

Stambridge Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114848
Local Authority	ESSEX LA
Inspection number	311728
Inspection dates	12–13 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Martin Beale

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 on roll	
School	79
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Betty South
Headteacher	Mrs Maureen Sealeaf
Date of previous school inspection	6 June 2005
School address	Stambridge Road Stambridge Rochford Essex SS4 2AP
Telephone number	01702 544369
Fax number	01702 530713

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a very small school. Virtually all pupils are from White British backgrounds and eligibility for free school meals is slightly below average. Classes are affected by the comparatively high numbers of pupils who join or leave other than at the usual ages. Pupils are taught in three mixed-age classes. Attainment on entry is well below that expected of four-year-olds, particularly in literacy and numeracy. High pupil mobility also affects the nature of each year group. The proportion of pupils identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Inspection findings support the school's judgement that it provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. The visitor is immediately struck by the warm and welcoming atmosphere and the polite and confident children. Parents view these features as a considerable strength of the school and are very pleased that they continue to be maintained in spite of several changes of staff in recent years. The school provides 'a home from home environment' as one parent wrote.

The new headteacher has built on the school's successes by focusing sharply on raising pupils' achievement. Improvements to the teaching of writing have led to rising standards in English. Pupils work with interest because teachers praise and encourage, so giving them confidence to participate in all aspects of lessons. The good progress of the children in Reception means that standards rise from well below average to below average by the time they enter Year 1. While pupils make good progress in English in Years 1 to 6, they make slower progress in mathematics and science so that their achievement is satisfactory overall. Standards are below average overall, but higher in English than in mathematics and science. More able pupils make slower progress in mathematics and science than in English because work is not always sufficiently challenging. Standards in science are also slipping because pupils' enquiry and investigative skills are not developed sufficiently. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress.

Pupils of all ages enjoy school, value the activities provided and behave well. Parents are right to be very pleased with the good care their children receive. The careful assessment of their progress in this small school makes the needs and circumstances of individual pupils well known to all. One parent's comments sum this up, 'All the staff know all the children and their families. You are not just a parent or child that comes to the school - you are the school'. The result is that pupils feel safe, understand how to behave sensibly, and readily care for others by befriending or playing with anyone who is unhappy or feeling left out. Pupils understand how to adopt a healthy lifestyle by eating well and taking regular exercise. School meals have improved and there is plenty to play with at lunchtimes to keep them active. Pupils have a voice through their school council, although older pupils would like to take greater responsibility for running it. The pupils' personal qualities and satisfactory development of basic skills give a sound base for the next stage of their education.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children have a good start in Reception. They make good progress because teaching focuses carefully on their identified needs. In spite of this, several do not reach expected goals by the time they enter Year 1 in aspects of literacy and numeracy because of their weak skills on entry. Good teamwork between the adults and the focus on personal development means the children settle quickly to the routines and become confident learners. As one parent with a child new to Reception this year said, 'I think the way the children have been introduced gently to full time school has been brilliant'. Inadequacies persist in the accommodation. Children are still not able to move freely between the classroom and a suitably resourced outside area.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise expectations of more able pupils and provide greater and consistent challenge in their learning, particularly in mathematics and science.
- Reverse the declining pattern of standards in science by focusing teaching more sharply on developing the pupils' skills of investigation and enquiry.
- Provide suitable accommodation for Reception children by giving them free access to a well-resourced outdoor area.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Boys and girls make satisfactory progress across Years 1 to 6, although with some variations between subjects and key stages. The fall in recent years in Year 2 results was reversed in 2007 in reading and writing. Overall, results were below the national average and very few pupils reached higher levels. Year 6 national test results were also below average, but with differences between the subjects. Few pupils reached higher levels other than in English, where results have followed an improving trend and were slightly above average in 2007. Mathematics results were below average, but science results continued to fall and were very low. The school has identified weaknesses in the pupils' investigative skills as the main reason for this, but has not yet taken suitable action to improve matters.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils of all ages like their school. Their positive attitudes contribute considerably to making it a harmonious place in which they can learn and develop. They work well together, and are taking more responsibility for their learning by evaluating their performance. The school helps them to appreciate and respect the customs of others by welcoming visitors from a wide range of cultural backgrounds. The pupils are concerned for the environment. Their work in monitoring the speed and flow of traffic outside the school shows concern for road safety. Attendance rates have improved considerably over the last year and are now close to the national average because of the effort by the school to help parents and pupils recognise the value of regular attendance.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching satisfactorily develops pupils' basic skills. Teachers organise activities well in the mixed-age classes so that pupils know what is expected of them and get on with learning with little fuss. Classrooms are calm because pupils are clear about the expectations for their behaviour. Teachers make learning interesting through their confident use of the new technology, such as interactive whiteboards and laptop computers. Pupils also enjoy discussing their work with others and assessing how well they are doing. Teaching assistants and other adults are carefully briefed so that they make a valuable contribution to the learning of

individuals or groups of pupils including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The headteacher recognises the main weakness is the inconsistency of challenge for pupils. The more able are not always stretched enough because some work is too easy and teachers do not consolidate learning by asking these pupils to explain the reasoning behind their answers.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum supports pupils' progress in key skills satisfactorily and their personal development effectively, particularly through the well-planned personal, social and health education programme. The wide range of clubs, trips and visits adds much to pupils' experience. Some of these are made possible through links with other providers such as specialist teachers from local secondary schools. Support for the development of basic skills has improved by making activities more interesting and relevant to the pupils, particularly in writing. Pupils have many opportunities to use their information and communication technology skills to develop learning in many subjects, but opportunities for enquiry, investigation and problem solving are rather limited. Curricular planning for more able pupils or those with particular talents does not enable them consistently to reach the standards they could. Programmes for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are more successful.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school is a safe and secure environment for the pupils in which their care and welfare is of prime concern to staff and governors, and safeguarding requirements are met. Pupils say that there is always an adult for them to turn to if they have a problem and that they are cared for well. The information from the careful assessment and tracking of pupils' progress is used effectively to focus specific programmes to help them to catch up if they are falling behind. This information is also used to identify and provide appropriate support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, but not always for the more able. The school has developed strong links with a variety of other agencies that provide specialist support for pupils with significant learning difficulties or health problems. Pupils are starting to become involved in identifying how well they are doing, but the school is not always challenging in the targets it sets or consistent in the guidance it gives to achieve them.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The new headteacher has established a clear picture of the school from satisfactorily rigorous evaluation based on systematic monitoring of teachers and accurate analysis of pupils' performance. The action introduced to improve the pupils' writing is already starting to bear fruit in higher standards. The small group of staff work well as a team, supporting each other and sharing ideas about how to improve their teaching. Systems to help them do their jobs better are thorough. The leadership skills of staff have improved over the past year, but they are only just starting to undertake their roles fully. Governors support the school soundly but do not have effective systems by which they can evaluate for themselves how it is performing. This limits both their ability to challenge the school to do better and their effectiveness in planning for its future. Target setting is based on a careful and satisfactory analysis of the pupils' attainment and progress, but its impact is to maintain their progress at a satisfactory

level rather than act as a lever for raising standards. Careful financial management has led to a prudent budget surplus to meet the priority of improving the accommodation for Reception pupils. The school recognises that not all parents support this development because it will involve a temporary reduction in the number of classes. Overall, the school gives satisfactory value for money.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

14 September 2007

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of Stambridge Primary School, Rochford, SS4 2AP

I am writing to thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave me when I visited your school. You were all very helpful. I enjoyed talking to you and your teachers and watching you learn.

The youngest of you have a good start in Reception. The rest of you make satisfactory progress during your time at school. Most of you meet the standards expected in English by the time you move on to secondary school, but several of you are not up to that level in science. You enjoy school, attend regularly, work hard and behave sensibly. You clearly enjoy the clubs, trips and visits provided for you. The good care and support you receive help you to settle in and make the school feel like one big family. You have a good understanding of the importance of diet and exercise for a healthy lifestyle. I was particularly impressed by the way you look after each other.

Your teachers and governors are trying hard to make the school better. Improvements could be made in some areas. I think that your teachers could help the cleverest pupils to learn more quickly in all subjects, especially in mathematics and science and give all of you more opportunity to do scientific investigations. The classroom and outdoor space for Reception children does not allow them to move freely between activities both inside and out. I am sure that you and your teachers will work hard to make these improvements.

I wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Martin Beale

Lead Inspector