

Shefford Lower School

School Lane, Shefford, Bedfordshire SG17 5XA

Inspection dates

22–23 November 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders maintain a good quality of education and take effective action to ensure that pupils are well taught and cared for and make good progress. Parents are highly supportive of the school.
- Leaders hold accurate views about the school's performance. Attention is well focused on pupils' progress and the teaching of mathematics and writing.
- Teaching is good. Teachers offer secure subject knowledge and challenging work which support the learning of pupils of different abilities.
- The teaching of reading is a significant strength. Pupils across all year groups become skilled readers.
- Pupils' attainment at the end of Year 2 represents good progress from their different starting points and their attainment by the end of Year 4 is above that expected for their age.
- Provision in the early years is good. Effective leadership and teaching support the children to make good progress, which prepares them well for key stage 1.
- Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are well taught and make good progress.
- Arrangements for supporting disadvantaged pupils are effective. They make good progress.
- Pupils willingly follow the school's positive values, which make a significant contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Pupils' behaviour is good and exclusions have significantly reduced. Pupils show respect and kindness to their teachers and each other.
- Pupils' attendance has improved because leaders have taken effective steps to reduce persistent absence.
- Governors fulfil their roles very well. Their support and challenge secure the successful direction of the school.
- Teachers' explanations sometimes lack clarity for pupils to understand their work properly or tackle problems. This slows pupils' learning.
- In mathematics, the work is sometimes not demanding enough to deepen pupils' understanding. Consequently, they are unable to apply their mathematical knowledge thoroughly.
- Some classroom records for children who have SEN and/or disabilities are not fully maintained. This can prevent the sharing of information intended to support their learning.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that pupils reach the highest standards expected for their different ages by making sure that:
 - teachers check that pupils have a thorough understanding of their work and are able to overcome any difficulties as they proceed through activities
 - in mathematics lessons, pupils are quickly provided with more demanding work that requires them to make thorough use of their knowledge, as soon as they are ready.
- Make sure that any classroom records for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are fully completed, so that the support being offered to them can be effectively evaluated and improved if required.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- This school is led effectively. The headteacher works with clarity and purpose and is assisted by her capable senior team and subject leaders. All staff and governors share high expectations about the expected quality of education at the school and have brought about effective improvements in teaching. Parents reported their approval of the school's work.
- Since the last inspection, leaders have maintained the quality of education and care provided, even as the school has continued to grow in size.
- Leaders' views about the school's strengths and areas for development are perceptive and accurate. They have correctly identified priorities for improving teaching in mathematics and writing and the progress of pupils with lower starting points. Many of these pupils have SEN and/or disabilities or are disadvantaged and supported by the pupil premium. Improvement plans are matched to these priorities and arrangements for checking on their progress are effective. Consequently, the quality of teaching is currently good, as is the pupils' progress.
- Leaders' development of teaching is effective. They make accurate checks on the quality of learning in lessons, as well as discussing pupils' work and progress with staff. As a result, they quickly identify training needs and improve teaching. One clear example has been the successful development of written skills across different subjects.
- Arrangements for managing and improving the performance of teachers are effective. Targets reflect the high expectations set by leaders and are matched closely to the priorities of the school improvement plan. Final decisions about performance and pay awards are subject to rigorous checks by senior staff and governors.
- Pupils' academic targets are set to match and exceed national standards in different subjects. Procedures for checking on pupils' progress are effective and prevent them from falling behind.
- Subject leaders work as an effective team. They are well led and supported by senior staff. As a result of the accurate guidance they offer, teachers are secure in their understanding of the progress pupils should be making in English, mathematics and the development of skills across other subjects of the curriculum.
- Arrangements to support pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are good. Many are also disadvantaged and supported by additional pupil premium funding. Their identification and assessment are accurate and planning for their care and teaching is strong. Leaders, including the effective family support officer, consult closely with parents, teachers and support staff to ensure that pupils get the right support. As a result, these pupils are making good progress.
- In some examples seen, however, classroom recording arrangements for supporting the progress of some pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities were not carried out thoroughly.
- Leaders' use of the pupil premium is effective. They accurately assess the support

required to remove barriers to pupils' learning in literacy, numeracy and other subjects and adjust teaching accordingly. The progress of disadvantaged pupils currently in the school is good and arrangements for reviewing their achievement are effective, particularly for older pupils with the lowest starting points, whose progress has improved since they were in key stage 1.

- The use of additional funding to increase the participation of pupils in physical education is effective. The number of pupils involved in school activities is significantly higher and there are 10 inter-school teams established. Pupils also compete in county-level competitions.
- The curriculum effectively supports pupils' academic achievement and personal development. As a result, pupils of all ages make significant progress in reading, and their written and mathematical skills are effective. They also make good progress in religious education, arts, music, science, history, geography and computing.
- Leaders and staff use the curriculum to make a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Consequently, pupils display an effective and age-appropriate understanding of the school's values system, which leads them to become kind, considerate, respectful and cooperative with one another. They also develop an effective understanding of the different beliefs, cultures and lifestyles within the United Kingdom.
- Leaders' promotion of British values contains exceptional elements. Pupils hold deeply committed attachments to parliamentary democracy, the rule of law, personal freedom and the right to be different. Several pupils remarked, 'We can't put a price on these values.'
- Leaders contribute to local school improvement work, including sharing expertise in assessment, teaching and leadership development in other schools. The local authority offers a light level of support in accordance with its positive assessment of the school.
- Parents are highly appreciative of the work of the school to educate their children, keep them safe and respond to concerns. A small minority do not agree that the school responds to concerns effectively. However, inspectors were unable to find evidence for this at the time of the inspection.

Governance of the school

- Governors are effective leaders and offer senior staff a careful balance of support and challenge. They draw on a wide range of professional experience to guide them in their work and are closely involved in the life of the school. Their work is effectively linked to the different priorities of the school's development plan and their regular visits ensure that they are fully informed of the improvements leaders are making. They ask well-considered questions of leaders and ensure that their enquiries are followed up, especially in the areas of attendance, the quality of teaching and pupils' progress.
- Governors meet all their statutory duties, including their oversight of leaders' work to keep pupils safe.
- Governors hold leaders to account over their use of additional funding to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.

- Governors review performance management arrangements and pay progression with great care.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All staff and governors work continuously to maintain a safeguarding culture which is vigilant and where children are protected from risk.
- All arrangements to check on the suitability of staff to work with children are effective.
- All staff and governors are suitably trained to fulfil their safeguarding roles. Training covers all areas of national guidance and takes account of all potential risks to pupils, including neglect, abuse, the misuse of technologies, radicalisation and extremism. Staff are clearly aware of what to do and how to act when they have a concern.
- Staff act quickly on concerns and leaders' management of this information is efficient. As a result, leaders are quickly able to engage local authorities or other appropriate agencies. The effective sharing of information between leaders allows them to monitor pupils and act swiftly to help them if circumstances change.
- Arrangements for site safety and access to the school are secure.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is good across the school. Pupils benefit from stable staffing and supportive relationships with their teachers, who actively promote the school's vision of 'believe, achieve and succeed'. Teachers expect pupils to work hard and they set challenging work which captures pupils' interest.
- Teachers make effective use of their subject knowledge and assessment skills to plan activities that support pupils of different abilities to achieve well. One good example was in a Year 3 history lesson, where all pupils were supported to create convincing written speeches about Queen Boudicca, using a range of historical sources.
- Teachers' questioning skills are effective. Questioning is used to assess pupils' knowledge and use it skilfully. One good example was in a Year 4 mathematics lesson. The teacher used questioning to encourage pupils to explain ways of identifying the missing values in calculations about perimeter. As a result, pupils were able to explain the importance of using their number knowledge, division skills and other mathematical rules to solve problems.
- Teaching assistants are used very effectively. They receive high-quality training and work closely with teachers in order to get the right help to pupils. Their knowledge of the children they help is effective. They are particularly skilled when working with pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and some of their practice is exceptional. As a result of their work, the pupils they support make good progress.
- Reading is taught particularly well and pupils of all ages become skilled readers. The teaching of phonics is also strong and higher-level reading skills are taught effectively from an early age. Consequently, most pupils are able to infer authors' meanings,

assess characters or comment on the features of an author's writing across different books.

- Writing is taught well. Teachers have focused on the development of effective composition skills, expressive vocabulary and pupils' knowledge of spelling, punctuation and grammar. As a result, pupils write effectively for different purposes across a wide range of subjects, including history, geography, science, art and English.
- Mathematics teaching is effective. Leaders and teachers have responded to assessment results and ensured that pupils' knowledge of number, arithmetic rules and calculations is secure. However, in some examples of work seen, pupils are sometimes provided with fewer opportunities to apply their mathematical knowledge to more demanding problems, when their knowledge is secure. This prevents some of them reaching the very highest standards they could.
- Although the great majority of teaching is effective, teachers' explanations of work or their checks on pupils' understanding sometimes miss misconceptions and errors. As a result, some pupils remain unsure of how to move on in their learning and their progress is slower.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Parents commended the school for this area of its work and the way in which children are cared for and looked after. Leaders and teachers work very closely, patiently and effectively with families of pupils who have experienced personal difficulties and this work has ensured that they have remained in full-time schooling and moved successfully to the next stage of their education.
- All staff show consideration and care for pupils in lessons, around the school, at break and in the lunch hall, where they are encouraged to eat sensibly.
- Pupils are polite and show respect for one another and all adults, including visitors. They show consideration for the feelings of others, are well mannered and explain how the school's values contribute to their positive attitudes and relationships.
- Pupils said that they feel safe at school at all times and know how they can raise a concern with any adult. They enjoy very positive relationships with each other and believe that bullying of any kind is very rare. This matches the current records for the school. Pupils believe that, if bullying were to occur, it would be dealt with very quickly as soon as they reported it.
- Pupils are very aware of different types of risk associated with social media and communication technology. As a result, they are able to explain how to be safe and sensible when using online resources, email and games.
- Pupils make an active and positive contribution to the life and work of the school. They serve as elected members of their effective parliament, organise charity appeals, including Children in Need, and have supported charities which help children in African

countries. Older pupils also act as support mentors or buddies to pupils who are new to the school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- All staff and governors communicate consistently high expectations of behaviour. Pupils respond well to this encouragement and enjoy positive relationships with all adults at the school.
- Pupils' conduct around school is good. They act safely and sensibly and they behave well in assembly. Pupils also respect school equipment, the environment of the school buildings, work displays and play areas. During break and at lunch, they are considerate to each other, play cooperatively and respond politely to adults who look after them.
- In lessons, pupils' attitudes towards learning are positive. They show genuine interest in their work and are becoming successful learners. They share ideas, listen to one another patiently and try hard.
- Workbooks show that pupils of all abilities take pride in their presentation and effort. Pupils said that they were proud of their school.
- Attendance is above average and pupils are punctual. Leaders and governors have worked effectively to reduce significantly the persistent absence of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils. Leaders have worked closely with families in this area of the school's work. Pupils' attendance has improved considerably as a result of this action.
- In previous years, fixed-term exclusions for poor behaviour were high. However, for most of the last year and in the current academic year, there have been fewer exclusions. This reflects the good behaviour of the pupils currently in the school and the improvement in the behaviour of those previously excluded, following effective work by leaders.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils are making good progress in the different year groups and key stages of the school. Leaders and teachers have maintained and improved the quality of teaching needed to secure the good progress of pupils across a range of subjects, which include English, mathematics and the wider curriculum.
- Children join the early years with knowledge, skills and personal development broadly typical for their age or lower. They show a range of different starting points in reading, writing and early number knowledge. Owing to effective teaching, they go on to make good progress and, over time, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development has compared favourably with national results.
- The development of pupils' phonics knowledge is a significant strength. In recent years, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard has been above average, although it was slightly lower in 2016. In 2017, the proportion of pupils

achieving the expected standard was very high. Pupils currently in the school are continuing to succeed in phonics and there are no significant differences between groups of pupils.

- Pupils' progress in key stage 1 is good. Standards reached in 2016 and 2017 represented good progress from pupils' starting points in the early years, particularly in the proportion of pupils achieving greater depth in all main subjects. Achievement in reading was particularly strong, while pupils made good progress in writing and mathematics, taking account of their starting points. There was a fallback in some pupils' attainment in mathematics in 2017 but leaders have quickly addressed this.
- Pupils' current work, teaching and the school's accurate assessment information show that pupils in Years 1 and 2 are making good progress and standards are rising in both writing and mathematics, while reading remains a significant strength.
- Pupils' attainment is above national expectations for Year 4. The progress of pupils currently in Years 3 and 4 is good and represents important improvements on their Year 2 assessments in 2016 and 2017. Reading and writing are particular strengths and current standards in mathematics also reflect good progress, although some pupils do not reach the very highest standards they could. This happens when the work set is not demanding enough to allow them to go deeper in their skills.
- The proportion of pupils who have been accurately assessed as having SEN and/or disabilities has been above average in recent years. The progress of those who entered key stage 2 with lower starting points currently in Years 3 and 4 has improved owing to effective assessment and teaching. Those pupils in key stage 1 are making good progress from their starting points in the early years.
- Disadvantaged pupils make good progress, particularly those who entered the school with the lowest starting points or who were identified as having SEN and/or disabilities. The differences between their progress and other pupils nationally are reducing. The achievement of those with expected or higher starting points is also good.
- The most able pupils make good progress and have achieved well in recent years. They are doing particularly well across subjects that promote their higher-level reading and mathematics skills, including science, computer studies, history, geography and religious education.

Early years provision

Good

- Effective leadership supports children in making good progress across the different areas of learning and in their personal development. Parents praised the quality of education offered in the Nursery and Reception classes.
- The school's assessment records indicate that children enter the early years with a range of skills and knowledge which are broadly typical or lower for their age. Effective provision prepares them well for key stage 1 and their assessments at the end of the Reception class represent good progress.
- Children make an effective start. There are well-established arrangements for children to visit school, where parents and teachers have the opportunity to discuss their personal development and early skills and interests. Leaders also undertake

assessments and use the information to organise well-planned play, support and teaching activities.

- Children receive effective care and encouragement to settle in quickly and learn to work and play with others. As a result, their behaviour and attitudes towards each other are often exceptional for their age.
- Arrangements for keeping children safe are effective. Leaders and staff are all suitably trained in safeguarding practices, are vigilant and act quickly on any concerns. As a result, children are protected from risk and harm. Parents agreed that this was a significant strength of the early years.
- The expectations of leaders and staff are high and academic and personal development checks are undertaken regularly. Assessment is effective and teachers and support staff are able to use the information to maintain children's good progress. Parents said that they appreciate the ways they are kept informed.
- Activities are challenging and interesting, and teaching encourages children to develop their knowledge and skills. Teachers' patience and use of questioning are consistently strong. Children are supported to think and speak skilfully as they play and learn.
- The early teaching of phonics is effective. Consequently, children are well prepared for using their accurate knowledge of sounds and words when they enter Year 1. Teachers and teaching assistants make careful checks to ensure that mistakes are not repeated once they have been corrected.
- Early handwriting skills are taught well. As a result, more children are able to combine their reading and writing achievement into early sentence work, which further supports their effective start in Year 1.
- Children's gains in knowledge of number and early conceptual development with shapes and measuring are effective. Teaching ensures that children are supported to apply their number knowledge through early problems and well-organised play. As a result, their understanding is secure.

School details

Unique reference number	109479
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10037648

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	497
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Val Thompson
Headteacher	Tracey Callender
Telephone number	01462 629 123
Website	www.sheffordlowerschool.co.uk
Email address	shefford@cbc.beds.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	24–25 October 2013

Information about this school

- This school has grown in size since it was previously inspected and is larger than the average primary school.
- Most children in the early years start in the Nursery class and most then move to the school's full-time Reception class.
- Pupils move onto their next school at the end of Year 4.
- Most pupils are White British and the proportion who speak English as an additional language is well below average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is above average. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is above average.

- A children's centre on the school site is managed by the governing body. This is inspected separately.
- As the school does not have any Year 6 pupils, there are no floor standards to report. Floor standards are the minimum national expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of key stage 2.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection gathered evidence from lessons covering all classes within the school, some of which were visited jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of information and school documents, including self-evaluation records, improvement plans, curriculum information, checks on the quality of teaching, performance management arrangements, details of governors' work and records for attendance and exclusions.
- Inspectors looked at the school's arrangements, records and policies for the safeguarding of children.
- Inspectors looked at work from each year group and listened to children read. They also scrutinised the school's records for pupils' assessment and progress.
- Meetings were held with various teachers and support staff, the headteacher, subject leaders, the local authority's improvement partner, an education adviser and the governing body.
- Other meetings were held to discuss the progress of children, attendance, exclusions, the development of teaching since the previous inspection and the performance management of staff.
- Meetings were held with the school parliament and pupils from key stages 1 and 2 to discuss their experiences.
- Inspectors observed an assembly and observed pupils at break and around school.
- Inspectors met with parents at the start of school on the first day of the inspection. They also took account of 62 parental responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and 37 written responses. They also considered email correspondence from parents. The views of 51 staff to the online staff survey were considered and inspectors met with support staff and teachers to discuss their experiences at the school and their training.

Inspection team

David Turner, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Lesley Stevens	Ofsted Inspector
Lindsay Hanger	Ofsted Inspector

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