

Wilstead Lower School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	109492
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	377929
Inspection dates	13–14 March 2012
Lead inspector	Martin Beale

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

Type of school	Lower
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	138
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Bryant
Headteacher	Janine Cox
Date of previous school inspection	5 July 2007
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Introduction

Inspection team

Martin Beale

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Five hours were spent observing parts of 13 lessons taught by 10 members of staff, holding discussions with pupils about their learning and hearing pupils read. The inspector held meetings with staff and members of the governing body. The inspector took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. He observed the school's work, and scrutinised pupils' books, assessment data and case studies of specific pupils. He also looked at evidence of the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning. The inspector analysed 61 responses to the questionnaire returned by parents and carers.

Information about the school

Most pupils are from White British backgrounds in this smaller than average school. Few pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is well below average. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in a Reception class.

The school shares its site with a privately run pre-school which also provides a breakfast and after-school club. This provision is not managed by the governing body and as such is inspected separately.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. It has several major strengths such as the pupils' achievement in reading and writing, their very positive attitudes to learning and their excellent behaviour. The school is not outstanding because progress in mathematics is only satisfactory, particularly for girls, and attainment is average by the end of Year 4.
- Pupils make good progress from skills which are broadly as expected for their age on entry. Attainment is well above average by the end of Year 4 in reading and writing and, in some year groups, pupils are almost a full year ahead of expectations for their age.
- There is much lively and interesting teaching, particularly in English, that moves learning forward rapidly. However, teachers do not always pitch their lessons in mathematics sharply at the next steps in learning for all pupils or consistently provide opportunities for them to apply their skills to solving problems or undertaking investigations.
- Pupils try very successfully to live up to everyone's expectations of them and to fulfil the school's values at all times. Pupils show great respect for adults and demonstrate great care and consideration towards each other. Their ability to work as part of a team helps to generate a harmonious and purposeful environment for their development.
- Strong staff teamwork is one factor which has helped the school to maintain high standards since the previous inspection. The drive to manage performance and improve teaching has met with great success in reading and writing, but has had more modest impact in mathematics. Assessment data are used well to take action when pupils are in danger of falling behind their targets, but are not used as effectively to evaluate accurately and speedily the impact of the school's actions.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' progress in mathematics, particularly for girls, so that

attainment matches that in English by:

- introducing a rigorous programme to develop staff subject knowledge and expertise in teaching mathematics and monitoring its impact
 - providing systematically planned opportunities for pupils to apply their skills to solving problems and undertaking investigations
 - consistently using assessment information to pitch lessons sharply at the next steps in each pupil's learning
 - develop pupils' numeracy skills across all subjects
 - providing more effective feedback, through marking, about the steps pupils need to take to meet their targets.
- Use assessment data and other information more effectively to evaluate the impact of actions taken by the school, in order to plan more sharply the next steps to be taken in school improvement.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Inspection evidence confirms the strongly expressed views of parents and carers that their children make good progress during their time at the school. Pupils enjoy their learning particularly when they are engaged in practical activities or when discussing their ideas with each other. They learn new skills at a good pace. Pupils regularly use their information and communication technology skills to support and extend their learning in subjects. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs also make good progress although sometimes in quite small steps.

Children usually enter Reception with skills broadly as expected for their age. This year they are starting to make better than their previous satisfactory progress. They are increasingly able to explore their own lines of enquiry and were observed during the inspection undertaking a wide range of interesting activities using computers and other electronic devices.

The drive to bring more consistency to teaching phonics (the sounds that letters make), along with pupils reading regularly at home, is leading to reading developing well. The good progress in reading starts in Reception and continues across Key Stage 1 so that attainment is above average and rising by the end of Year 2. This good progress continues at Key Stage 2 and attainment is well above average by the end of Year 4. Pupils are creative in their writing because of the stimulating contexts provided, which fire their imaginations. They plan their writing carefully before embarking on extended pieces in a range of different styles. Having been enthralled by seeing a wasps' nest, pupils in Year 3 produced thoughtfully crafted descriptions using a wide range of vocabulary, such as 'colony' and 'antennae', before introducing similes such as 'as sharp as a needle' to describe a wasp's sting.

By contrast, progress is satisfactory in mathematics and attainment is broadly average. Basic skills develop reasonably well but pupils do not extend and apply these consistently to solve problems or when learning in other subjects. Girls are making slower progress than boys in part because they are not always keen to take

risks and learn by their mistakes.

Quality of teaching

Parents and carers are accurate in their view that teaching is good. An imaginative English lesson in Year 4 moved learning forward at pace and demonstrated many of the more effective features of the school's teaching. The teacher stimulated the pupils' imaginations as they used language creatively to describe mystery items hidden under a cloth. By regularly seeking responses from the pupils, the teacher ensured a good pace of learning and gave pupils the opportunity to refine their writing having listened to the ideas of others. Discussion was encouraged at all times and pupils were challenged to choose the best way to get their thoughts together before writing.

Teaching in mathematics is only satisfactory because subject expertise is not as strong as in English. Planning is not as creative and whole-class teaching is not always challenging for the more-able, who sometimes sit through sessions of work they have already mastered. One exception to this was observed when a small group of more-able pupils in Year 4, who were following the Year 5 curriculum, rapidly developed an understanding of the grid method of multiplication because of the teacher's confident and expert teaching. Marking in mathematics is also not as effective as in writing in helping pupils to meet their targets because teachers rarely comment on pupils' work or show them how to take steps to consolidate and improve their learning.

Assessment information is used well to adapt the planned curriculum for pupils in danger of falling behind their targets and to provide personalised programmes for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Effective support for pupils with a statement of special educational needs is based on a very good understanding of their specific needs and constructive relationships with the adults who work skilfully with them. Grouping pupils by ability for phonics across Reception and Key Stage 1 is a major factor in the rapid development of their early reading skills.

Teachers take every opportunity to promote the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They encourage pupils to work collaboratively and to use their imaginations by using interesting texts, video clips and resources. One effective example of this was when pupils in Year 2 compared the book and the film of 'The Sleeping Beauty' in order to help them develop their writing about the characters.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The pupils' often exemplary behaviour helps to create a very harmonious atmosphere throughout the school. The pupils are cooperative at work, play happily together and conduct themselves with care around the school, often holding doors open for adults and each other without prompting. Pupils feel they are treated fairly and that adults implement the school's procedures firmly and consistently. They greatly enjoy being praised when they live up to expectations and are proud when they get a leaf on the 'Values Tree' for displaying qualities such as honesty or thoughtfulness. Their above-average attendance reflects their great enjoyment of school life.

Pupils recognise that there is 'zero tolerance' of bullying. They say adults will help to sort out quickly any disagreements or falling-out between friends. Pupils are helped to understand the consequences of their actions if they say unkind things and taught how to develop strategies so it does not happen again. As a result, records of incidents and the views of parents and carers as well as their children, confirm that the excellent behaviour observed during the inspection is typical for the school.

Pupils say how safe they feel in school, and are not worried in any way as they can rely on adult support at all times. Their parents and carers strongly agree. Pupils are very aware of how to keep themselves safe and healthy, such as when they learnt of the effects of drugs and alcohol when going on board the 'Life Bus'. Visits from the fire service and the local police officer teach them how to stay safe in and out of school. They take care of each other and, in part through the 'buddy system', they help pupils who might be feeling lonely or left out at playtime.

Leadership and management

The school's good capacity for further improvement is built on the headteacher's clear vision, a cohesive leadership team and challenge from a well-informed and increasingly effective governing body. The performance of teachers is rigorously monitored in order to identify how they can improve, although assessment data are not always analysed to show how successful school initiatives have been or to set clear targets when planning new action. The focus, driven by the headteacher and senior leaders, on improving the teaching of reading and writing has led to rising attainment in both. More effective provision in Reception is leading to the children making more rapid progress. The well-led governing body has become much more effective as its structures have tightened and it has become more involved in monitoring the school's performance and planning for its improvement. Governors understand the school's qualities and challenge the headteacher, such as over the need to improve achievement in mathematics.

The curriculum promotes the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well through art and music. Pupils greatly enjoyed singing and dancing in an assembly to music from steel pans before taking part in workshops finding out how they are made and some features of post-war Caribbean culture. The pupils' experiences are supplemented by themed events such as 'International Week' and many other activities that extend their horizons.

The harmonious atmosphere reflects the school's success in promoting equality and tackling discrimination. The headteacher and her staff are acutely aware of the circumstances and needs of pupils and use this information to focus on breaking down barriers to learning for individual pupils. Very few pupils fail to reach the level expected for their age by the end of Year 4. Boys' writing is improving and the gap with girls is closing, but the school has been less successful in raising the attainment of girls in mathematics.

Parents are happy with the relationship between home and school. A recent e-safety workshop, to be followed up by a planned session on mathematics, has enabled them to support their children better. Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements

and reflect the confidence of parents and carers in way the school looks after their children.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



15 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Wilstead Lower School, Bedford, MK45 3BX

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave me when I visited your school recently. I saw that you work very hard and are proud of the part you play in school life. I was particularly impressed by your confident answers to my questions. I have judged that Wilstead Lower is a good school because the headteacher, staff and governors try hard to help you all achieve of your very best. These are the things I liked most.

- As you told me, the headteacher, staff and governors do their utmost to help you all to succeed, to take care of you and make sure you are kept safe.
- You want to learn and behave very well; this helps to make the school calm and happy.
- I agree with you that you are taught well. Teachers make lessons interesting and help you to make good progress.
- Your writing improves rapidly because you are given opportunities to develop your skills in a wide range of interesting ways.
- You also enjoy learning to read and I was impressed by the way you can talk about books you have read.
- Those of you who find learning difficult are given effective help so that you make the same good progress as others in your classes.

I have asked the school to improve teaching further in mathematics so that it is as good as in English. I have also asked that information about how well you are doing is used better when planning improvements to the school.

You can all play your part in helping the school to get even better by continuing to work hard.

Yours sincerely

Martin Beale
Lead inspector

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