

Earl Soham Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	124578
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	380921
Inspection dates	12–13 March 2012
Lead inspector	Graham Preston

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	79
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alison Bowman-Garrett
Headteacher	Karl Pearce
Date of previous school inspection	2 February 2009
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Graham Preston

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector observed eight lessons taught by three teachers as well as carrying out a number of 'learning walks' to listen to pupils read, evaluate the quality of pupils' writing and observe the teaching of the sounds letters make (phonics). The inspector held meetings with representatives of the governing body and groups of pupils and staff. He took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding practices, the school's self-evaluation and development planning. The inspector also took account of the views of parents and carers in 57 returned questionnaires.

Information about the school

Earl Soham is much smaller than the average-sized primary school and serves a rural area. Over half of pupils attend from outside the catchment area. The school has a higher than average proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Most of these have moderate learning or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school meets government floor standards, which set the minimum requirements for pupils' attainment and progress. Almost all pupils are White British with a small number from other backgrounds including a few at an early stage of speaking English. The school has several awards including the Activemark for sport, 'Sing Up' Silver award, the Eco School Bronze award and Healthy Schools status.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- Earl Soham is a good school. It provides a very supportive and nurturing environment for its diverse intake. It is good rather than outstanding because there are still inconsistencies in teaching and assessment practice.
- Pupils make good progress over the time they are in school. Year 6 pupils have above-average attainment in mathematics and English by the time they leave. A third of pupils attain the higher Levels 5 and 6, considerably above average, while pupils who join the school with major behavioural or learning needs make significantly better than expected progress.
- Pupils are very positive about school reflected in their high attendance and obvious enjoyment in lessons, assemblies and participation in many extra-curricular activities. Parents praise the headteacher and staff for ensuring that their children are happy, safe and well supported.
- Good teaching ensures that children achieve well, evident in good phonics sessions that help pupils develop good reading skills. A strong focus on improving writing is having a positive impact. Most lessons are well planned and are interesting and engaging, though teaching assistants are not always fully used to provide different levels of challenge in the mixed-age and ability classes. Improvements in marking are helping pupils improve their work though teachers do not always ensure pupils follow up their guidance, or link marking clearly enough to pupils' National Curriculum targets.
- The significant progress the school has made in recent years has been a result of a readiness to use the outstanding practice of other schools, for example, in developing its excellent and innovative curriculum, as well as establish a culture of rigorous self-review and improvement. The leadership and management of teaching is good, based on accurate evaluation and considerable use of shared professional development. Well-established performance management procedures are understood and shared by all staff.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Maintain consistently good teaching and increase the amount of outstanding practice by:
 - making full use of lesson time to provide different levels of learning challenge and support in the mixed-age and ability classes
 - ensuring all marking provides opportunities for pupils to improve their work further and shows them how they can make progress in terms of their National Curriculum targets.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Effective learning support and a wide range of stimulating activities in the Reception/Year 1 class enable children to make good progress, particularly in their personal and social development and in aspects of numeracy, where attainment is above average. Progress in language and literacy is initially more variable. The good phonics sessions help pupils make good progress in reading though pupils are slower in developing their writing skills. Attainment in mathematics and English when pupils transfer to Year 2 is broadly average. In 2011 there was considerable variation in the year group as it contained academically able pupils as well as a significant number of disabled pupils and those who had special educational needs, whose parents and carers chose the school because of its exceptional reputation for care and support. Many of these pupils, including some looked after children, start slowly but steadily improve their progress over time.

In the last two years, the school's efforts to improve pupils' achievement have resulted in all pupils making or exceeding the national expectation for progress in mathematics and English, including pupils with disabilities and those who have special educational needs. This good progress has resulted in attainment that has been significantly above average for two years with current pupils on target to achieve similar outcomes in the summer. This was evident in a Year 5/6 mathematics lesson where all pupils could construct frequency tables and the more able could convert frequencies to percentages.

Despite strengths in mathematics and reading, pupils' writing has been more variable in recent years. The school has responded with a concerted effort to improve accuracy and presentation and this has led to attainment rising rapidly, narrowing the gap in performance between writing and reading. This was evident in the Year 2 to 4 books, where weekly close marking of writing was steadily improving pupils' work over time. There are no differences in performance between boys and girls and the exceptional school support ensures that disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs do considerably better than their peers nationally. Parents

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and carers are very appreciative of the school's efforts, whether it is the headteacher giving extra tuition and guidance to those struggling to make progress, or the international mathematics challenges used to engage and stretch more-able pupils. They rightly believe that their children make good progress at the school.

Quality of teaching

Parents are very rightly positive about their children's education. Most returned the parents' questionnaire and four out of five chose to write about the good quality of learning and support. Teachers and support staff work hard to ensure pupils make good progress and plan and organise exciting, purposeful activities despite the often cramped classroom facilities. The Reception/Year 1 area is more spacious and staff make good use of both the inside and outside areas to provide stimulating learning. One such lesson, helping children understand a variety of two and three dimensional shapes, made good use of all staff to provide different levels of challenge to the mixed-age and -ability groups. Other teachers similarly strive to use support staff fully. On occasion, though, this proves difficult when the teacher runs overlong whole class sessions rather than making good use of support staff to work with targeted groups of pupils for a greater part of each lesson.

Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and positively to show them how to improve their writing, and give them sufficient opportunity to respond to their comments. This is less evident in mathematics and other English work. Furthermore, despite much good work in establishing the rigorous tracking of pupils' progress against National Curriculum targets, teachers do not explicitly show pupils how they can improve against their targets. Much of the teaching underpins the school's strong emphasis on pupils' spiritual, moral and social development. This was well illustrated in a Year 5/6 lesson on human organs where pupils were using computers and other resources to research their chosen field demonstrating considerable independence and cooperative working. However, given the monocultural and geographical context of the school, teachers make a special effort to promote a wider cultural awareness through its 'Black History' month and links to schools in France and Africa.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Parents and carers praise the very positive, nurturing ethos of the school, with many saying how much their children love it. Attendance is consistently high. Pupils know they are cared for by the headteacher and his staff and in that very secure context they behave well and treat each other with respect. When the pupils gather for assembly they readily contribute and enjoy each other's company like one big happy family. Their kind and considerate behaviour to each other is reflected in the 'buddy bench' in the playground where any child can sit and be invited to join in others' play. The school has a successful record of helping pupils who have particular behavioural and learning needs who have not made progress elsewhere. Pupils speak enthusiastically about the school council, ecological activities, gardening, various successful sports including swimming and netball as well as residential and other visits. Pupils say they feel very safe in school with no evidence of any type of

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bullying, including cyber-bullying and prejudice-based bullying related to special educational needs. They appreciate the efforts the headteacher and staff make to deal with any worries and concerns and to ensure that there is a safe environment.

Leadership and management

The school is very well led by the headteacher. He is praised by many parents and carers for his inspirational leadership of a caring and supportive team of teachers and other staff who 'enable the children to thrive academically, socially and emotionally'. The headteacher has established clear performance management procedures, regular shared observations of practice and introduced a full range of professional development. This training has supported whole-school tracking of pupil progress, improvements in assessment practice and the development of a creative and engaging topic-based curriculum.

The school meets all safeguarding requirements. The building of a new front entrance has resolved earlier concerns about site security and staff and representatives of the governing body have completed relevant safeguarding training. The curriculum is outstanding because the school staff have worked closely with two outstanding schools to produce a curriculum that both supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and contributes extremely well to their good and improving achievement. The school uses its good tracking on a termly basis to evaluate the progress of each pupil and runs various interventions to ensure a pupil is on track to meet his or her curriculum targets. One parent wrote, 'My child struggled with mathematics and I was given excellent work and guidance for use in and out of school and he is now where he should be'.

The school leadership has made particularly good use of its strong, positive links with parents and carers to help them support pupils' learning through curriculum meetings and very well-planned homework. There are no gender differences in achievement in a school with noticeably more boys than girls, and the careful monitoring and support of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs ensures that they do better than their peers nationally. Overall, this is a highly regarded community school that has made considerable progress in improving provision and pupils' achievement. These strengths are well established and constantly reviewed indicating a strong capacity for further improvement.

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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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 March 2012

Dear Pupils



Inspection of Earl Soham Community Primary School, Woodbridge, IP13 7SA

Thank you for making me so welcome when I came to visit your school. Your school gives you a good education, and ensures that most of you achieve well by the time you leave.

All of you like coming to school and attend regularly. In lessons, I could see that you like to work together and are prepared to listen carefully to the teacher. I was impressed by your consistently good behaviour and how caring of others you are, shown by the use you make of the 'buddy bench'. All of you say you feel safe in school and appreciate the help and support you receive. It was good to see how many of you enjoy sports, including swimming and netball, and appreciate the various visits teachers organise for you. Like you, I enjoyed the assemblies taken by Mr Pearce and were impressed by the thoughtful contributions you made.

I spent most of the time looking at how well you are making progress in lessons and what could be improved. Your teachers do a good job of helping those of you in red and yellow classes understand how you can use letter sounds to improve your reading. In most of the lessons I saw, the teacher and teaching assistants were doing a good job in helping you learn in spite of the cramped classroom space. I could see that you enjoy your lessons which are often fun but have asked teachers to use the teacher assistants even more to support different learning groups in the class rather than try and do most of the teaching themselves. I was impressed with the care your teachers take to mark your work regularly and most explain what you need to do next to improve it. I have asked your teachers to give you more time to follow their suggestions and improve your work so you can better meet your reading, writing and mathematics targets. You can help by always taking care to read and follow your teachers' advice.

Thank you again for your help. Make sure you attend school regularly and work hard.

Yours sincerely

Graham Preston
Lead inspector

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