

Fairfield Park Lower School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	135021
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	381776
Inspection dates	10–11 May 2012
Lead inspector	Christopher Parker

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	3–8
Gender of pupils	Primary
Number of pupils on the school roll	236
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Howley
Headteacher	Jenny Stone
Date of previous school inspection	20 May 2009
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Age group	3-8
Inspection date(s)	10–11 May 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

Christopher Parker

Additional Inspector

David Lewis

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors visited 14 lessons taught by nine teachers, talked to the pupils, and scrutinised samples of their work. Inspectors also met with a representative of the governing body, and the members of staff with additional responsibilities – for example, leading mathematics and leading the Early Years Foundation Stage. Inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection; observed the school's work; and looked at records of behaviour, safeguarding policies, records of the monitoring of the quality of teaching, and the school's plan for further development. They analysed responses to questionnaires from 91 parents, 53 pupils and 20 members of staff.

Information about the school

The school opened in 2007 and is at the centre of a new development of 900 homes. In the last three years the number of pupils has doubled, making it currently similar in size to the average primary school. The school population is projected to rise further, and plans for extensions to the building are at an advanced stage. At present, fewer pupils than usual are known to be eligible for free school meals, although the proportion is increasing. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and very few pupils' first language is other than English. The proportion of pupils at school action, school action plus and with statements of special educational needs is lower than the national average.

The school has gained a range of awards including a National Healthy School award, an International School award and an Artsmark award.

There is a privately run day nursery on the school site, which is subject to a separate inspection.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

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

Key findings

- This is an outstanding school. It is successful because leaders and managers are sharply focused on ensuring that the teaching is of a consistently high standard. As a result, pupils learn very effectively, and almost all make rapid progress.
- Achievement is excellent. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children gain the firm foundations for reading, writing and mathematics that allow them to develop and enhance these skills across the curriculum at a rapid rate as they move through the school. By the end of Year 4 their attainment typically exceeds expectations for their age. It is slightly higher in reading and writing than in mathematics.
- The teaching is outstanding because the headteacher has developed a high level of consistency in the very effective approaches used to promote pupils' learning. As a result, lessons are interesting and pupils well motivated. The teachers mark the pupils' writing in great detail, highlighting how they can improve it. Marking in mathematics, although conscientious, does not give the pupils as much help to develop their understanding further.
- Pupils develop very positive attitudes to learning, and benefit greatly from the many opportunities that the broad and exciting curriculum offers them to extend their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Very attractive and interesting displays of pupils' work reflect the high expectations that are evident throughout the school. Typically, pupils behave extremely well.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. The attention to detail in all aspects of the school's work results in high-quality provision that pervades all that the school provides for the pupils. All aspects of the school's work are planned extensively, enthusiastically implemented, incisively monitored and comprehensively evaluated, to ensure a positive impact on pupils' learning and progress.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate pupils' progress in mathematics so that they attain standards that are as high as those in reading and writing, by providing more detailed feedback through marking so that they know how to improve their work and what to do to reach the next level.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Children start school with the skills and abilities that are expected for their age. They make excellent progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Over the last few years, the results of national tests at the end of Year 2 have risen sharply to be significantly above average in reading, writing and mathematics. This creates a very secure platform for continued rapid progress in Years 3 and 4. By Year 4, their attainment exceeds expectations in reading, writing and mathematics, with many working at levels expected of pupils of Year 5. Almost all of the parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire agree that their child is making good progress. Inspectors found that the pupils are making rapid progress in lessons because of the consistently good, and often outstanding, teaching.

Pupils' attainment in mathematics is not quite as high as it is in reading and writing. The pupils are making rapid progress in these two important areas because they benefit from the emphasis placed on improving their work. This is evident in their writing where the older children analyse their own work to identify what they have done well and where it can be improved. They also respond very positively to their teacher's incisive comments that indicate where and how they can improve their work. In mathematics lessons the pupils take the excellent opportunities they are given to explore patterns and relationships and to apply what they learn in various contexts. However, they are not as adept at improving their work, as they are in English. They are not given as sharply focused guidance about how they can improve and what they need to learn next.

Girls and boys are doing equally well, because tasks and activities are carefully chosen to motivate all of the pupils. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are given very good support with the result that they are also continually challenged to make rapid progress and do as well as they can.

Pupils make rapid gains across the curriculum, which extends their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness through the development of their appreciation of art; in music and singing, where a teacher with specialist knowledge expands the range of the pupils' voices; and through their early exposure to several modern languages.

Quality of teaching

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There is a high level of consistency in the approaches used by all of the teachers, in their high expectations, and in the positive attitudes to learning that they cultivate in the pupils. As a result, pupils learn effectively, and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very effectively promoted. Older pupils are very positive about the impact of the teaching on their progress. They recognise that the improvements in their own skills and knowledge are the result of opportunities which their teachers, and the curriculum, provide for them. All of the parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire agree that the teaching is good.

The teachers deliver extremely effective lessons. They carefully tailor their plans to take account of the needs of pupils, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. The activities that the teachers plan engage and motivate the pupils very well. Technologies such as computers and digital cameras are used very effectively to stimulate learning, and pupils frequently refer to these as the element of lessons that they particularly enjoy. Interactive whiteboards are used expertly by the teachers, for example to extend the comprehensive programme of teaching letters and sounds, which is delivered at pace so that pupils remain interested and engaged, and learn to read effectively.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage, detailed planning and very lively teaching ensure that each activity is a vibrant, well-resourced opportunity for the children to explore the world around them. In addition, they have excellent opportunities to develop their language and number, and to extend their personal development. As a result, children demonstrate high levels of enjoyment, curiosity, independence and concentration. Activities flow freely from indoors to out.

Very effective marking and questioning about the pupils' writing focuses the pupils' attention on how they can improve their work. In Years 3 and 4 the pupils respond maturely to the teacher's comments on their work. Pupils are made very aware of what they need to do to reach the next level. Older pupils feel this helps them to make rapid progress. In mathematics, while the pupils' work is marked conscientiously, the comments which the teachers make are not as sharply honed to help the pupils to improve as is the case in English.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The pupils concentrate and persevere very well, because the tasks they are set engage and interest them and there are very high expectations of what they will achieve. In the Reception classes, children maintain concentration and happily contribute throughout activities that develop their understanding of letters and sounds. By Year 4, older pupils demonstrate growing maturity in the manner in which they contribute to, for example, discussions about the texts of myths and legends.

The school strongly promotes respect and responsibility. As a result, it is very calm and orderly, allowing the pupils to thrive. The pupils show respect for each other and

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for the adults who work in the school. On the few occasions when individuals do not live up to the school's high expectations, the teachers take action immediately. In discussion, the pupils cited an instance of racist name calling. They explained how the teachers addressed this, not only with the individuals concerned and their parents, but also through a series of personal, social and health education lessons for the class, and an assembly for the whole school. The pupils are extremely confident that any such incident is taken very seriously and dealt with thoroughly.

The older pupils are very aware of the different forms that bullying can take. They know who to turn to should they have any concerns. Relationships between the pupils and the adults who work in the school are highly positive. Almost every parent who responded to the inspection questionnaire agreed that behaviour at the school is good. Talking to inspectors, the pupils said that they feel safe and that – aside from the occasional squabble – behaviour at playtimes is good, with lessons rarely interrupted by misbehaviour. Attendance is above average.

Leadership and management

The headteacher is the driving force behind the school's success. Strongly supported by the deputy headteacher, she provides excellent leadership, and a vision for the school to which the staff are committed. The unrelenting drive for continuing improvement is set out in a highly detailed plan which involves all members of staff improving their practice, taking full responsibility for the areas they manage, and being accountable to senior leaders. The views of pupils and parents are taken into account in the formulation of priorities for improvement. The governing body is very effective and fully involved in evaluating the school's performance, and in monitoring the impact of its improvement strategy. The headteacher and governing body strongly support the development of leadership qualities among the staff, so that, as the school expands, they have teachers ready to take on additional responsibilities.

Monitoring of the quality of teaching, coaching and training are sharply focused on helping the teachers to improve their practice. The headteacher and senior leaders also frequently check the progress of each pupil to identify individuals or small groups who are not doing as well as expected. This allows them to target additional support to the areas where it can make the greatest improvement. The headteacher and senior leaders use extensive analysis of pupils' progress to evaluate the impact of the steps they take.

Equal opportunities are strongly promoted, and any discrimination is firmly challenged on the few occasions it arises. Arrangements to make sure that the pupils are as safe as possible meet current requirements. The school uses a wide range of approaches to keep parents well informed and involve them in their child's learning. The curriculum provides many excellent opportunities for pupils to use and extend their literacy and numeracy skills in a wide range of contexts. The school has developed a very diverse curriculum that draws on all subject areas, and forms the basis of the many interesting activities that the teachers provide for the pupils. These activities strongly promote the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural

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development. Visits and visitors enhance the curriculum and provide opportunities to develop a wide range of skills, most notably in art. Displays of the pupils' work create a highly attractive working environment which, as one pupil commented, 'makes you feel warm inside'.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	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 to 31 December 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.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
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.



14 May 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Fairfield Park Lower School, Hitchin, SG5 4FD

Thank you for taking the time to talk to us about your school. Thank you also to those of you who completed a questionnaire asking your views about the school. You go to an outstanding school which is very welcoming, and which supports you very well in making excellent progress in reading, writing and mathematics. You make excellent progress because your teachers are doing a really good job. You behaved very well in the lessons we visited, and told us that it is like that most of the time. You also told us that you know any name-calling or misbehaviour will be dealt with straight away by the adults in school. The children I spoke to told me how much they enjoy school, and said that it provides a lot of interesting opportunities for them, particularly in art. The giant lobster on display in the corridor, which resulted from the study of the work of Willem Kalf, is an excellent example of the interesting work you do.

The school has got better and better over the last few years. This is because the headteacher and all the adults who work in the school have very high expectations of you. As a result, almost all of you do your best. The teachers focus on making lessons as absorbing and enjoyable as possible, so that, as you told me, you have fun while you are learning. They have helped you to become very confident about improving your writing, so we have asked them to do the same in mathematics. The headteacher is leading the school extremely well. With the help of the governors, she is constantly looking at how well the school is doing so that more improvements can be made. Your views, and those of your parents, are taken into account when the school makes its plans for further developments.

I hope that you continue to enjoy all that you do at school, and that in the future you achieve as well as you possibly can.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Parker
Lead Inspector

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