



Portfields Combined School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 131718
Local Authority Milton Keynes
Inspection number 293824
Inspection date 15 January 2007
Reporting inspector Steven Hill

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Westbury Lane
School category	Community		Newport Pagnell
Age range of pupils	4-11		MK16 8PS
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01908 616060
Number on roll (school)	544	Fax number	01908 610793
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr David Tyler
		Headteacher	Ms Mary St-Amour
Date of previous school inspection	11 March 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a large primary school that, up to July 2006, also took pupils up to the end of Year 7. The social circumstances of pupils are wide ranging but are broadly average. The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage, with about 15% coming from a range of other ethnic backgrounds. There are currently several Traveller families on roll. The mobility of pupils is somewhat above average, particularly in the oldest classes. Relatively few pupils have a mother tongue other than English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is below average. Teaching staff turnover has been relatively high in the last few years. Children's attainment when they start in Reception is broadly average, but their mathematical skills are relatively high, with writing skills significantly weaker.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Portfields provides an outstanding education for its pupils, as it did at the last inspection. High standards have been maintained and attendance has improved. This is because of outstanding leadership and management, which mean the school is well placed to maintain and build on its achievements.

Pupils' achievement, personal development and well-being are all outstanding. Excellent provision in the Foundation Stage means that children's overall standards are above average in all areas by the time they go into Year 1. Pupils continue to make very good progress, so that almost all reach the expected standards by the end of Year 2. Many exceed them, except in writing, where the number gaining the higher grade is average, because of pupils' lower starting points in this aspect. Standards are exceptionally high by the end of the school. Almost all pupils meet the expected standards by the end of Year 6 with high numbers exceeding them, including in writing.

Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and take a pride in their achievements. Their behaviour is excellent and they have very good relationships with staff and each other. They have very positive attitudes to learning and take on responsibilities conscientiously. Attendance is good. Pupils have a very good understanding of healthy lifestyles, which they embrace enthusiastically.

The very positive outcomes stem from outstanding teaching, very high levels of care, support and guidance, and a wide ranging curriculum that has excellent provision for enrichment. Teachers plan very effectively to meet pupils' individual needs, based on the school's very thorough assessments. High quality marking and specific individual targets ensure that pupils know how they are doing and how to improve. Teachers are using the new interactive whiteboards well to make lessons more interesting for pupils, and those with high levels of expertise show outstanding skills in this. The pastoral care provided for pupils is very good, with outstanding help given to those who have particular needs or difficulties. The enhancement of the curriculum by a very wide range of visits, visitors and clubs contributes very effectively to pupils' achievements and enthusiasm.

The excellent provision is firmly underpinned by the outstanding leadership and management. Rigorous monitoring of teaching ensures that teachers are given clear guidance to improve their practice and maintain high standards. Careful tracking of pupils' progress gives a very clear view of strengths and weaknesses. The school is quick to address the latter with effective action, whether for individual pupils, groups or the school as a whole. This very effective self-evaluation and the very good teamwork by all staff lie at the heart of the school's success. For example, hard work by all concerned has raised standards and provision in information and communication technology (ICT) and pupils now have very good skills in using computers. The school has correctly identified that the use of ICT to support work in other subjects, while including some very good practice, is better in some subjects than in others.

What the school should do to improve further

Although the school has no major issues that need addressing, the inspector agreed with senior staff that they should concentrate on

- Improving the consistency of the use of ICT in different subjects, and sharing the high levels of expertise of some staff to raise standards even further.
- Increasing further the proportion of pupils who attain high standards of writing in the younger classes.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Achievement is outstanding and pupils' standards in English, mathematics and science are exceptionally high by the time they leave Year 6. This is because of excellent teaching and very good provision for academic guidance. The latter, in particular, ensures that all pupils make similarly strong progress, regardless of ability, gender or background. There is variation in standards from year-to-year because of different levels of ability in each cohort, but the trend is upwards. High standards in singing and in using computers were also observed during the inspection.

Children start school with broadly average standards, although their early writing skills are relatively weak. They make excellent progress in Reception, and their attainment in all aspects of the areas of learning are above average by the time they go into Year 1, although standards in writing are still below those in reading or mathematics.

Excellent progress continues across Key Stages 1 and 2. Almost all pupils reach the expected levels and high numbers exceed them, especially in Year 6. Last year's results in English were particularly strong and reflected the school's successful focus on improving pupils' writing skills. At Year 2, good numbers also gain the higher levels, except in writing, where the number gaining level 3, while rising, is only slightly above average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Excellent behaviour is based on pupils' very good relationships with each other and with staff. Pupils work hard in class and are confident in expressing their views. They know their views are listened to, particularly through the very effective use by every class of 'Circle Times' when teachers encourage pupils to give their opinions and to analyse their feelings. Pupils are very thoughtful and reflective when required, and respond sensitively to difficult issues. They know how to keep themselves safe and say that bullying is very rare, and, on the few occasions it does occur, is very effectively dealt with by staff. Pupils are enthusiastic about all aspects of school. They particularly enjoy sports and are keen to participate, showing great pride in the achievements of their cross-country team. They understand the importance of hard work, saying their

success is '...because we train a lot!' Their excellent basic skills, positive attitudes and good teamwork stand them in very good stead for their future lives, in school and out. They are growing up into confident, mature young people with high levels of self-esteem.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The high quality teaching includes a large proportion of outstanding lessons. Positive relationships with pupils underpin high standards of discipline and the purposeful working atmosphere that permeates classrooms. Pupils strive to meet the high expectations of work and behaviour that their teachers set. Work is carefully matched to pupils' needs and they are given a good understanding of how they are getting on. Pupils work hard to reach the specific individual targets that teachers set, and take a pride in meeting them.

Pupils say that lessons are fun, particularly when teachers use the interactive whiteboards to make things more interesting. Lessons have a very good pace and a lot of ground is covered effectively in a short time, so that pupils often make excellent progress. Pupils are fully involved in lessons by a variety of strategies. Teachers give them many opportunities to contribute and to express their ideas, and they do so confidently because they know their views are valued. The frequent use of 'talking partners' where pupils discuss their ideas in pairs is effective in helping them clarify their thinking.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is wide ranging and interesting. As well as firm commitment to the 'basics' of English, mathematics and science, there is very good coverage in depth of all the subjects of the National Curriculum. The creative aspects of the curriculum are also stressed and pupils say how much they enjoy the different subjects they study, including design and technology, French, music and sports. Pupils' good basic ICT skills are enhanced by learning how to type.

There is excellent provision to enrich the curriculum. Pupils go on a wide range of visits which are all carefully linked to their studies back in class, and help raise standards and generate enthusiasm. The regular, structured use of 'Circle Time' makes a very effective contribution to pupils' personal development, as does the residential visit undertaken in Year 4. Visitors make a great contribution to pupils' learning. They include both people from the local community and specialists who contribute to specific curriculum areas, such as a professional football coach and a creative arts group who visited during the inspection. There are many clubs which cover a wide range of interests, including music, sports and the very popular cookery clubs. The school has

a 'Healthy Schools' award and an 'Activemark' demonstrating its excellent promotion of healthy lifestyles.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils are all valued and looked after very well. Provision to safeguard learners meets requirements. Exceptional provision is made to care for pupils who have particular problems, and letters from parents show how much this is appreciated. The school's extensive provision to support the government's 'Every Child Matters' agenda is very successful as is shown by pupils' outstanding personal development. The support given to Traveller pupils, to those 'looked after' by the local authority and to other pupils who arrive at different times ensures that they all settle well into school, quickly making friends and succeeding academically. Good systems are in place to support bilingual pupils, who do well.

There are thorough and extensive systems to track how well individuals are doing and to support them if they are not making the progress they should. Good use is made of national programmes and, where needed, the school devises and implements its own intervention to meet the specific needs of each individual, making good use of the very skilled teaching assistants.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The school's success is strongly supported by the high quality of leadership and management. The headteacher gives very clear educational direction to the school, and senior colleagues give strong support. All staff work together as a team to ensure that the high quality of provision is maintained and is built upon constantly.

Self-evaluation is accurate and effective. It is based upon careful monitoring of pupils' progress and of the quality of teaching and learning in lessons. The latter has enabled the maintenance of high quality teaching despite significant staff changes. Staff are given clear feedback about their performance, and very good support to help them improve. Subject leaders play a full part in this, gaining a good understanding of strengths and weaknesses across the school, and helping to drive improvements. This has contributed, for example, to the raised standards in writing over the last year and the successful introduction of interactive whiteboards in each class.

The school is innovative and is always looking to see how it can improve further, for example through its links with other schools and universities. The lack of complacency and the willingness of all to work together to raise standards is a key to the school's success. Governors support the school effectively, have good systems to ensure they know what is happening, and meet all their statutory obligations.

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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?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
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

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

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	2
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

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	2
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

Thank you for all your help when I visited your school. I enjoyed watching you at work and talking to you about the school. I would like to say a special thank you to pupils in Years 2 and 6 who took time to speak to me during the afternoon. You were very helpful in helping me to understand what the school is like. You all told me you liked school and I could see why. I think that Portfields is an outstanding school, and these are the main reasons why.

You all make excellent progress because of the outstanding teaching. By the end of the school, you do really well in English, maths and science, and standards are getting higher each year. You are already doing well by Year 2. You are very good at writing, but not quite as good as you are at reading and maths, and I have agreed with the teachers that they are going to try to improve this. You can help by carrying on working hard.

I was very impressed by how well you all behave and how well you get on with each other and with the staff. The children I saw were friendly, sensible and seemed really to enjoy lessons, and to work hard. You told me you thought that lessons were most interesting when teachers used the interactive whiteboards to help you learn. I have agreed with the headteacher that the teachers who are particularly good at this are going to help the others, so that lessons are even more interesting in future. You already have lots of interesting things to do in lessons and clubs, and all the extra visits and visitors make things more exciting, and help you to learn even more. As well as all the usual subjects, you are learning extra things, such as French and how to type.

The staff keep a very careful eye on how you are getting on, so they make sure work is just right for you, and that everyone is safe, happy and well cared-for. The headteacher, deputy head, other staff and governors are very good at organising the school and are always looking for ways to make it better. With your help, I am sure they will succeed.

I hope you all carry on enjoying school, best wishes,

Steven Hill

Lead inspector