



The Hills Lower School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109510
Local Authority BEDFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 288405
Inspection date 26 January 2007
Reporting inspector Paul Cosway

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

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|---|--------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Type of school | Primary | School address | Stancliffe Road |
| School category | Community | | Bedford |
| Age range of pupils | 4-9 | | Bedfordshire MK41 9AT |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | Telephone number | 01234 266498 |
| Number on roll (school) | 311 | Fax number | 01234 400228 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body | Chair | Mr C Murphy |
| | | Headteacher | Mrs C Taylor |
| Date of previous school inspection | 19 October 2001 | | |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The Hills Lower School is an average-sized primary school to the east of Bedford. The local population served by the school represents a wide mix of social backgrounds. Attainment on entry is close to average. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. Pupils are mainly of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, including those with statements, is above the national average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The Hills Lower School is outstanding in all aspects of its work. It fully realises its aims of enabling every child to make excellent progress; of developing lively enquiring minds; and of teaching children to think creatively within a rich, stimulating and enjoyable learning environment. Standards are high because of excellent teaching. Parents are delighted and almost all agree strongly that this is an excellent school. They comment: 'A fabulous school, supporting academic and social progress...our children are getting an all-round education. Even the boys love coming to school!'

Children achieve well in the Foundation Stage because of the excellent provision. Standards are well above average in English and mathematics by the end of Year 2 and high in all subjects by the end of Year 4. These standards represent outstanding achievement. The school meets the very challenging targets it sets itself, year on year. Girls and boys achieve equally well, except in writing, where boys lag behind girls slightly, but less than boys do nationally.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. As they move through the school, they grow remarkably in their confidence and their sense of responsibility. They develop very positive attitudes to school because they enjoy their lessons, saying that it is fun to learn. All this helps them to achieve very well indeed. They learn to be safe and know exactly what to do if they feel insecure. They live healthy lives because of the strong emphasis that the school gives to exercise and healthy eating. Pupils make considerable contributions to the school community through the school council and their roles as monitors, and to the wider community through charity work and involvement in sport and pageants. The excellent work they do in literacy, numeracy and with information and communication technology (ICT), along with the independence that the school fosters, helps to prepare them very well for their future lives.

The many outstanding features include the care, support and guidance for pupils, the curriculum and the leadership of the school, all of which make a strong contribution to pupils' achievement. All the adults in the school are models of respect and consideration. In return, pupils like and respect their teachers. They receive excellent academic guidance, which helps to ensure that they are set challenging targets and given every support to meet them. Their moral, spiritual, social and cultural development is excellent. The school has outstanding procedures to ensure that pupils are safe and all staff have their welfare at heart. The curriculum enables all to succeed and provides a rich and exciting range of activities and visits. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those with special gifts and talents are supported very well and pupils report: 'There's no bullying: Everyone's welcome.'

Excellent leadership and management have brought about significant progress since the last inspection and there is a clear focus on raising attainment further. The school has an excellent capacity for continued improvement and gives outstanding value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the standard of boys' writing by working to improve their handwriting and their punctuation, as well as helping them to write even more fluently and expressively.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils enter the school with close to average standards and more have learning difficulties than is normally the case. Children achieve well in the Foundation Stage and reach at least the standards expected by the time they begin Year 1. By the end of Year 2, results are well above the national averages and have been for many years. In Year 4, standards in English, mathematics and science are very high. Almost half the pupils reach Level 4, the standard expected of eleven-year-olds. Although boys' writing skills are well above average, they lag behind the girls. This is the only aspect of their education where this happens in the school. All pupils are confident when making calculations and solving problems in mathematics and their reading skills are also very well developed. When speaking, they answer questions thoughtfully, confidently and articulately.

Standards are also high in a number of other subjects, including ICT, physical education and music.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils love coming to school and attendance is above average. Almost all pupils behave extremely well. They are respectful, polite and considerate. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They are very keen to face new challenges, work hard and demonstrate mature attitudes that significantly improve their learning. They want to succeed and are confident that they will be given the support they need to do so. Pupils respond exceptionally well to opportunities to make decisions and their views are taken seriously and acted upon. They have outstanding work skills which will be valuable in the future, developed through excellent teaching of literacy, numeracy and ICT.

They make an excellent contribution to community events and participate in many activities with local schools, especially in sporting competitions.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Almost all parents are full of praise for the teaching and the lessons observed during the inspection were outstanding. They are very well planned. The work meets the needs of pupils of differing abilities so that all are challenged and supported to succeed. Relationships in classes are excellent and this helps to create a very positive climate for learning. The teachers use ICT very well indeed to make lessons interesting and fun. The youngest children have raised flooring so that they can reach the inter-active white board and contribute actively to lessons through the use of ICT. Pupils are very well managed and the teaching assistants make an invaluable contribution, giving very good individual support where it is needed. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and set challenging tasks, whilst ensuring that all can succeed. Their questioning skills are excellent. The brisk pace of all lessons ensures that pupils learn quickly and no time is wasted.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is well-planned and fully meets the needs of all pupils. The range of visits, including residential experiences, visitors and after-school clubs is remarkably wide for a school with this age range of pupils. There is a particular focus on ensuring that pupils are healthy and fit. Very good provision for teaching physical education, French and music deepens and broadens pupils' knowledge. There are excellent opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in reading, writing, numeracy and ICT, and these help the pupils to make excellent progress in other subjects because it gives them the learning skills they need. Teachers find ways to link subjects to give greater relevance to the curriculum, for example, by teaching about the lives of famous people through history and English. This is very successful, but it is not done to quite the same high standard in every class. The provision for personal, social and health education is excellent and pupils are taught to appreciate the many cultures in the modern world.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Outstanding care, guidance and support make pupils feel happy and safe. They are adamant that there is no bullying or racial discrimination, but know that any incidents will be dealt with firmly. Close attention is given to health and safety issues. Child protection arrangements fully meet requirements, and teachers and support staff are sensitive to the needs of all individuals. Staff provide pupils with much thoughtful help and guidance in lessons. Consequently, pupils know their targets well and how they can improve. The care and support for pupils with learning difficulties is

outstanding. Parents were almost unanimous in their praise for the school and the care it gives their children.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Exceptional leadership and management have brought about further improvements in the effectiveness of the school, which was judged as excellent in the last report. The school's analysis of its own performance is outstanding and has led to well planned changes in provision to bring about further improvement in, for example, pupils' standards and progress. All teachers share an extensive understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and take a full part in the process of school improvement planning and review. The procedures for professional development and managing the performance of staff are excellent. The school has flourishing partnerships with other organisations, for example, that help meet the needs of groups of pupils. There is excellent liaison, for example, with outside agencies that helps pupils with learning difficulties to make very good progress.

The governing body's support and monitoring of the school are excellent. They have been responsible for major improvements in accommodation and safety and in overseeing the excellent progress pupils make.

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Inspection judgements

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| 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

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| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 1 |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 1 |
| The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage | 1 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 1 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 1 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes |

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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|---|---|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 1 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 1 |
| The behaviour of learners | 1 |
| The attendance of learners | 2 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 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 | 1 |

The quality of provision

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

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.

Leadership and management

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| 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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets | 1 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 1 |
| 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 |

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

26 January 2007

Dear Pupils,

The School Council, The Hills Lower School, Stancliffe Road, Bedford, MK41 9AT

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful to me when I visited your school. I enjoyed sharing your lessons and talking to you. You all told me how much you love your school and I agree with you that it is an outstanding school. There are many excellent things about it. You said that everyone is friendly and this is one of the reasons that you are so happy and doing so well at school. I was impressed with the confidence you show and how helpful you are to each other. I enjoyed the assembly. You were very well behaved, and there was a real sense of a very special occasion, as you applauded those who had done well and joined in the prayer. The Reception children, who told us all they had learnt about bears, were very good - they spoke clearly and confidently. Other excellent things about your school include:

- You work hard in lessons and behaviour is outstanding.
- You do very well in the tests that you take, reaching high standards in your reading, writing, mathematics and science by the time you leave.
- Your headteacher and senior teachers have excellent ideas about ways to improve the school.
- You are set clear targets and are helped to achieve them.
- Teachers make lessons enjoyable.
- Teachers, teaching assistants and all adults care for you very well indeed.
- You get excellent help to be healthy and safe.

I have asked your school to try to make things even better. The most important thing is:

- Improve the writing of the boys even more so that they do as well as the girls!

Keep working hard and make the most of your time in this lovely school.

Yours sincerely

Paul Cosway

(Lead Inspector)