

Fairfield Park Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135021
Local Authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	329006
Inspection dates	20–21 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Margaret Goodchild

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	133
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sue Howley
Headteacher	Mrs Jenny Stone
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Dickens Boulevard Stotford Hitchin Bedfordshire SG5 4FD
Telephone number	01462 830000
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Age group	3–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an additional inspector.

Description of the school

This new school opened in September 2007 to serve the needs of a new housing development on the outskirts of Stotfold. Around eight out of 10 pupils come from this development while the remainder come from further afield. The school has continuously increased in size from the outset and though most of the children are in the Early Years Foundation Stage or Years 1 and 2, there are now a small number of pupils in Year 3. In September 2009, the school will expand further by taking pupils into Year 4. The Early Years Foundation Stage consists of Nursery and Reception classes: 50 children attend the Nursery part time and there are 32 in the Reception year. Pupils come almost exclusively from White British backgrounds and a below average percentage are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. An average proportion has been identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities: these pupils have mostly speech, language and communication difficulties or emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average. An independent company, Poppyfields, offers childcare provision from 8.00 to 18.00 on the school site. As the school's governing body does not manage this provision, it is subject to a separate inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Fairfield Park Lower is a good and improving school that has developed rapidly in response to the needs of its pupils and the community it serves. The majority of parents are pleased with the education the school provides and a number say that they have noticed significant improvements in their children's progress and self-esteem since joining the school.

Pupils' attainment on entry is broadly in line with national expectations for their age but with significant variation from year to year. This is because the high level of movement into the school has brought with it considerable fluctuation in pupils' prior attainment. As part of the continuous rise in numbers, some pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have joined Fairfield Park Lower from other schools so that attainment on entry into some years has been below average. This explains why achievement is good although standards are average. The school carefully tracks pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics and its data, confirmed by inspection findings, shows that pupils make good progress and meet challenging targets. Children get off to a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage and continue to build well on their skills, knowledge and understanding as they move into Key Stage 1 and more recently, for a small number of pupils, into Key Stage 2. Nevertheless, raising standards further is the main development priority for the school, including extending best practice already evident in English and mathematics into other subject areas.

Good achievement is the result of good teaching and a curriculum matched well to pupils' needs and interests. Pupils learn in a high quality environment that is rich with stimulating and informative displays, and the school has given much emphasis to making learning exciting. The introduction of a range of intensive support programmes has increased the progress of lower attaining pupils, and senior leaders analyse assessment information very thoroughly to identify anyone at risk of underachieving. Teachers generally use assessment information well when planning their lessons so that tasks are a good match to the needs of different groups of pupils. Very occasionally more able pupils spend too much of their time working with the whole class rather than completing tasks that develop their thinking skills to higher levels.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good and improving. Pupils have very positive attitudes to school and speak with enthusiasm about the activities provided. They enjoy learning and behave well. The school provides good care, guidance and support, and personal, social and health education is a very strong feature of the curriculum.

The school has come a long way in the short time since it opened. The headteacher provides clear vision and an exceptionally strong sense of purpose. She is passionate about making the school as good as possible, and has been very successful in uniting the increasing numbers of staff and pupils. Senior leaders work very well together. They have high expectations, are clear about what is working well and identify the right priorities for development. Leadership and management are good overall because leadership is not yet as well developed in other subjects as it is in literacy and numeracy. Governors are closely involved in the strategic development of the school and provide good support and challenge. The school is well placed to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good and children achieve well. Teaching is good overall and the curriculum is matched well to children's learning needs. The teaching of numeracy is outstanding in the Nursery and Reception classes. The strong emphasis placed on this means that children's numeracy skills are exceptionally high compared with expectations for their age. Most children are likely to reach the early learning goals in other areas by the end of their time in Reception. They are making very good progress in their knowledge of sounds and letters and satisfactory progress in writing. Their personal, social and emotional development is good. The children are well cared for and they behave exceptionally well, concentrating for long periods of time. There are effective systems for assessing and tracking children's progress. Partnership with parents is good with some instances of very good practice. Sharing curriculum and assessment information with other providers, where children attend more than one setting, is an area for development. Teamwork among the staff is good and provision is led and managed well.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards throughout the school and ensure that teachers consistently challenge the most able pupils.
- Extend the very good practice already evident in the leadership of literacy and numeracy to develop subject leadership in other areas.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards in National Curriculum assessments at the end of Year 2 were average in 2008. Although standards remain average overall, pupils who have been in the school for all of Key Stage 1 are now working at above average standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards in Year 3 are broadly average. The school's efforts to raise standards in writing and mathematics have begun to have a positive effect. For example, the amount of writing pupils produce has increased, and the way they structure their work and the vocabulary they choose both show improvement. Pupils make good progress and there is no significant difference between the overall progress of different groups of pupils. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress and there are instances of outstanding progress for individual pupils. The progress of more able pupils is generally as good as that of their peers, but very occasionally work is not challenging enough. Although standards are average overall, there are instances of pupils producing high quality work, for example in information and communication technology (ICT), where older pupils have produced presentations using ICT, and where pupils worked with an artist in residence to produce exciting designs for a school logo.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are happy at school and their enjoyment of learning is reflected in the above average attendance rate. They are willing to try very hard when work is stimulating or when it provides exactly the right level of challenge. Behaviour is good: it is outstanding when pupils are closely supervised but self-discipline is less well developed than it might be for a very small proportion

of pupils at Key Stages 1 and 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils feel safe in school and relate very well with one another. They have a good understanding of healthy living and readily take part in a wide range of physical activities. Pupils make an exceptionally good contribution to the community. They take responsibility as monitors and helpers around the school, raise funds for a number of charities, and even the youngest children contribute to decision-making. Most importantly, they share a sense of belonging to the local community extremely well and have an understanding of how people live very different lives in other parts of the world, for example through corresponding with children in Sri Lanka and learning about traditions in Japan and Nigeria. Pupils develop a range of valuable personal skills and make good progress in literacy, numeracy and ICT. This prepares them well for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers have high expectations and work hard to make learning stimulating and varied for the pupils. They plan their lessons well and learning objectives are generally clear. Throughout the school, teachers use interactive whiteboards well to explain points to pupils and focus their attention, particularly when introducing new ideas, and when learning is summarised at the end of lessons. Where teaching is outstanding, for instance in the teaching of numeracy in the Early Years Foundation Stage, teachers match activities perfectly to the next steps in children's development and use methods that enable them to make rapid gains in their skills and knowledge. Where teaching is very occasionally satisfactory, methods are not always the best match for the skills that are being taught. Teaching assistants provide valuable support, especially when they work with small groups of pupils who need intensive support. Teachers do not always deploy them strategically in class to enable pupils to be split into groups, especially to ensure work is consistently matched to the needs of more able pupils. There are good opportunities for parents to get involved in their children's learning through homework projects, and they are kept very well informed about the topics their children will be covering.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum that places suitable emphasis on literacy and numeracy and links other subjects through a series of themes. Literacy is supported well through opportunities for writing across the curriculum and ICT is being incorporated into topic work. The arrangement, whereby the small group of Year 3 pupils learn in a mixed age class with Year 2, works well overall but as numbers increase, the school recognises that a more distinct Key Stage 2 curriculum will be needed. It has identified a number of key features that need to be introduced to the curriculum to raise standards further at Key Stage 2. The school provides a wide range of activities after school, at weekends and in the holidays. Links with a local secondary school and the use of visiting coaches extend successfully the range of physical activities provided. In addition, an outstanding range of educational visits and special events enrich pupils' learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school cares very well for its pupils and provides good guidance and support. It has effective systems to enable new pupils to settle in quickly and thoroughly assess pupils' prior attainment in literacy and numeracy in order to identify their learning needs. Where pupils receive intensive support in literacy, very careful analysis of their progress identifies the next steps in their learning. There are good procedures for safeguarding and protecting pupils and promoting their health and safety, and effective links with other agencies. Marking makes very clear to pupils what they need to do to improve their written work; the school is working to extend this quality of marking across the curriculum. Tracking is outstanding in literacy and numeracy; assessment and tracking are developing in science, ICT and other subjects. Partnership with parents is good and there is a very active parent-teacher association. Although a minority of parents would like closer communication with the school, parents are kept very well informed about developments through regular newsletters. There are good opportunities to find out about their children's progress through consultation evenings and the school has run workshops to develop parents' skills in supporting their children's learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has been highly effective in forging a strong sense of purpose that has brought the staff and pupils together to quickly establish Fairfield Park Lower as a good school that is well placed to develop further. Self-evaluation is good and monitoring by the headteacher and deputy headteacher is very thorough. Rigorous checking of teachers' and pupils' work by senior leaders gives rise to continual improvement. As part of this, outstanding monitoring and analysis in literacy have provided teachers with excellent guidance about how to develop their practice. Staff meetings are used to very good effect in refining the skills of staff and raising expectations. This regular training is very effective in supporting continuous growth as the school expands. The school has rightly identified the need to develop further the role of subject leaders in order to strengthen leadership and management and raise standards. This is necessary in order to extend the very good leadership evident in literacy and numeracy to other subjects. The school actively seeks the views of all its stakeholders and promotes community cohesion exceptionally well. It works very closely with its local community, identifying its needs, and involves grandparents as well as parents and carers in the life of the school. The school already has global links with a school in Sri Lanka and senior leaders have carefully identified how provision could be developed further. To this end, a joint project is planned with a school in a different social setting to extend pupils' understanding of the diversity in modern Britain. The governing body is led extremely well by the Chair, and a number of governors bring valuable expertise to their role. Governors have formed links with subjects and write reports on their visits to the school. A few of the governors have been more recently appointed and are developing their roles.

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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	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

22 May 2009

Dear Pupils

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

Thank you very much for your friendly welcome and for helping me when I visited your school recently. I enjoyed my visit and was pleased to see that you are happy at school. I agree with you and many of your parents that Fairfield Park Lower is a good school.

These are some of the best things about your school.

- You are making good progress with your reading, writing and mathematics.
- Your teachers make learning interesting for you and you particularly like the special events that make the curriculum exciting.
- You enjoy school and get on very well together.
- The staff care for you very much and want you to do well.
- The lively displays in the corridors and classrooms make the school very attractive.
- The headteacher, teachers and governors run the school well and want to make it as good as they can for you.

I agree with them that the most important things the school needs to do now are:

- to help you to reach higher standards in your work and to make sure learning is always challenging enough for everyone
- to make sure that the good things that happen in reading, writing and mathematics are shared with other subject areas.

Keep working hard and enjoy the rest of your time at Fairfield Park Lower School.

Yours faithfully

Margaret Goodchild

Lead inspector