how to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. Planning has improved, particularly for pupils with learning difficulties who receive good support from teachers, teaching assistants and the learning mentor. Planning in the Foundation Stage has also improved due to staff changes and local advisor support. Children benefit considerably from having interesting and enticing indoor and outdoor activities and the headteacher has plans to improve this valuable resource even further. Staff have worked hard to improve their ICT expertise and are becoming increasingly competent at using interactive whiteboards to sustain pupils' interest. Year 4 pupils enjoyed using the internet to research Roman and space topics. Work is complemented by recently increased opportunities to take part in other activities. These include chances for pupils to develop interests and talents in music, games and sport. There is broad range of lunchtime and after school clubs and activities, such as football, tag rugby, aerobics, computer and chill out zone, successfully promote pupils' personal and social skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pupils are well cared for in this happy, friendly school which prides itself on welcoming everyone. Support for pupils with learning difficulties is good. It is especially characterised by good levels of pastoral care from all staff. Support for pupils who need extra time and consideration because of family situations is very good and the headteacher and staff make sure they get to know families well. Child protection procedures are firmly in place and staff are very vigilant. In some classes pupils have relevant literacy and numeracy targets, which help them to improve their work, but this is not yet consistent practice in all classes. Parents' views about the school are positive. They like the new headteacher very much and feel that she has 'worked wonders at the school and brought renewed hope and pride to the local community.'

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The inspection findings concur with the school's evaluation of itself and show that there is good capacity to improve. The headteacher provides good leadership and has worked very hard since her appointment just under a year ago. She grasped what needed to be done to raise standards very quickly, and dealt rigorously but fairly with very difficult staffing issues. With the effective support of staff, advisors and a local headteacher she has succeeded in putting successful strategies in place to improve standards. Satisfactory systems have been introduced to evaluate the school's work. Staff morale has been raised and improvements to the buildings have created a bright fresh learning environment. The

schools now has a happy ethos where all staff work together well. Subject leadership has renewed vigour and enthusiasm, and is underpinned by regular guidance from local advisors. The governance of the school is satisfactory. It has improved recently and the charismatic chair, along with two other governors, provides good support and challenge through the 'school improvement group.' Other governors are very new to their roles and are currently receiving training. Many of the strategies to improve the school are relatively new but are already having a positive impact on raising standards and pupils' achievement.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for welcoming me to your school when I visited. It was a pleasure to talk to some of you and to watch you working and playing. This letter is to tell you about some of the important things I saw. You are lucky at your school because the headteacher, teachers and all the other staff encourage you to be happy at school, to be healthy and to stay safe and they ensure you have opportunities to learn new things. Several of you told me how much you liked your new headteacher and your teachers and how well you thought they helped you to learn. You behave well and this makes it easier for the teachers to teach and for you to learn. You don't like it when people do not behave well, but you know what to do if they don't. You enjoy looking after each other such as when you are toilet monitors and are on the school council. Your headteacher and all the teachers are keen to make the school even better for you. I think that to do this they need to make sure that you all have permanent teachers and that you continue to improve in all subjects. Another good thing would be if your headteacher carries on getting help from experts on how to make the school even better. It will also be good if all your teachers set you targets and mark your books so you know how to improve your work. It was so good to find out that all of you are happy at school and that your parents say you love coming to school. Keep on enjoying school and 'moving on up' like your daily aerobics song!