

Milton Ernest VC Lower School

Thurleigh Road, Milton Ernest, Bedford, MK44 1RF

Inspection dates

6–7 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2	2
Leadership and management	Good	2	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils' progress is particularly impressive in reading because teachers are really good at teaching the sounds that different letter combinations make. Pupils get lots of opportunities to practise reading. All teachers encourage the use of the same hints and tips so they become familiar to pupils.
- Pupils and teachers get along very well. Parents and carers are exceptionally positive about the school. Pupils feel safe and well cared for.
- Pupils develop into articulate and confident young people who are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Leaders have been effective in improving the quality of teaching from satisfactory to good. They have ensured that teachers make lessons interesting and provide pupils with the skills they need.
- The school has a deservedly high reputation for school sport and has enjoyed success in several competitions.
- Behaviour is positive around school and in classes.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There are missed opportunities to develop pupils' writing skills in different subjects and this means that they do not make the same impressive progress in writing as they do in reading.
- Teachers do not always get pupils to explain their thinking and understanding in mathematics.
- The way leaders check how well staff are doing is not robust enough to move good teaching on to being outstanding.
- Marking does not always provide enough help to pupils in improving their writing.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was conducted by one inspector.
- The inspector observed teaching in nine lessons across all classes. The headteacher accompanied the inspector on four lesson observations.
- Meetings were held with a group of pupils, members of the governing body, senior leaders, teachers and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector scrutinised work in pupils' books, the school's tracking data, school improvement plans, documents relating to management and safeguarding.
- The inspector talked informally with 13 parents and carers at the end of the first day, spoke with one parent by phone and considered the views of 21 parents and carers as expressed on Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View).

Inspection team

Michael Sheridan, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is much smaller than average. It is part of a federation with Eileen Wade Lower School. These two schools share a headteacher and have a joint governing body.
- Most pupils are White British and all pupils speak English as a first language.
- Hardly any pupils are known to be eligible for the additional government funding called pupil premium.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, who are supported through school action and at school action plus, is below the national average. Currently, there are no pupils with a statement of special educational needs.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that leaders and governors further improve the quality of teaching by:
 - developing their systems of monitoring so that they focus on supporting teachers to become outstanding
 - using what they know about pupils' performance to draw up plans that are sharply focused on helping all pupils to do their very best
 - making sure the teachers and leaders are held to account for how well pupils improve in writing and mathematics through rigorous performance management
 - making the best use of expertise across the federation to ensure the maximum benefit from this partnership.
- Further improve the quality of writing by:
 - making sure there are no opportunities missed to develop pupils' wider writing skills across all subjects
 - ensuring that teachers expect the same high standard of writing in all subjects and not just English
 - giving pupils regular opportunities to respond to teachers marking and feedback so they can instantly make corrections and/or improve their written work.
- Further develop pupils' deeper understanding of mathematical concepts by expecting them to talk about their understanding, explore their thinking and justify their answers.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils make good progress in this school and reach above standards of attainment in writing and mathematics. Progress in reading is particularly impressive and pupils become very competent readers.
- By the time pupils leave Year 4 they are well prepared for middle school. Pupils are encouraged to answer questions and give their ideas in lessons. Teachers skilfully question pupils to deepen their understanding. Because of this, pupils become articulate and confident.
- Early reading is taught exceptionally well. Teachers throughout the school are skilled at teaching pupils the sounds that letters make. These lessons are quick paced and pupils have many opportunities to demonstrate their often impressive grasp of these skills.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make similar progress to their peers. This is because they are given the right support in class and when taught as part of a smaller group. The school provides work at the right level for pupils of different ability.
- On the rare occasion when pupils fall behind, the school responds quickly so they are given the extra help to catch up. Additional adults provide effective support in classes. Teachers effectively move around different groups in class to ensure all pupils get individual attention, guidance and support.
- Boys and girls make similar rates of progress. In the past girls have been better writers than boys but this gap is beginning to close with the introduction of exciting topics that boys find more exciting.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good and pupils learn well in most lessons. Teachers have a secure understanding of what they are teaching. They usually adapt their approaches effortlessly to meet the needs of pupils throughout lessons.
- Reading is taught very well. Teachers use a set of reading and spelling resources that have been designed to work together as a package. The school is committed to delivering this accurately and this is being very successful. Pupils are grouped for English so the work they complete is at the right level and they learn quickly.
- Reading is well promoted in different lessons and for pleasure. Teachers in different subjects encourage pupils to read and use the same techniques that are used in English lessons so pupils become more able to use these independently. These techniques are also used across the school to help pupils become competent spellers.
- Teachers miss opportunities to develop writing skills further. Pupils' work in English lessons is often well marked with useful guidance to improve work. However, pupils do not have the time to read these comments and make the recommended improvements to their work.
- In lessons other than English, teachers do not always expect pupils to produce their best writing. Pupils do not always produce their best written work. In these lessons, marking does not pick up

on the fact the quality of pupils' writing is not as good as it should be and pupils do not realise that their work should be better.

- Relationships between staff and pupils are very positive. Teachers usually have high expectations in class and pupils respond well to these. Most lessons are brisk so pupils are working hard for most of each lesson.
- Pupils work very well in the Reception class when in small groups with an adult because they are challenged at the right level. Adults in Reception adapt activities in response to pupils' interests and the choices they make through play. However, adults sometimes spend too long talking to children when they are sat altogether on the carpet. As a result, some become distracted.
- Mathematics is usually taught well with pupils being challenged by well-planned real-life problems. Teachers have high expectations and pupils work hard to solve problems and find answers.
- In some mathematics lessons pupils do not have enough opportunity to explain their thinking and justify their answers. In these lessons, teachers tend to tell pupils the methods they need to use rather than asking them the type of questions that would encourage them to work it out for themselves.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils behave well around school and in lessons. Classrooms are often characterised by a purposeful buzz. Pupils frequently work together in groups and do this while maintaining a sensible level of calm and order.
- Pupils are usually polite and friendly with each other and adults in school. Relationships are very positive in classes and around school. On occasion, individuals act with indifference when a request is made by mid-day supervisors.
- Pupils are very proud of their school and talk positively about the experiences they have there. They say that they enjoy the wide range of activities they get to take part in, both in lessons and after school.
- Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school. They say that the school responds very quickly to any incidents or concerns that are reported.
- Pupils say that bullying and unkind behaviour is dealt with quickly but sometimes pupils choose not to tell an adult at lunchtimes. The school is aware of this mismatch and is improving the mechanisms at lunchtime so pupils know that their concerns will be taken seriously.
- Pupils learn about staying safe in different situations appropriate for their age. Pupils practise road safety daily when they sensibly cross the road to the village hall for lunch. Older pupils talk knowledgeably about the ways that the school keeps them safe when using technology and the things they must do to avoid dangers.
- Attendance is above average. Pupils enjoy school and are eager to be there.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher is well respected by staff, pupils and parents and carers. She has led the school effectively through changes, ensuring that those involved in the school are fully signed up to the developments taking place. This has contributed to the happy atmosphere that staff, pupils and parents all talk about.
- Management systems are effective. The school runs smoothly in the headteacher's absence. This is particularly important because she is away from the school for two-and-a-half days a week.
- Leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching is not rigorous enough to make the improvements to teaching that would help the teaching become outstanding. This is because monitoring does not take place regularly enough and the targets set in school improvement planning and performance management are not sharply enough focused on raising standards further.
- Middle leadership is stretched because of the relatively few teachers in school to take on responsibility. Some work has been done to work across the federation but this is at an early stage of development. Discussions during the inspection indicate that there are opportunities to share subject expertise and responsibility further across the federation.
- The local authority has supported the school in setting up the federation. Advisers have continued to monitor standards and challenge leaders by setting annual targets for pupil attainment. Because this is a successful school, the local authority has given little support in promoting school improvement.

■ The governance of the school:

- The governing body is new and has responsibility for both schools in the federation. Governors are monitoring the work of the school and receive regular reports about the school's performance. They know about the quality of teaching and the performance management arrangements, and how these relate to pay. They know in general terms how the school spends its pupil premium money and the impact this has, even though very few pupils are known to be eligible. Until recently, governors have been unclear about the impact and purpose of their monitoring activities. The Chair of the Governing Body is newly appointed and brings a wealth of experience from his work as a governor elsewhere and as a senior leader in education. He has quickly built a positive working relationship with the headteacher so issues are discussed and debated regularly. New systems for ensuring accountability are developing and appear strong. Governors ensure that the school has the right systems to keep pupils safe.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	109613
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	405246

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary Controlled School
Age range of pupils	4-9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	55
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Chris Hilliard
Headteacher	Mary Harris
Date of previous school inspection	9th February 2011
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