

Shortstown Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109498
Local Authority	Bedfordshire
Inspection number	324971
Inspection dates	2–3 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Julie Winyard HMI

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	131
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Leslie Adam
Headteacher	Mrs Alison Bray
Date of previous school inspection	23 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Canberra Road Shortstown Bedford Bedfordshire MK42 0UZ
Telephone number	01234 740148
Fax number	01234 743644

Age group	4–9
Inspection dates	2–3 December 2008
Inspection number	324971

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors

Description of the school

Shortstown Lower is a smaller than average first school. It is situated in an area of high social disadvantage and has well above average numbers of pupils who are eligible for free school meals. Pupils start the Early Years Foundation Stage with standards below those expected nationally in most of the areas of learning. However, standards are well below expected levels in Communication, Language and Literacy and Mathematical Development. There are more pupils from minority ethnic groups than are found in similar schools nationally but there are smaller numbers for whom English is an additional language. There number of pupils identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. More pupils start and leave the school at different times during the year than is found nationally. Pre-school provision is available in the morning and afternoon at the adjacent Children's Centre.

The school has the following awards: Healthy Schools, Investors in People, Eco School Silver, Activemark and is a recognised training school for Bedford University.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

'I am so impressed with the school. In my eyes it is excellent.' This parent's view is fully endorsed by the inspection and is overwhelmingly echoed in the feedback from the large number of parents who responded to the questionnaire. The school is exceptionally well led by a headteacher whose commitment to improving the outcomes for children is exemplary. She is very ably supported by an assistant headteacher and dedicated team of subject leaders and staff. Leaders and managers at all levels within the school, including the governors, are outstanding. Because of the excellent leadership and management that they provide, the school has made outstanding progress since the last inspection and has outstanding capacity to make further improvements. The school plays a leading role in the local community. There are weekly visits from community police officers to read with pupils, very good links with local business and some outstanding examples of pupils working for community improvements, including a recent environmental project.

Pupils make outstanding progress through the school and currently standards at Year 2 and Year 4 are above national expectations. This is because of the outstanding teaching the pupils receive and the good curriculum the school is continuing to develop. Academic guidance is also outstanding in lessons and pupils are clear about what they are learning and how they know they will be successful. One school council member said, 'Success criteria are like a checklist so you know what you need to do.' Individual reviews of pupil progress have proved to be an excellent opportunity for teachers to give direct feedback to pupils about what is good and what needs further development in their work. However, this highly effective practice is not consistently reflected in the written marking in pupils' books.

The outstanding care and support pupils are given is reflected in their outstanding personal development and well-being. Behaviour in lessons, around the school and on the playground is excellent. Pupils say there is no bullying, 'That's because of our anti-bullying week'. They talk enthusiastically about making healthy food choices and getting plenty of exercise. Pupils feel completely safe in school because the teachers are 'so kind' and say they can talk to adults readily if there is any problem. Parents talk about how much their children love the headteacher and staff and that this is what makes the school such a special place for them. 'They love coming to school and cry when it is holiday time!'

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are also outstanding and this was exemplified in an assembly that focussed on belonging to communities and especially the school community. At the close all the children and adults took part in a vigorous 'aerobics' session to the music of 'Reach for the Stars'. After such an exciting activity, there was total quiet and stillness for a final moment of reflection. The headteacher said, 'This is your thought for today. Reach for the stars in everything you do in all your lessons today. Always do your best and you will be successful.' Shortstown Lower School has proved that this can be true. It has achieved outstanding outcomes for its pupils.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Going into the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) classroom at Shortstown Lower School is like entering a magical world of exciting learning opportunities. The outstanding teacher, very ably supported by an excellent teaching assistant, sets out the most enticing range of activities

for children to choose. In Santa's grotto, the reindeer get ready for their daily work and one child insists that she is going to get Father Christmas a present 'because he is so busy he never gets any presents!' Another group of children are at the water tray excitedly spooning ice cubes into small containers. 'We've got the most' announces one boy while a girl rapidly counts her collection of cubes. In the outside area, another group of children delightedly feel for shapes deep in bowls of shaving foam. The teacher watches, listens and writes notes encouraging the children to describe the various attributes of the shapes. There is an outstanding balance between child-initiated and adult-led activities. Because of the excellent curriculum, planning and teaching, children make outstanding progress from often very low starting points. Children love learning in this environment and most are confident to talk to visitors about what they are doing. For example, one boy was very concerned that a visitor had not had the chance to draw their Christmas list and found paper and pens so this could be remedied. He very carefully marked the work highlighting where he was 'tickled pink' or where 'green for growth' was needed.

The EYFS is exceptionally well led and managed. Planning is detailed and covers all the areas of learning. Assessment practice is exemplary and parents and teachers can readily see the progress children are making because of the excellent systems that are in place. The welfare and safety of children are paramount and they are very well cared for both in the classroom and the outside area. Pupils enjoy their healthy snack time and this contributes to their excellent personal, social and emotional development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure marking and feedback in children's books is consistent across the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Last year pupils entered Year 1 with standards similar to other schools nationally. This is not always the case because in small schools the comparatively small numbers of pupils in each year group means results can vary significantly from one year to the next. For example, in 2007, by the end of Year 2, standards were in line with national expectations in reading, writing and mathematics; whereas, in 2008, standards were below national expectations. The school's rigorous and robust assessment and tracking system shows that this was because there was a much larger proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities in the 2008 cohort. Current data indicates that in Year 2 and Year 4 pupils are on track to reach standards above those expected nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. This shows outstanding progress from their starting points.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of the excellent support they receive in class and through the outstanding work of the learning mentor both individually and in the small nurture class the school has established.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the school community. Suggestion boxes are kept in every classroom and these are collected by the school councillors and discussed at meetings. 'If suggestions are sensible we usually get them and the PTA gives us the money.' Pupils' enjoyment of learning is an outstanding feature of the school and is evident in every lesson.

They like the school rules, 'We have lots of them!' and clearly understand how they have to earn their weekly Golden Time. It is because of the way all adults consistently apply the school's discipline policy that behaviour is excellent at all times. Pupils talk enthusiastically about the school garden and about planting trees in the community and are very proud of the Silver Eco status. They raise money for a range of charities for example Cancer Research. 'We had a great day and everyone had to wear pink'. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education because of the outstanding teaching of basic skills and the excellent team and individual work that is developed throughout the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The overall excellent teaching makes an outstanding contribution to pupils' good standards and excellent progress throughout the school. In the best lessons, teachers have high expectations for learning and behaviour and detailed planning ensures that learning objectives are clearly identified. Plans are evaluated extremely carefully after every lesson and any learning that is not secure is noted so that it can be further developed in the next session. There is a whole school approach to ensuring that all pupils' needs are met and teaching assistants are used well to support learning in class and in 'catch up' activities. This contributes to the good progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Teachers explain very carefully what learning is about so that pupils can contribute to the success criteria. These are referred to throughout the lesson to keep learning on track and pupils really appreciate this. Pupils' speaking and listening skills are developed extremely well in every lesson because teachers ask them to clarify their thinking and ideas by talking to their partner. The outcome of this is excellent participation and pupils' interest in and enthusiasm for learning is evident throughout lessons. Another outstanding feature of the most effective teaching and learning is the school's approach called Talk for Writing. For example in one lesson, having planned how to write some instructions with the teacher, the pupils leapt to their feet and acted out the order of events very carefully. This activity led to some outstanding writing.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is well planned and meets statutory requirements and the school is beginning to develop meaningful links between subjects. For example, in geography a unit of work about islands started with a visit from two authors and some writing activities about a fictional island. In science, close links have been made with literacy so that pupils can learn how to write instructions for making an electrical circuit. The school has regular themed days, such as a recent India Day. Everyone, including the staff and parent helpers, dressed up in authentic Indian costume. They learnt how to dance in the 'Bollywood' style and sampled a range of spicy foods, which pupils say they really enjoyed, 'and they were healthy too because they had vegetables!'. This made the learning about religious festivals and cultural customs much more realistic and authentic. Music is featured throughout the school day. For example, there is quiet music in classrooms and excellent singing in assemblies. The pupils and parents are very pleased with the number of after school clubs and activities. Parents are also thrilled that a number of Saturday events are put on by the school. There is an annual activity holiday for Year 4 pupils. All these additional activities enrich the curriculum and add significantly to the pupils enjoyment of learning and school life.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school has exceptionally robust systems in place to ensure pupils receive the very best care and support. All safeguarding procedures are fully in place and the school has a very strong emphasis on ensuring the health and safety of all. The outstanding provision in the nurture class ensures that pupils' social and emotional needs are exceptionally well met. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified rapidly and systems and provision put in place to enable them to make good progress. Academic guidance is exemplary in terms of pupils' ability to reflect on the quality of their own and each other's learning and in the very constructive verbal feedback they receive from teachers. Pupils' individual targets are kept with them in every lesson so that they can refer to them and note when they are achieved. Attendance is in line with the national average and the school is doing everything it possibly can to improve this. The headteacher works very closely with the Education Welfare Service, who speak very highly of the school's approach.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

It is because of the outstanding leadership of the headteacher and assistant headteacher that the school has made outstanding progress since it was last inspected. They have moved the school from being just satisfactory to a place where excellent practice is expected and happens on a daily basis. Challenge is valued because it leads to improvement and growth and this challenge comes from all levels of leadership and management. The governors know the school very well. They make regular focussed visits to look at lessons, pupils' work and talk to subject leaders. They all understand what makes teaching and learning good and give informed challenge as well as support to the senior leadership team. The local authority agrees that the school sets challenging targets for itself based on its excellent self-evaluation. New initiatives are carefully chosen because they will make a real difference to pupils' achievement, standards and well-being. The focus on community cohesion within the school and local community is a strength of the school. Parents say that all families are 'behind the school' and talk about how welcome they feel. The school recognises that it now needs to develop pupils' understanding of different communities both within the United Kingdom and globally so community cohesion overall is good.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
--	-----------------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1
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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

4 December 2008

Dear Children,

Inspection of Shortstown Lower School, Canberra Road, Shortstown MK42 0UZ

I really enjoyed my visit to your school. It is an outstanding place to learn. Thank you all for making me feel so welcome. Special thanks go to members of the school council for giving up their time to talk to me and to the nurture class for talking to me about their work. I was very impressed with those happy faces and hope they continue! I would also like to thank a Year 4 boy who spent a long time talking to me about his work and how well he is getting on at school.

I loved visiting your lessons. It was brilliant in Reception when I was able to draw my Christmas list. I thought I was never going to have time to do this and I was very pleased I had some tickled pinks as well as greens for growth! I enjoyed watching the active instruction writing, listening to reports about trees and was impressed with how well some of you could think about general statements in mathematics.

Your teachers do an excellent job, as do all the staff who work with you. You are very lucky to have such a good learning mentor to help those of you who find it harder to behave well. I was also impressed with the conferencing you do with each other and with the teachers and I have asked them to make sure they write down that this has happened clearly in your books as well so that your parents can see how well you are getting on.

I had two favourite times at your school. The first was my visit to Mrs Bray's wonderful pink office. (Yes, I like pink too!). The second was the assembly, where you finished with those wonderful dance exercises. I agree with Mrs Bray, just keep reaching for the stars and doing your best in everything and you will continue to do really well.

With very best wishes for your future lives,

Yours sincerely,

Julie Winyard

Her Majesty's Inspector