

Millbrook Combined School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131815
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	319557
Inspection dates	15–16 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Joan Lindsay

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	337
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Ania Sagajlo
Headteacher	Miss Debra Mansfield
Date of previous school inspection	3 May 2007
School address	Mill End Road High Wycombe HP12 4BA
Telephone number	01494 524791
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This larger than average primary school provides extended services through nursery care, breakfast, after school and holiday clubs. Approximately half the pupils come from a Pakistani background, with about a fifth of White British heritage. The school has recently seen an increase in the number of Polish pupils on roll. Over 60% of pupils do not have English as their first language, which is far higher than average. There is a high turnover of pupils. Many enter into the upper end of the school with limited or no English. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is slightly above average for a school of this size. The proportion of pupils with learning disabilities and/or difficulties is roughly average. These pupils have a range of difficulties, the biggest groups having speech, language and communication or behaviour, emotional and social needs. The school has the Activemark. In May 2007, the school was inspected and was given a Notice to Improve.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Millbrook Combined School now provides a satisfactory education and in accordance with section S13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

There are some good features such as the partnership the school has with parents and outside agencies and the pupils' good awareness of healthy living. Pupils also benefit from the extensive enrichment activities available to them and from being well-looked after in school. The headteacher is held in high regard by staff, pupils and parents, several of whom commented on how they felt the school had moved forward under her leadership. One parent voiced the views of others by commenting: 'The whole atmosphere and ethos of the school has changed unrecognisably in the last couple of years.'

Most children start the Foundation Stage with skills and knowledge that are well below expectations for their age. Throughout the school a legacy of poor teaching, a previous lack of focus on literacy skills, high pupil turnover and many pupils entering with little or no English, often at a later stage of their learning, has had an enduring impact on standards. Teachers, armed with more effective tracking tools, are now better able to spot underachievement. This is beginning to have an impact on achievement. Pupils now make satisfactory progress overall. However, writing across the school is still an area for improvement. In addition, more able pupils are not reaching the standards they could as the work set for them is not always challenging enough.

Teaching has improved considerably, particularly in the Foundation Stage. It is now satisfactory overall, with pockets of good teaching seen throughout the school. This is having a positive impact on pupils' progress. There is still some inconsistency in how well teachers use information to plan for and challenge pupils of all abilities, including the more able, and in the way teachers manage pupils to eliminate disruption. An improved curriculum is already having an impact on pupils' enjoyment of school and is helping develop key skills that suffered from inadequate teaching and a lack of focus on literacy skills.

Pupils are well looked after in school and tracking data is beginning to be used to help support them academically as well. However, there is an inconsistency in how well pupils understand and use their targets to help them to improve and achieve as well as they can. Pupils' personal development and well-being, and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are satisfactory. However, too many parents remove their children for holidays in term-time, some for long periods. This has an adverse impact on attendance and how well some pupils learn.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher and her deputy have a strong focus on raising standards and achievement and new initiatives are beginning to have some effect on pupils' progress. Middle managers are still developing their roles, but are doing so with enthusiasm. Governors are very supportive and are gaining greater levels of knowledge allowing them to be more questioning especially in relation to the school's performance.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children come into school with particularly poor personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy. They make satisfactory progress, but standards are still below average by the time they move to Year 1. Staff care for and relate well to children

and this promotes their safety, welfare and enjoyment of school. Children learn to form letters correctly and make satisfactory attempts at writing their names. Behaviour is satisfactory. Some children find it difficult to share equipment, a weakness which staff are addressing. Children's speaking skills are variable. The capable leadership of the Foundation Stage now ensures children have a sound education. This is developed through an enjoyable range of activities that they can explore and choose to help their learning and development. However, this is hampered somewhat by a lack of easy access to outdoor facilities. Teaching still needs to be developed further so that it is of a consistently high standard to ensure that all children are managed and assessed effectively so that all progress as well as they can.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement across the school but especially in relation to writing, and the more able.
- Improve teaching by ensuring there is a consistency of practice in the use of the best methods to manage pupils, challenge all and give clear guidance in how to improve their work.
- Work with parents to improve attendance to enable all pupils to have the best opportunity to learn.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards overall have improved slightly, particularly in mathematics at the end of Year 2. However they remain significantly below average in English, mathematics and science and particularly in writing, across the school. A lack of literacy skills has had an adverse effect on progress overall but improvements in teaching and other initiatives are beginning to have an impact on pupils' achievement. There are signs that more pupils are gaining the higher levels at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 but there are still not enough pupils who do so. Many pupils currently in Year 6 who have been in the school since Year 2 are making good progress. However, a large number of pupils in this year group joined the school recently with limited English. This hampers their progress. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have benefited from effective targeted in-class support and they achieve at least as well as others.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils enjoy coming to school and say they 'like meeting people and learning new things in safety'. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. They know the difference between right and wrong. Behaviour, whilst satisfactory overall, is often very good when pupils are together such as in assembly. A small minority present challenging behaviour that teachers usually, but not always, manage effectively. The number of exclusions and incidents of bullying and racism have reduced this year. The 'Millbrook Message' sets clear expectations for social harmony and this is reflected in pupils' positive attitudes and willingness to support one another.

Pupils are aware of the importance of being healthy and safe. They understand how to choose a healthy diet and are proud of their 'Activemark' status. Pupils' improving basic skills and the

greater emphasis on computer and social skills means that they are now more adequately prepared for future life. Satisfactory community links are being made through local and national charitable events, but global links remain an area for further development. The resurrected school council is beginning to contribute to decisions on school improvement, for example interviewing candidates for the post of deputy headteacher. There are not yet enough opportunities for pupils to take greater responsibility for their independent learning.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching overall has improved in the last year, though it is still variable. The most successful lessons plan for pupils to respond to a wide range of teaching strategies such as the use of 'talking partners', discussions or role play. However in some lessons, activities are not sufficiently challenging for more able pupils and this prevents them making as much progress as they can. The slow pace of some lessons leads to occasional disruptions that are not always managed effectively. Pupils have some opportunities to work in pairs and small groups. This is helping to develop their communication and social skills. However, some pupils still struggle with the acquisition of good writing skills. Teaching assistants are used well in supporting the high number of pupils whose first language is not English and pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This helps ensure their satisfactory level of progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Although still in its early stages, the newly revised 'creative curriculum' has provided increased opportunities for pupils to develop knowledge through practical activities that make learning enjoyable. There is now more emphasis on developing literacy skills and this is beginning to have some impact on pupils' standards and achievements. Pupils' experiences are enhanced through visits, for example to the aquarium, museum and music centre, that make learning meaningful. A helicopter landing in school grounds and other visitors such as a mountaineer, provide pupils with exciting experiences and opportunities to learn valuable skills such as overcoming challenges. Opportunities to use computers for research have increased and are supporting pupils' learning well. The well-resourced library and the comfortable reading area provide valuable opportunities for pupils to develop an interest in reading.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pupils are confident that caring staff treat their anxieties sensitively and confidentially. They feel supported to resolve personal conflicts. This has a positive impact on pupils' personal development and well-being. A good level of qualified additional staff, for example a learning mentor and teaching assistants, provide effective support for pupils including those with learning difficulties and/or disadvantages. Support for pupils with English as an additional language is good. Child protection and risk assessment procedures meet statutory requirements and are followed by all adults.

A good system for checking on pupils' progress now enables teachers to target pupils who need extra support. Although still in its early stages, there is already evidence of the impact of this extra support on progress, although there is still some inconsistency in its use. All pupils have

individual targets. However, their use and the quality of marking is variable so that not all pupils receive sufficient advice on what they need to do next to reach their goals.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and her senior leadership team form a strong partnership committed to raising standards and rooting out underachievement. She has a strong vision for the school based on improving teaching and pupils' enjoyment of their learning. This has led to renewed enthusiasm amongst staff, pupils and parents. Targets are now more challenging for most pupils, but more able pupils do not yet achieve as well as they can. There is a strong sense, amongst middle managers of working towards a common goal to raise standards and achievement. However, whilst senior leaders have monitored and supported teaching effectively, middle managers now need to be more involved in this. The effectiveness of the school's self evaluation is sound. This, coupled with signs of improvement in pupils' achievement, combined with better teaching, give the school a satisfactory capacity to improve.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	4
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

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

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

29 May 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Millbrook Combined School, High Wycombe, HP12 4BA

Thank you very much for welcoming us into your school. We enjoyed talking to you and your teachers, coming into lessons and assembly and having a chat with you about your school. We think your school has improved and is now satisfactory and does not need to have a Notice to Improve any longer.

Here are some of the things that we like best about your school.

- The headteacher has a good understanding of what improvements need to be made so you make better progress. We can see signs that this is beginning to work but there is still a long way to go, especially in your writing skills.
- You enjoy school and feel safe and secure there. You have a really good understanding of how to stay healthy. Behaviour is satisfactory and it was very good in the assembly. You have many opportunities to do fun things and this helps you learn as well as enjoy yourself.
- There are good links with others such as your parents, who are very positive about the school.

This is what we have asked the school to do next.

- Improve your skills in all subjects but especially in writing and for those who could do work that is a bit harder. Teachers could do this by making sure they always know how much you all understand.
- Make sure that in all lessons, teachers do not allow any bad behaviour to spoil it for others, and by checking that everyone is working as hard as they can and that you all know how to improve your work.
- Make sure that you all come to school as regularly as possible as quite a few pupils have long holidays and this can affect their learning.

You can help your school by continuing to work hard and behave well. Thank you again for a very enjoyable visit to your school and best wishes for your future.

Yours sincerely

Joan Lindsay

Lead Inspector