

Germander Park School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110375
Local Authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	337483
Inspection dates	20–21 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Hugh Protherough

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	66
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Joy Cowell
Headteacher	Mrs J Edwards
Date of previous school inspection	7 February 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 12 lessons, and held meetings with governors and staff and spoke with children and parents. They observed the school's work and the policies that support this. They looked at a range of assessment and pupil-tracking data, individual education plans and the recent plans emerging from a review of the curriculum. Thirty-five parental questionnaires were returned.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- Why have pupils' achievements in literacy lagged behind those in mathematics, especially the boys and in writing?
- Is the quality of teacher assessment sufficient to ensure effective support and guidance to pupils, and is it helping to narrow the gap in pupil attainment?
- Do leaders and managers at all levels ensure high quality teaching and learning and demonstrate a secure capacity to improve pupil outcomes?

Information about the school

The school is much smaller than average and the number of pupils on roll has fallen in recent years. The school serves a mixed community, with pupils coming from a range of backgrounds. The largest groups are White British and Black African. A significant number of children are at the early stages of learning English. Their home languages include French, Polish and Somali. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is high. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average, but growing, and includes pupils with physical, behavioural and learning difficulties. Provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is made in the Reception class.

Since the previous inspection in 2007 there have been three headteachers. The last two have been interim appointments. The current acting headteacher was seconded to this post in April 2009.

The school was awarded Healthy School status in June 2009.

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: how good is the school?

4

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

4

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

The acting headteacher made a rapid assessment of the school and successfully addressed some important issues. Safeguarding arrangements have been reviewed and are now robust. Information about pupils' attainment is systematically recorded and analysed and the information used to set challenging targets for pupils and teachers in the 'Raising Attainment Plan.' However, actions to improve the quality of provision have not had sufficient impact. Teaching in Years 1 and 2 is inadequate. The fundamentals of successful classroom management to meet the needs of pupils are not firmly embedded in either class. As a result, pupils are too often bored or restless and low level chatter and misbehaviour disrupts learning. Attainment in both year groups is low, especially in reading and writing. The recommendations of the previous inspection to improve pupils' writing and the teachers' use of assessment have not been acted on.

The acting headteacher has the confidence of staff, parents, governors and, most importantly, pupils. The recently formed school council is delighted with its new responsibilities and members are very clear that their job is to help make the school 'really good'. Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good and has benefited from recent investment to improve the learning environment. The Reception leader is developing her role effectively. Elsewhere there is insufficient knowledge and expertise to embed ambition or accelerate the necessary improvements to teaching that will increase pupils' enjoyment and achievement and equip pupils for Key Stage 2 and life beyond. This is especially the case in English.

Although the acting headteacher has an accurate view of the school, approaches to self-evaluation are inadequate. The last self-evaluation form is several years old and does not reflect the school's current position. The school lacks capacity to improve because, despite remedying some areas of weakness, recent improvement is fragile and has yet to have sufficient impact upon the quality of provision and pupils' attainment.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise pupils' attainment, especially in reading and writing, by improving the quality of teaching and assessment in Years 1 and 2 by:

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- increasing the pace and demand of lessons
- establishing a closer match of work to pupils' individual abilities
- using probing questions to deepen understanding and stimulate discussion
- promoting the enjoyment of books and literature
- ensuring consistent approaches to teaching handwriting.
- These features should be present in 60% of lessons by January 2010.
- Eliminate poor behaviour and low level disruption to learning in Years 1 and 2 by ensuring teachers set and maintain consistent expectations for work and play. Good behaviour should be a feature in 100% of lessons by January 2010.
- Build the school's capacity to improve by ensuring that all staff have a clear understanding of their roles as leaders and managers and assess their performance against the targets set in the school's 'Raising Attainment Plan'.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**4**

Pupils say that they enjoy school and feel safe. They are certainly polite and friendly to visitors and play happily together on the playground at breaks and lunchtimes. A greater involvement of adults in pupils' play has led to a dramatic reduction in incidents of poor behaviour. The extent of pupils' enjoyment of school once in lessons is a more complex picture. Many of those with additional needs benefit considerably from working quietly in small groups with teaching assistants and specialist support staff. The teaching of phonics in small groups at the start of the day also works well. In these settings pupils learn and make reasonable progress.

Too many lessons involving the whole class are dull. The teacher talks for too long and pupils switch off and chatter. When group activities start teachers' expectations of behaviour are not consistently enforced and pupils lack the necessary skills and self-control to succeed. As a result, pupils of all backgrounds and abilities are simply not being 'switched on' to the excitement of learning. Nor are they being equipped with the fundamental skills of self-discipline, literacy and numeracy. Teachers' assessments for those pupils who left school in the summer of 2009 suggest they made satisfactory progress from their starting points but that attainment was below the national averages for 2008, significantly so in writing. Current levels of attainment in Years 1 and 2 are lower still and pupils' current work shows little progress since September.

Attendance has improved considerably over the past nine months and is now in line with the national average. Persistent absence has been eliminated and parents and carers have supported the staff by getting their children to school on time.

Pupils have a satisfactory understanding of what it means to lead a healthy lifestyle. They exercise vigorously on the playground and have a healthy appetite for the fruit and vegetables provided every day. All pupils make a contribution to their local community, entertaining senior citizens and taking part in cultural events across the town.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	4
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	4
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	4
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	4
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

The majority of teaching in Years 1 and 2 observed during the inspection was inadequate. Although teachers' planning provides a satisfactory basis for lessons, there are fundamental weaknesses in classroom management that hamper learning and assessment. The insistence on assembling pupils on the carpet is uncomfortable and impractical. Space is limited and impedes teaching assistants when they need to support individuals or small groups. Teachers' questioning skills are weak. Teachers fire off questions that require a one word answer and seldom pose the types of probing enquiry that deepen understanding. Questions are not well matched to pupils' abilities. In one mathematics lesson, the opening 'warm-up' was far too easy for a significant number of the pupils who could predict the number patterns at a glance. Pupils' subsequent inattention and off-task behaviour, although unacceptable, is unsurprising.

Whilst lesson content dutifully reflects the framework of the national strategies, it is often presented in a way that fails to inspire. Teachers do not make the most of the good variety of books and literature within the school library, or the rich linguistic heritage of pupils attending the school. Their modelling of language is mundane. Approaches to the teaching of handwriting are inconsistent. Pupils are faced with a bewildering variety of tools that impede their ability to develop a correct grip and confident letter formation.

Teaching assistants and other visiting specialist support staff frequently make important

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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contributions to the learning and welfare of vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These pupils do much better when working in small groups where the close attention of an adult enables them to make steady progress.

The acting headteacher has made a secure start to revising the school's curriculum so that it better meets the needs and abilities of the pupils. Whilst this framework is clearly in preparation, the content has yet to impact upon provision in Key Stage 1.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	4
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	4
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	4
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

How effective are leadership and management?

Falling pupil numbers and a local authority review of educational provision in the area have posed significant challenges to the governing body. The absence of permanent school leadership has compounded their difficulties. Whilst governors are rapidly coming up to speed with their responsibilities, they have not held the school to account for its performance for some time. Since April, with the support of the acting headteacher, there has been a thorough review of arrangements for safeguarding and decisive action that has eliminated significant risk to pupils' well-being. Relationships with parents are positive. There has been good response to initiatives such as the new induction programme and exciting plans are in place to involve parents and carers more in their children's education. The school has a good appreciation of its local context and actively promotes social cohesion through events such as 'Multi-Cultural Week'. Links with a school in South Africa and the regular celebration of the many different cultures represented at the school offer a secure foundation to raise pupils' awareness of the wider world.

The acting headteacher collates and analyses pupil assessment data with rigour and uses this to inform the 'Raising Attainment Plan'. This includes the identification of individuals and groups such as those speaking English as an additional language or with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and informs decisions about the additional support provided to help them access the curriculum.

Whilst she is clearly ambitious for the school and receives good support from the Reception leader, current capacity to drive improvement is hampered by weak provision in Key Stage 1. As a result leadership of important areas such as literacy are inadequate and limit progress. Challenging targets in the 'Raising Attainment Plan' have been set for all teachers in order to help pupils make up lost ground. These are a vital benchmark for the future performance management of staff.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	4
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	4
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	4
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	4

Early Years Foundation Stage

The profile of pupils entering Reception over the past two years shows that most arrive with levels of skills, knowledge and understanding much lower than those expected nationally of four-year-olds. This is particularly the case in their personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy. Last year's class contained a significant number of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The progress of this group was hindered by the lack of a proper induction plan. The new induction programme of summer 2009 has clearly benefited the children in Reception and helped them get off to a good start. Working closely with the partnership Parent Support Advisor, staff visited the homes of children who were due to enter school in September. They found out about their interests and needs and encouraged families to provide additional information on an 'all about me' sheet. Parents were welcomed into the school with their children for a series of visits towards the end of term and a good number attended. The start to full-time school was sensibly staggered, so that children gradually built the stamina to cope with a full day at school.

As a result, children love being at school and thrive in the company of adults who know them and with whom they feel safe and happy. There is good provision in both indoor and outdoor classrooms with frequent opportunities for children to select and initiate their own activities. They manage this sensibly, most taking turns and sharing. Recent investment in a canopy over part of the outside area means that children always have an opportunity to work outside. Adults set high expectations and take every opportunity to make learning fun. For instance, the simple journey from hall to classroom is

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accomplished silently by the teacher asking the children to creep back to the classroom. She models the walk with her finger to her lips, the children follow her example.

The teacher is gradually preparing the children for more formal teaching. Every morning a series of pictures tells the children what's in store during the day. Children cope well with short and briskly paced sessions where they start to learn about the sounds of letters. A well-judged mathematics lesson checked pupils' knowledge of colours and the properties of shape as well extending their spoken language. Questions were well matched to different abilities of the children.

Under the effective leadership of the teacher, adults are deployed to different activities to track the achievements of individuals and groups in the different areas of learning. These notes and observations are building into a helpful profile of each child, but are not yet consistent in identifying the next steps in learning, essential to accelerating the children's progress.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Questionnaires show that the majority of parents and carers are happy with the school and the quality of education it provides. Very few questionnaires provided additional written comments. One or two made positive mention of the work of the acting headteacher and the good quality of the Reception class. A few expressed concern about the quality of information relating to pupil progress and homework. The inspectors agree with all of these points.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Germander Park to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 35 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 66 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	25	71	9	26	1	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	17	49	17	49	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	15	43	16	46	4	11	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	14	40	16	46	4	11	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	17	49	15	43	3	9	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	18	51	15	43	2	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	15	43	16	46	2	6	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	9	26	20	57	1	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	11	31	22	63	1	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	12	34	12	60	1	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	14	40	14	54	1	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	14	40	14	57	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	17	49	17	46	1	3	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for 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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



23 October 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Germander Park School, Milton Keynes, MK14 7DU

Thank you very much making me so welcome when I came to visit your school. I enjoyed meeting you all. This letter is to tell you what I found out. There are some big things that the school needs to improve. This is because it is not making sure that you all do as well as you can, particularly in reading and writing.

Children in the Reception class are doing well. You're enjoying school and are having lots of fun as you learn. I like the way that you work together and are learning to take turns and share things. You listen carefully to your teachers, and 'Winnie the Witch' is doing a good job in helping you find out about letters and sounds!

Children in Years 1 and 2 aren't doing so well. Although you play together sensibly on the playground and can work well in small groups when an adult is close by, you don't always behave well in class. I know that some of your lessons are a bit dull and I've asked the teachers to make your work more interesting. I need you to help them.

- Think hard in lessons and always do your best, especially in reading and writing.
- Listen carefully to what your teachers say and try and answer their questions without interrupting each other.

I'm delighted that your school council wants to make your school 'the best ever'. Your headteacher knows what to do to make things better and she needs your help. I want to help as well, and to make sure that things get better quickly so I've asked for another inspector to visit your school every term to check how things are going. I look forward to reading their reports and hearing how you are all getting on.

Good luck!

Yours faithfully

Hugh Protherough

Lead inspector

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