

St Leonards, Heath and Reach, VA Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109618
Local Authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	377953
Inspection dates	10–11 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Raminder Arora

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	102
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alan Gomersall
Headteacher	Sarah Vincent
Date of previous school inspection	01 November 2006
School address	Thrift Road Heath and Reach Leighton Buzzard LU7 0AX
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Age group	4–9
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspector observed teaching in eight lessons taught by four teachers. Meetings were held with pupils, teachers and members of the governing body. The inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at school improvement planning, policy documents, records of accidents and incidents, pupils' performance data and work in their books, curriculum planning and local authority evaluations following visits. In addition, questionnaires from 71 parents and carers, 34 pupils and 10 staff were analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The effectiveness of strategies to improve pupils' attainment, particularly in writing and mathematics.
- The effectiveness of strategies to maintain achievement, progress and the quality of learning throughout the school, particularly in the context of classes of mixed age.
- The impact of actions taken by middle leaders and subject managers to improve the quality of teaching and learning and drive school improvement.

Information about the school

This is a much smaller village school than others of its type. Most pupils are of White British heritage. Pupils are taught in 4 classes, two of which are mixed-age. The school's number on roll is increasing and currently there are more boys than girls. Very few pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average. Their needs relate mainly to speech and language and moderate learning difficulties. Very few have a statement of special educational needs. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are catered for in the Reception class. The school has a breakfast club and an after-school club, both managed by the governing body. A pre-school that is not managed by the governing body shares the school site and is subject to a separate inspection. The headteacher, previously a senior teacher at the school, was appointed in March 2011, following a period of two terms as interim headteacher. The school has National Healthy Schools status and an International Schools Award.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This is an outstanding school. It is very welcoming and ensures outstanding care, guidance and support for its pupils. The extremely caring ethos results in very happy pupils who thoroughly enjoy school life. The school's strong sense of purpose to ensure pupils learn successfully, together with the exceptional provision for their well-being, contribute greatly to their personal development. Senior leaders and staff have maintained and built upon the strengths identified in the previous inspection. As one parental comment stated, 'This is a happy, friendly, child-centred school where great values and fantastic learning are paramount'. All groups of pupils are highly valued and have full access to the high-quality learning opportunities provided.

Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and are highly motivated learners. Attendance has improved to high levels. Pupils make valuable contributions to the school and to the wider community. Community cohesion is promoted well at local and international level; the school is working on developing and strengthening national links with other communities within the United Kingdom to further pupils' knowledge and understanding. However, overall, pupils make exceptional progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They demonstrate raised awareness of cultures different from their own. The vicar from the local church takes regular assemblies which enable pupils to think deeply and act maturely. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is outstanding. They feel extremely safe because of the strong pastoral-care systems. They show an excellent understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle.

Standards in reading, writing and mathematics are consistently high for all groups of pupils because the quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Progress is outstanding because the expertly planned curriculum focuses particularly well on developing pupils' interpersonal skills as well as their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) competence. As a result, pupils are extremely well prepared for their next school. Achievement is outstanding, especially given pupils' starting points on entry. Pupils identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve highly because their needs are very well catered for and they are sensitively supported.

Teaching very successfully promotes outstanding progress for all pupils. Teachers establish clear expectations and high-quality relationships with pupils. Explanations, instructions and questioning promote learning of the highest quality. Assessment is used with great skill to plan teaching and to match tasks to pupils' abilities. The

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school has been successful in reducing the gap between boys' and girls' attainment, particularly in writing. Both boys and girls develop into confident speakers and readers. They write interesting and compelling pieces across a wide range of subject matter. Teachers enable all pupils to have the skills in mathematics that they need to understand challenging concepts. Pupils in Key Stage 1 benefit from a continuous programme of skills development and tackle problem-solving and investigations with confidence. However, individual pupils in Key Stage 2 do relatively less well in their application of their numeracy skills in problem-solving tasks.

The headteacher has quickly gained the confidence of the governing body, staff, and parents and carers. Safeguarding policies, procedures and practice are effective and almost all parents and carers feel very confident that their children are safe. Since the previous inspection, the school has maintained and further built on its many positive aspects. It has been highly successful in raising the achievement of all pupils, with outstanding promotion of equal opportunity for all. The very effective systems for evaluating the strengths and areas for development of the school are playing their part in sustaining high standards over time and adapting to changes within the school. The school's excellent organisation and strong, shared vision for its further development demonstrate an outstanding capacity to sustain improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that every pupil consistently uses and applies the numerical skills and knowledge gained, when carrying out mathematical investigations and problem-solving tasks built into the school's creative curriculum.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with knowledge and understanding below the levels expected for their age, particularly in language. They make good progress, and attainment on entry to Year 1 is broadly average. In Key Stages 1 and 2, achievement is outstanding for all groups of pupils. The school's tracking data and the inspection evidence indicate all pupils are on course to at least reach, and mostly exceed, their challenging targets. Excellent acquisition of learning skills is contributing strongly to pupils' economic well-being.

Pupils greatly enjoy learning because lessons are very well planned and excellent relationships contribute to an exciting climate for learning. They are provided with many opportunities to solve problems and to think for themselves – to which they respond enthusiastically. Independent learning is a constant focus, particularly for pupils in Years 3 and 4. Writing is of high quality throughout the school, including in subjects other than English. Pupils much enjoy writing. Handwriting is neat and work is well presented. Older pupils use paragraphing well. Pupils' lively writing shows good use of imagination through vivid use of vocabulary. Analysis of pupils' work

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shows that their numeracy skills throughout the school have improved since the last inspection to be more in line with those in English. For example, very skilful planning and challenge in a mixed-age Year 3/4 class enabled the more able and the gifted and talented pupils to plot coordinates in four quadrants quickly and successfully. Outstanding progress enables pupils to reach standards that are high compared with those expected for their age in English and mathematics by the end of Year 4. Challenging learning for all groups of pupils, including those with speech and language and other learning difficulties, has been consistent over time and, consequently, all make outstanding progress.

Pupils behave extremely well because they thoroughly enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in their high attendance levels. Pupils say they feel extremely safe because relationships are excellent and they can discuss any problems they have with adults. Pupils talk knowledgeably about maintaining a healthy lifestyle and the good range of clubs and activities are well attended. They have extremely well-developed skills in working collaboratively. They make a positive contribution to their school and local community, for example, by planting heather seeds in the local park. The school is keen to extend pupils' wider community contributions through interacting more with schools in other social and ethnic contexts. Pupils actively engage in raising money for various charities. Spiritual and moral development is especially positive and assemblies make a very effective contribution. Pupils have very clear awareness of diverse cultures, ethnicities and religions. During assemblies, pupils are often invited to lead the prayer for the whole school; they do this very well and they reflect and respond maturely when challenged to think of something they have done that makes others feel 'good'.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1

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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The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

1

How effective is the provision?

Extremely strong relationships and excellent attitudes and behaviour contribute to a positive climate for learning. Lessons observed during the inspection were at least good and teaching and learning are, generally, outstanding. Teachers use assessment information skilfully to plan work that matches the needs of all pupils within the mixed-age classes. Teaching assistants support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities very well, so they make the same outstanding progress as others. Behaviour is managed well, and staff uphold the high expectations they have that pupils' behaviour should be exemplary. Lessons move along at a brisk pace and interesting activities help to motivate pupils. Assessment of learning during lessons is good and teachers skilfully choose questions to probe what pupils know. In a literacy lesson, younger pupils were quick at learning the onomatopoeic words because the lesson moved at a brisk pace, and the teacher and teaching assistant worked closely together. In another lesson, the well-considered activities of a real fire captured pupils' interest and the teacher's enthusiasm motivated them well to generate words with a 'fire poetry' focus.

The exciting, creative curriculum is planned very well around interesting topics and matched to the needs of all groups of pupils. The very strong personal and social education programme assists pupils' outstanding personal development. Pupils enjoy the curriculum and this contributes to their growing enthusiasm for learning. Literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are used well in other subjects through well-considered links. Curriculum enrichment is excellent and there is a wide range of visits, clubs and activities, which are popular and well attended.

Support is extremely well planned for pupils who need additional help and for those whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable. Families also receive helpful support. Pupils' needs are central to the work of the school and all adults effectively help pupils and parents and carers to get the best from learning by maintaining excellent communication. The school draws on the skills and knowledge of outside professionals and school partners effectively to enhance support and care. All adults are excellent role models. Induction and transition arrangements for children entering the school in the Early Years Foundation Stage, at other points during the school year and when moving on to other schools are excellent and support change very well.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1

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The effectiveness of care, guidance and support

1

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders have a very thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and they communicate their proper ambition for its development extremely well. The headteacher is dedicated to making sure pupils achieve their best and that staff achieve high quality in their work. She leads the school with competence and compassion, valuing the work of others and encouraging staff and pupils to take responsibility. Middle leaders and managers play a full part in ensuring that teaching, learning and achievement are of high quality. Pupils' work is monitored rigorously; any pupils who need additional help or challenge are supported extremely well.

The governing body ably supports staff and challenges the school well to ensure school improvement initiatives are successful. Members monitor and evaluate the work of the school effectively and are becoming more proactive. Tracking of progress is very thorough and senior leaders quickly identify any dips in standards and swiftly put sensible strategies and interventions in place to promote improvement. Appropriate developmental areas to improve further the effectiveness of the school are clearly identified in the school improvement plan.

The school promotes equalities expertly, as reflected in the profile of high achievement across all groups. All safeguarding procedures and checks on adults are robust. Child protection, risk assessment and safeguarding procedures meet current statutory requirements. The school effectively adopts all recommended good safeguarding practice and is aiming to be a model of exemplary practice in the near future. The new headteacher has a lead role in providing training to local schools on safeguarding matters. Excellent partnerships with local schools and various support agencies contribute to outstanding provision which impressively supports pupils' learning and well-being.

The local and international aspects of community cohesion are promoted particularly well. Local links are good and helped by partners such as the Learning Community partnership, an on-site pre-school and the local cluster of schools. The school is aware that wider national links are currently relatively limited.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1

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The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Good leadership, shared between the headteacher and Early Years Foundation Stage leader, and the good quality of teaching are promoting effective provision in this setting. Children settle quickly because of good induction arrangements. They make particularly good progress in their personal, social and emotional development.

Children in the Reception class make good progress and gain a solidly good foundation for their later learning. They are well cared for and supported and grow in confidence in the warm and safe environment. Good attention is given to developing children’s language skills.

There is a good range of activities for indoor and outdoor learning. However, these are not planned with clear focus on the learning outcomes. Activities are well balanced between those that children can choose for themselves and those that are led by an adult. Opportunities are sometimes missed to promote and extend children’s understanding and response when they are engaged in their own choice of activity. In general, there is a good focus on developing children’s speaking and listening, and their skills in phonics (the sounds that letters make) mean that all pupils become confident learners. Children develop their early reading skills sequentially and develop a love of books, taking their book bags home to read with parents and carers on a regular basis. Children were seen enjoying learning about hedgehogs, making these out of clay, hunting for them in the school grounds and learning about how to look after them; they were really excited by this active learning.

Parents and carers are very happy with the provision and communication between home and school is effective. As part of the ‘take away’ home tasks, they have been fully involved in their children’s learning by making very special treasure boxes of items precious to children. Assessment arrangements for all six areas of learning are good and the special books of photographic evidence and work samples are well kept and used.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
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Taking into account:	2
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

The proportion of parents and carers who returned questionnaires was above average. They were overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of the school. In discussions with the inspector, parents and carers conveyed their great appreciation of the school's work and their good engagement with the school. For example, one parent commented, 'The inclusivity and involvement of parents and carers to fundraising and school events are very supportive of the school's growth, its community spirit and positive developments.'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Leonards, Heath and Reach, VA Lower School 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 71 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 102 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	56	79	15	21	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	55	77	14	20	1	1	1	1
The school informs me about my child’s progress	37	52	34	48	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	35	49	34	48	1	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	51	72	20	28	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	43	61	27	38	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	53	75	17	24	0	0	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)	43	48	33	46	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	35	49	36	51	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	33	46	35	49	0	0	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	35	49	33	46	1	1	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	40	56	31	44	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	49	69	22	31	0	0	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 all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 pupils' 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.



14 November 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Leonards, Heath and Reach, VA Lower School, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 0AX

It was a great pleasure to meet you and speak with you when my colleague and I inspected your school recently. Thank you for making us so welcome and telling us about your school, including the things you enjoyed such as the many after-school clubs and being with your friends.

St Leonards, Heath and Reach, VA Lower is an outstanding school. These are the main strengths.

- You thoroughly enjoy school and your attendance is high.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have a good start and make good progress.
- All of you in Key Stages 1 and 2 are making outstanding progress because of the excellent teaching you receive.
- An exciting and wide range of learning activities is provided, including clubs that you take part in.
- You get on extremely well with each other and your behaviour is outstanding.
- You have an excellent understanding of how to keep healthy and fit.
- You feel very safe at school because teachers and other adults take excellent care of you and provide outstanding guidance and support.
- You make valuable contributions to school life and to the wider community.

There is one thing I have identified for staff and the governing body to improve. They should make sure that you always have lots of opportunities to use your mathematics skills to carry out investigations and solve problems as part of your thematic work.

Thank you for a very enjoyable and memorable visit to your school and best wishes for your future. You can all help by continuing to work really hard.

Yours sincerely

Raminder Arora
Lead inspector

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