

Maidstone Infant School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	124581
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	380922
Inspection dates	31 May–1 June 2012
Lead inspector	Judith Dawson

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	203
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fiona Topliss
Headteacher	Lizzie Girling
Date of previous school inspection	26 January 2009
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Age group	3–7
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Introduction

Inspection team

Judith Dawson

Additional Inspector

Janet Tomkins

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed a total of 16 lessons taught by eight teachers. They heard sample groups of pupils read and held meetings with pupils, members of the governing body and staff. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of documents including the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement, its assessment and tracking of pupils' progress, procedures for maintaining pupils' safety and welfare, and teachers' planning. They also analysed responses from 55 parental questionnaires.

Information about the school

This is an average-sized infant school, serving the community to the west and north of Felixstowe. The school normally includes the Felixstowe area Specialist Support Centre (SSC) but this has not operated during this academic year because there were no pupils allocated to it. It will resume in September. The school entered into a soft federation with the local junior school in September 2010, with the headteacher assuming responsibility for both schools. The arrangement is due to be reviewed at the end of this academic year. There have been changes in the senior leadership team to accommodate this. The percentage of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs who have additional support, including those on 'school action plus' and those with a statement of special educational needs, is higher than average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is also above average. The school provides a morning and afternoon nursery and a breakfast club for a few pupils. Pupils in Key Stage 1 are taught in five mixed-aged classes.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school. It is not yet good because there was a dip in standards and weaknesses in leadership and management during the first year of the soft federation. These weaknesses are being addressed. The monitoring of teaching and learning is now well-established and occasionally good practice is shared, but it still lacks sufficient rigour to ensure teaching is consistently good. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Most pupils now make satisfactory progress from their below average starting points. Standards remain below average overall, especially in mathematics, but many pupils have made good progress in reading because of the effective systems for teaching them the sounds that combinations of letters make (phonics). Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress because their needs are met very effectively.
- Teaching is satisfactory. Teachers make lessons interesting and set work to help pupils make progress. However, some teachers do not expect enough of their pupils and targets are not sufficiently linked to what each age group should be achieving. Oral advice in lessons is effective but written comments are rarely followed up. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively and help to extend pupils' learning.
- Pupils enjoy school and behave well. They work hard and get on noticeably well with their peers, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. This is because of the school's highly inclusive environment where adults effectively support these pupils, including those with emotional or behavioural difficulties, within the classes.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. The senior leadership team is overcoming recent weaknesses and is focused on improving achievement, with some success. Plans for improvement reflect the school's priorities.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the monitoring of teaching and learning so that:
 - areas for improvement that are identified when teaching is observed become the focus of future observations and development and good practice is shared regularly
 - teachers' discussions about pupils' progress generate clear, time limited and aspirational targets for raising standards and that progress towards them is monitored regularly.
- To engage pupils more fully in their learning:
 - ensure that pupils take some responsibility for improving their own work and time is given for them to respond to teachers' marking
 - make sure that teachers plan and organise pupils' work effectively, especially in mathematics, to enable them to see progress over time.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils joined Year 1 with well below average standards in reading, writing and mathematics. They are now in Year 2 and progress has been satisfactory although standards remain below average. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage generally start school with knowledge and skills below those expected of their age. They often make good progress during the adult-led sessions because the teachers make learning fun and match content precisely to enable children to achieve their next steps. Sometimes, however, the activities provided for children to initiate their own learning lack precision, limiting opportunities for them to build on their skills.

Almost all parents and carers feel their children make good progress, especially in reading. Throughout the school many pupils learn well in their phonics lessons because the teachers and teaching assistants are proficient in progressively extending their skills. Although the current Year 1 pupils are generally attaining appropriate reading skills for their age, Year 2 pupils reading standards remain below average because of their lower than average starting points.

Pupils were seen applying their writing skills through their 'Big Write' sessions. In lessons where teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and set challenging targets, they make good progress and generate well-presented, lively and lengthy text. In a lesson to write riddles about the Queen they were reminded to use correct punctuation, interesting adjectives and the correct tense. In another class, however, where pupils were only reminded about punctuation, the outcomes were not so good. Pupils' books show that, where teachers have high expectations, pupils make good progress. In other classes, presentation, content and the amount of writing is noticeably poorer.

There are similar variations in the progress pupils make in mathematics. In one lesson, for example, pupils of all ages and abilities made good progress because

teachers set them work carefully matched to their abilities, and provided good support and effective questioning that ensured pupils thought for themselves, while the most able worked independently to solve challenging problems. Although teachers keep group records of how well pupils have achieved their tasks, the work in most pupils' books does not clearly reflect the learning that has taken place in lessons and often lacks any record of the purpose of tasks or advice on how to improve. So pupils do not build on their previous learning or learn from their mistakes.

Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress. Several parents and carers expressed their delight in the progress their children have made. Staff are practised in, not only planning work to meet these pupils' needs but also in ensuring they develop the skills they need to work independently. Pupils are integrated into lessons and learn happily alongside their peers. They are given every opportunity to achieve well.

Quality of teaching

All the parents and carers who returned the questionnaires felt that their children are taught well. Teaching is satisfactory overall although there are some features that are consistently good. Teachers have good relationships with pupils and make lessons interesting. In one lesson, for example, the teacher, crowned as Queen Elizabeth, delighted her pupils with the way she modelled 'I am' statements for her pupils' riddles. Pupils thoroughly enjoyed their learning and swiftly understood the attributes of a riddle. Teachers and teaching assistants give wise verbal advice and question pupils effectively to encourage them to think. They often praise pupils, promoting good self-esteem. When oral feedback on pupils' work is given, however, there is no record of what was said. Written advice is rare and pupils are not expected to respond; opportunities are missed to help pupils to improve their work and previous advice or targets are seldom referred to.

Joint planning between teachers ensures that pupils have equal access to the curriculum. However, their expectations of what pupils should achieve are inconsistent. Teachers track pupils' progress each term to identify if additional support is needed and their planning contributes to pupils' satisfactory progress. Nevertheless, there is a lack of rigour in how teachers use their assessments to set aspirational targets to accelerate progress to the levels that pupils of different ages and abilities should be achieving. Teachers' planning is effective for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. Support staff are skilled in helping every pupil to achieve well. Their excellent relationships with pupils they support, and their delight in every achievement, ensures these pupils, whatever their specific difficulties, make good progress. One parent writes '(My child's) one-to-one teacher is amazing. My child has come on leaps and bounds.'

Behaviour and safety of pupils

One of the strengths of the school is that all adults consistently apply systems for promoting good behaviour. Incidences of poor behaviour, including different types of bullying, are rare. Pupils behave well at playtimes and in lessons, which they clearly

enjoy. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage work and play together well and make good progress in developing their personal and social skills. All pupils are eager to please their teachers. There are some who have specific behavioural or emotional difficulties, and a small minority of parents and carers feel that lessons are sometimes disrupted because of this. However, the effective management of behaviour and sensitive and skilful input from the staff ensure that lessons are rarely interrupted. The inclusion of these pupils, and their peers' understanding that some of them find normal relationships difficult, helps them to make good, and sometimes outstanding, progress towards their targets.

Parents and carers are very appreciative of the care their children receive. All agree that their children feel safe in school and the pupils endorse this view. The school is a welcoming, calm and orderly establishment where all demonstrate consideration for others. The curriculum provides pupils with a good understanding of moral and social issues. Their self-esteem is promoted well and they show empathy for others. During the jubilee celebrations, for example, pupils learnt what it would be like to be the Queen and demonstrated a great deal of respect for all that she does. The school council has had a good impact on school improvement, by, for example, requesting bins in the playground to reduce the litter. Consistent and rigorous measures to promote good attendance are resulting in a reduction of avoidable absence. The breakfast club is helping to improve punctuality.

Leadership and management

Initially, the sharing of the headteacher with the junior school, along with other factors, led to weaknesses in leadership and management, generating an adverse impact on staff morale and, ultimately, on pupils' achievement. The governing body and headteacher were rightly concerned about this. A new senior leadership team was appointed that has, with the headteacher, grasped the nettle and made a satisfactory start in addressing the issues. Staff morale is now good and there are now systems for tracking progress and monitoring teaching and learning. These procedures have already had an impact; progress is satisfactory and the teaching of phonics has improved and this was a weakness identified at the time of the last inspection. This demonstrates a sound capacity for future improvement. The deputy headteacher, with no class responsibility, can respond to any issues in the headteacher's absence. Subject leaders are knowledgeable and have made improvements in the curriculum to improve standards. The governing body is well-informed and regularly monitors the work of the school. However, the monitoring of teaching is not yet followed up sufficiently to significantly raise staff aspirations of pupils and generate rapid improvements in standards.

The school meets the requirements for safeguarding pupils and ensures that they have equal access to the curriculum and school activities. The curriculum is satisfactory and evolving to provide more opportunities for pupils to apply their skills across subjects. There is appropriate provision for pupils' cultural development and a good range of additional activities to extend learning. The management of systems to support disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is good and involves parents and carers and external agencies very effectively.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	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 to 31 December 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.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
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.



4 June 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Maidstone Infant School, Felixstowe, IP11 9EG

Thank you all very much for your friendliness and help when we visited your school recently. We really enjoyed talking to you and seeing how hard you work in your lessons. We could see how much you enjoy school. You behave well and take care of each other. Well done. A special thanks to those of you who gave us your views or read to us. We really enjoyed our visit to your welcoming and happy school.

Your school is satisfactory. You told us that you feel safe in school and are cared for well. We agree with you. Those of you who have extra help in school are very well cared for and make good progress. The rest of you are very good at helping them join in with your learning.

Most of you make satisfactory progress. While some teachers give you plenty of challenge, we want all your teachers to expect the best from you all and to make sure that you know how to make your work better. Please make sure that you take their advice. In some of your books, especially your maths books, it is very difficult to see how well you are doing. We have asked your teachers to make sure that there is plenty of work in your books for you to see and that, when you look back, you know what you were trying to achieve. You can then see how much progress you have made. At the moment, teaching is satisfactory. When those in charge of the school watch your lessons or look at your work we want them to see what teachers can do to help you learn more quickly and, next time they look, to see if this has happened. You make good progress in your phonics lessons because you are taught well. Keep up the good work!

Although your headteacher is shared with another school, she, and all those in charge, make sure that your school runs smoothly and that you enjoy your learning. We wish you all the very best for the future

Yours sincerely

Judy Dawson
Lead inspector

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