

Beecroft Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109445
Local Authority	Bedfordshire
Inspection number	324960
Inspection dates	3–4 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Roger Brown

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	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	206
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Stephen Wilkinson
Headteacher	Mrs Rebecca Baker
Date of previous school inspection	3-4 October 2005
School address	Westfield Road Dunstable Bedfordshire LU6 1DW
Telephone number	01582 663486
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Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Beecroft Lower School is a slightly smaller than average sized first school. Most children are from White British backgrounds, with a minority from a range of other backgrounds, including a small number from Traveller families. A small number of children do not speak English as their first language. The proportion eligible for free school meals is higher than usual. The proportion of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is much higher than average, but no child has a statement of special educational need. Above average proportions of children move to the school or move on to other schools during each academic year. Children start in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) at three points in the year, in the term after their fourth birthday. Children's average level of attainment when they begin school is well below that expected nationally.

A new Children's Centre, managed by the school, opened in an annex to the school building this term.

The school has received awards for Healthy Schools, Activemark, ICT Mark and has Investors in People status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This outstanding school is very successful in promoting high quality care and education for the children it serves. The words of one parent, 'a vibrant, happy and effective school', were echoed and reinforced by the great majority of parents, the staff, governors and the school's community partners. Most importantly, the children believe that their school and their learning are 'fun'. They thrive in this open, warm and friendly environment.

The needs of each child are at the forefront of all the staff's efforts and, as a result, children blossom in their learning and in their social and emotional development. The outstanding care given to each child, and, when it is needed, to their families too, gives rise to children's excellent personal development. The new Children's Centre, is not solely serving this school, but is open to the wider community and is already contributing to the outstanding provision the school makes. Attendance has improved year-on-year for the last five years and is now good. The school has worked very hard to reduce the levels of persistent absence and the procedures it has created are models of best practice. The children behave well and even those with profound needs are learning to conform, thanks to the positive attitudes of the staff and the excellent role models of their peers.

By the time children leave, the standards they attain are above those expected for their age. They make excellent progress through the EYFS, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Their achievement builds incrementally at each key stage. This is the outcome of highly effective and consistently strong teaching. Outstanding partnership between the teachers, teaching assistants and support staff is the key to this success. The close match of work to the specific needs of individuals and groups is a consistent theme in all lessons.

The curriculum provides good support for teaching and learning. As with all aspects of this school's work, staff work very hard to make it effective. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well in many lessons, but aspects of the subject such as using digital film and photography as a means of motivating children to write, are under-exploited. Staff produce significant paperwork to support the development of the curriculum, and some of this leads to unnecessary duplication of effort. Nevertheless, they are moving forward in the development of the curriculum and starting to combine aspects of different subjects into themed weeks. The children say that they enjoy this way of learning, and they would like more events of this nature.

The headteacher's dynamic leadership, which was noted at the last inspection, has been one of the key factors in moving the school forward from good provision at that time to a level of excellence now. Her attitudes and drive are reflected in those of all staff. She receives excellent support from the leadership team and the governors. Given the considerable success already achieved, and the drive for even greater outcomes enshrined within the school's self-evaluation and development planning process, its capacity to continue to succeed is outstanding.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage **Grade: 1**

The provision for children in the EYFS is outstanding. They start at levels well below those found nationally. Many have a range of learning difficulties as well as social and emotional needs. Nevertheless, they make exceptional progress in this lively and stimulating environment, and leave the EYFS broadly in line with national expectations in all areas of learning. The clear direction given by the EYFS leader ensures that the curriculum is closely linked to the needs of all children. Rigorous assessment processes enable staff to identify children's levels of understanding and to pinpoint what they need to learn next. Staff are expert at developing children's understanding of how to be healthy and stay safe. They are particularly skilful at helping children to recognise their own feelings and how to take another's feelings into account. Excellent outdoor activities develop children's imagination and promote physical, social and academic learning. The school's partnership with parents is exemplary in the way that staff successfully support parents in understanding their role in their children's learning. The high level of consistency in the implementation of policies and procedures assures children's welfare. Overall, the inspirational provision stimulates children to want to learn, as seen in their obvious enjoyment of writing and their positive attitudes in all activities.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop stronger links between subjects, particularly using ICT skills, to reinforce the children's progress in gaining skills, knowledge and understanding.

Achievement and standards **Grade: 1**

The excellent progress of the children in the EYFS builds throughout the next two key stages. The staff set demanding targets for all children at every point in their development. The end of Key Stage 1 assessments are in line with national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. Children's success continues in Key Stage 2 and, by the time they leave at the end of Year 4, they are attaining standards above those expected in reading, writing and mathematics. Children's success as writers is especially noteworthy as their progress in this aspect is outstanding. At the time of the last inspection, this aspect was a relative weakness, but now it is a strength. Children of all ages write enthusiastically, and the oldest are thoughtfully critical of their work, skilfully editing and improving it. Those who require extra support with their learning, whatever their needs, get considerable assistance from teachers and teaching assistants. This ensures that their progress and achievement, relative to their starting points, are excellent. Children with particular gifts and talents get great opportunities to develop these with focused activities and support from staff.

Personal development and well-being **Grade: 1**

The strong commitment of staff to promoting emotional well-being ensures that children have excellent attitudes to learning and get on very well together. They greatly enjoy their education. The children gain first-class insights to their role in the community and society through the high level of involvement of a range of people from the immediate community and beyond. The children's excellent spiritual and

moral development is promoted very effectively by visits to places of worship. It is extended through assemblies and by other planned opportunities which give them time to reflect. Children's behaviour is good; they understand the difference between right and wrong and take responsibility for their actions and for those of others. Their excellent social and cultural development is encouraged in themed weeks that focus on the cultures represented in the school. The school employs model strategies for promoting good attendance and punctuality. These create a high level of motivation among the children who just want to come to school. They understand and readily adopt safe and healthy practices in their daily lives and encourage their parents in this. The children are well prepared for the next steps in their education. They have a good level of academic skills and excellent levels of motivation.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Children make exceptionally good progress as a result of well-planned and well-taught lessons. These are always at least good and, on some occasions, truly inspirational. Accurate assessment ensures that all activities are well matched to children's needs. Teachers employ an extensive range of teaching styles to meet children's learning needs accurately. A helpful range of intervention strategies enables children who are struggling with their learning to make excellent progress. At the same time, all lessons include plenty of challenge for more able children. Interactive whiteboards are used imaginatively to enhance children's learning. Because of the consistent use of effective behaviour management strategies, behavioural issues rarely interrupt lessons. The teaching of the links between letters and sounds, and key words establishes a firm foundation of literacy skills. Children are confidently able to build their individual writing and reading skills on these. Teachers have high expectations of both the content and presentation of children's work, and there is an intense commitment among all staff to provide the best experiences they can for each child in the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

There is good evidence of a clear level of progression in the skills taught through the themes. These weeks are enhanced by enrichment and extra-curricular activities, such as choir, gardening and sport, which are very effective in promoting children's enjoyment of learning. The curriculum is adapted to local needs effectively by a range of visits and visitors, whose first-hand experience brings learning to life for the children. Literacy and numeracy skills are often linked to stories and other learning, but the process does not yet result in a coherent structure of learning opportunities. Teachers put a huge effort into planning the curriculum, but much of their work is duplicated in undue reliance on paperwork. A more holistic approach linking literacy and other skills, such as ICT, across the subjects of the curriculum is still at an early stage of development. The children report that they thoroughly enjoy using ICT to support their learning. There were many good examples of this seen during the inspection, but some good opportunities were missed to push children's learning to the next stage.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school's very inclusive and highly supportive ethos is successfully driven by the headteacher, with the wholehearted backing of the staff. Everyone, whatever their background or their needs, is catered for. Staff are not discouraged by problems that arise, they simply seek out good solutions. Children feel safe in school and are confident that they have someone to turn to if there are problems. There are very effective systems for checking children's progress and the teachers make good use of the information gathered in planning further lessons. Older children find the targets that they are set very helpful in improving their learning. A highly effective marking system has evolved; this is as powerful as target setting in helping children to learn very successfully and make excellent progress. Rigorous systems are in place for the safeguarding of children, ensuring that all statutory requirements are met. The staff have established excellent partnerships to extend the work of the school. These very strong links with external agencies are vital in providing the wide range of support needed to meet children's needs.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher makes the school open, friendly, highly inclusive and welcoming to everyone. She is the first to recognise that while she leads, the school's excellent achievements are also the result of the outstanding support she receives from all the staff. The teamwork between her and her deputy, and that of all the staff team combined with their thoughtful, caring, hardworking approach have greatly improved the quality of care and education. They have the enthusiastic support in this work by a dedicated and thoughtful governing body, which properly holds the professional leadership to account. The school's detailed and thorough self-evaluation arises from an extensive and very effective monitoring and evaluation process. The views of all involved with the school are valued. This is particularly evident in the way that children demonstrate their pride and ownership of the school. The excellent partnerships that have been established are helping the school's work to flourish. The new Children's Centre is building on the success of the extended-school's work that has thrived in this school. Responding to the needs of the children and the wider community is at the heart of the staff's work. Aspects of the school's work in relation to community cohesion are exemplary, particularly the breadth and quality of the partnerships it has established across the community. This success arises from an accurate and far-reaching self-evaluation process which constantly allows the leadership to analyse the provision that is made for the ever-changing nature of the population it serves. In this school, children, their parents and carers, staff and community members are valued and encouraged not just to participate, but also to make an active contribution to improving the lives of all children and their families.

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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?	1
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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
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	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.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1
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?	1

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	1
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

5 December 2008

Dear Children,

Inspection of Beecroft Lower School, Dunstable LU6 1 DW

Thank you for the warm welcome when Mrs Richmond and I visited you. I would like to explain what we found when we spent time in your lessons and talked with you and your teachers.

What a great school you attend! It is outstanding, and many people could learn from your school's successes. There are so many impressive things about it. You get an excellent start to your time in school in the Foundation Stage. You are polite, thoughtful and care for others and the environment. Your attitudes to school and to each other are excellent. The improvements that you have made to the standard of your work were particularly impressive. It was clear to us that you enjoy writing and your work includes many great ideas. Well done! Your teachers and teaching assistants give you excellent support. This makes you confident to ask questions and put forward your own ideas. Keep this up.

The staff work extremely hard to help you to learn. Even the very best schools can improve, and we would like your teachers to find ways of extending the themed work that you told us you enjoy so much and to help you to make more use of ICT in this work.

Please, do encourage your parents to make good use of the new Children's Centre. It is an excellent resource.

Thank you once again for your warm welcome, and all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Roger Brown
Lead inspector