

Emberton School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110226
Local Authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	310227
Inspection date	15 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Mike Thompson

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

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4-7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	30
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Paul Flowers
Headteacher	Mrs Arlene Bourne
Date of previous school inspection	31 January 2005
School address	Olney Road Emberton Olney MK46 5BX
Telephone number	01234 711518
Fax number	01234 711518

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Introduction

An Additional Inspector carried out the inspection. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues.

- How effective is the school in ensuring that pupils continue to make good progress and attain above average standards?
- How effective is the work underway to improve pupils' writing?
- How effective are the systems now in place to provide academic guidance for pupils?

The inspector gathered evidence from performance data, observations of teaching and the work produced by pupils. Parents' questionnaires and discussions with pupils, representatives of the governing body, and some members of staff also contributed to the judgements. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Emberton is a very small school in a village location to the south of the small market town of Olney, north of Milton Keynes. A very large majority of its pupils are of White British heritage. There are no pupils with English as an additional language and typically, very few pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Where learning difficulties are identified, they are usually categorised as the need for a short period of extra help to remedy specific weaknesses in either literacy or numeracy. The pupils are taught in two classes, one for the Foundation Stage and one for Key Stage 1. The school shares its headteacher with another small, local school. Until Easter 2008, the school was in a 'soft federation' with Castlethorpe School. However, since April, the headteacher of Sherington School, a close neighbour, has taken charge as the new Partnership Headteacher. The school has national 'Healthy School' status and is currently working towards Gold status. It has the Primary Quality Mark and has very recently achieved the national Financial Management Standard in Schools (FMSiS).

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Emberton is a good school. Many parents commented that they value the education it provides, especially the quality of care and the good social development of their children. A particular strength of the school is that it is very good at promoting a sense of 'family' in which all individuals are well known, valued, and fully included in all activities. One parent summarised the views of many others when writing, 'We are totally satisfied with the care and education our child receives.' Another added, 'We consider ourselves fortunate to have this wonderful school in our village.'

The governors managed the recent change in leadership very well, and carefully investigated the potential benefits of a new federation before seeking the link with Sherington School. The most significant gain has been the 'acquisition' of another experienced headteacher with a record of successful leadership. She is already building on the many successes of her predecessor and has got to know the pupils and their families within a very short time. With the support of the good staff team, she has continued to promote the school's many strengths, including its excellent partnerships with parents and the local community. However, much is yet to be done to ensure that pupils in both schools benefit from the many opportunities provided by this federation, such as sharing staff expertise and planning joint activities.

The pupils achieve well because they are taught well. Standards are above average. Pupils benefit from the individual attention they receive because class sizes are small and there is a very good ratio of adults to pupils. The school also provides its pupils with an excellent range of interesting and exciting activities that contribute strongly to their good academic and personal development. In common with all very small schools, standards fluctuate considerably from year to year. This is because of the disproportionate effect that the performance of each pupil can have on results overall. For the past five years, standards at the end of Year 2 have been either above or well above the national average. This year, standards are likely to be lower than in 2007. However, they are set to rise again in 2009 because the attainment of pupils in Year 1 is well above what is normally expected at this age.

The school is constantly monitoring pupils' achievements and looking for ways to become even better. Following the 2007 assessments, it identified the need to improve attainment in writing. This was because standards in writing, although above the national average, were not quite as high as in reading or mathematics. The strategies put in place to improve pupils' writing skills include the funding of additional teaching for one session per week, so that Year 1 and Year 2 pupils can be taught separately. In addition, pupils have clear individual targets to achieve, which are designed to address identified weaknesses and move them to the next level of attainment. The positive impact of these strategies was clearly evident during the inspection, where almost all of the Year 2 pupils observed writing during a history lesson were working securely at or above the levels expected at this age.

The academic guidance provided for pupils is good. Teachers make good use of their very detailed knowledge about each of their pupils to ensure that the work they plan is tailored carefully to individuals' needs. This means, for example, that specific learning needs in reading, writing or mathematics are addressed through well-targeted extra help whenever needed. This clear guidance stems from good systems for assessing pupils' progress in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. The school acknowledges that assessment in the non-core subjects does not yet provide enough information about pupils' progress in acquiring the

required skills, nor does it give a whole-school overview of pupils' achievements in these subjects.

Pupils' eagerness to learn and their love of being at school are key factors in the good progress made. They enjoy challenge, and the good teaching that they receive generally ensures that they are not disappointed. However, when teaching focuses more on the activities than on the intended learning, pupils make less progress. Skilled teaching assistants provide good quality support for pupils, such as when helping those who need an extra boost with literacy or numeracy. This successfully helps them to keep up with their classmates.

Pupils enjoy being at school. When asked to list the things they like best, the pupils gave many examples of what they enjoy and could think of little they would want to improve. 'I like the teachers best - because they're kind' typified the positive remarks made. Many pupils commented on the caring climate within the school and the friendships they enjoy. Through their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, pupils have a keen sense of right and wrong; consequently, behaviour is generally good. The pupils acknowledge that there are occasions when a few misbehave, but they are mature enough to appreciate that this is part of learning to get on with others. The pupils show a very keen awareness of the importance of keeping safe and of healthy lifestyles. They have outstanding social skills, including the ability to sustain concentration when working independently or in collaboration with others. This capability, together with competence in using information and communication technology (ICT) to help with their studies and good levels of basic skills, provides an excellent platform for the next phase of their education.

The leadership provided at all levels is good and helps ensure that pupils achieve well. The school has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. There is a very strong commitment to continuous improvement and systems to help ensure that this happens. Therefore, the school is well placed to make further progress.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The children get a good start to their education in the Reception class and, by the time they move into Year 1, standards are generally above average. Teaching reflects a secure understanding of how very young children learn. Activities are well planned, and children have many opportunities to make choices and develop their social skills and confidence. The highly practical approach to learning, both indoors and out, effectively promotes all aspects of children's development. However, the impact of the work done to promote children's independent learning is sometimes reduced when adults over-direct it.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the potential of the new federation with Sherington School.
- Extend assessment and tracking systems to non-core subjects to gain a fuller picture of pupils' achievements.

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Annex A

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?	2
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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
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?	2
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?	2

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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

27 May 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Emberton School, Olney, MK46 5BX

Thank you for being so helpful when I came to your school to find out how well you are getting on. I particularly enjoyed looking at your work and talking to some of you.

I agree with your parents that you go to a good school. There is so much I like about your school that I cannot mention everything, so here is a list of what I think are the most important things.

- You make good progress. By the time you leave at the end of Year 2, you are better at reading, writing and mathematics than pupils in most other schools. You should be very proud of this.
- Everyone in your school is friendly and welcoming, and your behaviour is usually good.
- You know a lot about how to be healthy and safe.
- You learn well because your lessons are often good.
- Your teachers provide lots of interesting things for you to do.
- All of the adults in your school make sure that you are well looked after.
- The people who help run your school do a good job in making sure that you get a good education.

Even in a good school like yours there are things that could be better. One of the reasons you do well in reading, writing and mathematics is that your teachers keep a very close check on your progress. So what I would like them to do now is to keep the same sort of checks on your work in other subjects, such as art or history. This will help you to make the best use of your skills in these other subjects. As you know, your new headteacher is also the headteacher at Sherington School. I think that joining up with another school is a great idea, and I have asked your headteacher and governors to see what they can do to plan ways in which the two schools can work closely together. I think that you will find it really exciting to take part in activities with the children at Sherington, and I think that your teachers will enjoy working with the Sherington teachers as well.

I am sure that you will continue to have great success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Mr Mike Thompson

Lead Inspector