

Ridgewell Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115142
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	311855
Inspection dates	23–24 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Roderick Passant

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	78
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	8
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sarah Howard
Headteacher	Mr Andy Richbell
Date of previous school inspection	4 October 2004
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Church Lane Ridgewell Halstead Essex CO9 4SA

Age group	3–11
Inspection dates	23–24 October 2008
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This small school serves its local community, and more than half of the pupils come from outside the immediate area of the school. Pupils come from a wide range of social backgrounds. Pupils are mainly White British with a small number of pupils with mixed heritage. In addition, the school serves a small settled Traveller site on the outskirts of the village. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is average. The number of pupils who have difficulties with their learning is above average, as is the number with statements detailing the support that they should receive. There is considerable variation in the numbers of these pupils in each year group. Some year groups are very small. The number of pupils joining or leaving the school at various points in the school year is higher than normal. The school hosts the local rural children's centre one day every other week to coincide with parent and toddler sessions. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) includes a very recently formed part-time nursery provision. Attainment on entry to the Reception class varies but children generally have the knowledge and skills typical of children of this age in most areas of learning. The school became an Investor in People in 2008 and is in the process of reapplying to retain its advanced Healthy Schools status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

After a long period of instability caused by significant staffing changes, the school is now settled and provides a satisfactory and improving quality of education for its pupils. Pupils made good progress last year in Year 6 from their starting points at the beginning of the year. Pupils currently in Year 6 achieve satisfactorily and are on track to attain broadly average standards. Teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, although the teaching seen was good and pupils made good progress in lessons. Pupils with specific difficulties make good progress because of the support that they receive. However, older pupils lack the independent learning skills they need and often require significant teacher input.

Aspects of the school are strong. Good attendance reflects pupils' great enjoyment of school. This is because what they do is interesting and the good curriculum provides rich experiences. The school has the unqualified support of almost all parents. They accurately stress the school's unique ethos, its caring nature, their children's good personal development and the close support given to them and their children. The school works hard to create a strong school community around the parents and their children. The school is also effectively developing its role within the local community. Because of the mixed age classes, older pupils learn to keep an eye out for the younger ones and they in turn quickly learn classroom routines. The school consciously supports this 'family' atmosphere.

Pupils feel safe and secure in school because staff are vigilant, know all the pupils extremely well and the high quality of relationships between adults and pupils create a warm ethos. The school is highly welcoming and inclusive. Respect for others is consistently emphasised. Praise is used well to foster pupils' confidence and reinforce the school's basic values. Pupils have a more limited knowledge of the diverse society in which we live, awareness of the wider world and the contribution that this can make to raising their aspirations. Behaviour is good. Pupils play across the age-range with joyful enthusiasm, underpinned by their consideration for others. Pupils have a good understanding how to look after themselves and an excellent understanding of what makes a healthy life-style.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. There are strengths and the headteacher leads the school well. He has the confidence of pupils and parents who appreciate his approachability and 'hands-on' style. There is very strong teamwork amongst staff, they share a deep commitment to the pupils and assume effective leadership roles. Governance is good. Since the last inspection, there has been good improvement in various aspects of the school's provision and the teaching of the established staff has improved. The staffing changes in the past reduced the impact of some of the initiatives put in place to raise standards, for example, improved assessment systems. The leadership has identified the need to embed initiatives, such as a closer focus on the quality of learning. Nevertheless, given the evidence of the improvements since the last inspection, strong teamwork and pupils' improving progress, the school has good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The school has just established the Nursery so it is too soon to judge these children's progress over time. Children are warmly welcomed and are clearly at ease with the room, resources and each other. Children's learning-journey journals show a good range of well-planned activities

and particularly good use of photographs to record and assess their progress. Extensive use is made of the outdoor area. The current advantageous adult to child ratios mean that the encouragement of language and their welfare needs are met particularly well. Children in Reception make good progress and achieve well so that by the end of Reception, most now meet, and some exceed the standards expected nationally. Children get a good start to their education. Children's individual needs are identified early and are supported flexibly and effectively. Very well planned activities ensure that there is an appropriate mixture of adult initiated and child led activities. The mixed-age class is used as a strength, with younger children benefiting from the role models of older children. Teaching is good, sometimes excellent, with particularly good use of role-play by adults to initiate and develop language. Leadership and management of the EYFS are good, with detailed evaluations of children's progress enabling adjustments to curricular planning. There is a very close relationship between the Nursery and Reception leaders. Shared planning allows for meaningful, appropriate interaction of the children, for example, in singing sessions. Currently there are small numbers in the Nursery and Reception class.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop older pupils' independent learning skills so that they can work on their own with greater sense of urgency and purpose.
- Embed the initiatives in place aimed at raising standards so that they are a consistent feature of teaching and learning across the school.
- Broaden pupils' horizons, aspirations and awareness of the diversity of our society through wider cultural and international opportunities.

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

Children get a good start in Reception and achieve well. Pupils in Year 2 achieved well in the 2008 assessments. Writing in particular shows an improving trend. Pupils' progress in Key Stage 2 has been more variable over time, reflecting a history of staff changes, which resulted in declining standards previously. Good teaching accelerated the progress of Year 6 pupils well last year and ensured that they achieved more, even though there were gaps in pupils' knowledge from previous years. The unvalidated test results indicate that pupils' standards were well below average in English and mathematics. Standards in science were broadly average.

With the improvement in teaching, pupils make good progress in lessons this year. Pupils in Year 6 are on track to attain broadly average standards and achieve satisfactorily. Pupils who find learning difficult make good progress and achieve well because they have consistent support. Higher attaining pupils make good progress through effective identification and the provision of suitably challenging work.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good and is reflected in the kindness and consideration they show to each other and the way they contribute to the warmth of the

school's ethos. They make a very good contribution to the school community because older pupils assume a duty of care towards younger pupils and take other roles and responsibilities seriously. Pupils' cultural development is satisfactory. The school teaches pupils to respect others and they have a mature understanding of disability. Their awareness of the diverse society and the increasing international nature of the world in which we live is more limited. Their understanding of ecological issues is good, aided for example by their allotment and tree planting exercises. Behaviour is good and pupils are confident that if there was a problem, a member of staff would sort it out. With their improving standards and good social skills, pupils' preparation for their future economic well-being is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The impact of teaching and learning over time is satisfactory. Current teaching is skilled and enables pupils to make good progress in lessons. Teachers manage the mixed age classrooms well because planning is structured carefully to meet the needs of the various abilities in the class. There is strong teamwork with teaching assistants and they provide good support to individuals or groups of pupils. Teachers share the purpose of the lesson and the judgements about how successful learning has been with pupils. They are skilled at creating real or fictional contexts for the learning to develop the quality of pupils' thinking. However, older pupils require too much teacher direction and support when working on tasks in order to keep their work rate and achievement high enough. Marking is diligent, provides praise and indicates points for improvement, but is insufficiently explicit about what pupils need to do to move on.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum meets statutory requirements and provides a rich range of experiences through special events, performances and various trips. All of these make a very significant contribution to pupils' enjoyment of school. Support for pupils' personal and social education is good. Contexts such as elections for the school council are used to develop an understanding of aspects of citizenship. There are good opportunities for pupils to participate and take responsibility within the school community. Information and communication technology (ICT) is a strong feature of the school and pupils are competent and confident users. ICT is used effectively to develop pupils' writing skills. Links are developed between subjects, such as within the work on the Egyptians, to provide opportunities to use basic literacy and numeracy skills. Some aspects, such as understanding British cultural diversity, are not planned to the same degree. Where appropriate, the school enhances the integration of new pupils into the school by sensitive references to their cultural backgrounds. There is good use of drama approaches to extend the quality of pupils' thinking and widen the contexts for learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The pastoral care of pupils is excellent. Pupils with specific difficulties are supported extremely well, both by adults and other pupils. As a result, they are involved fully in the community and life of the school and their contribution is valued. There are very good links with specialist agencies. Adults know all the pupils extremely well and this forms the basis of excellent positive

and nurturing relationships. Safeguarding and child protection procedures are secure. Systems to support pupils' academic progress have been weak in the past. They have now been tightened up and are good overall. All staff are involved in discussing the academic progress of all pupils to ensure that they do not fall behind and that appropriate strategies are in place to provide them with effective support. Academic monitoring is based on termly assessments. However, the intervals between assessments are often too long to provide the quality of information needed to assess accurately the changing needs of some pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher has a good and accurate understanding of the strengths of the school and what needs to be done to take it forward. He and the staff are reflective and share a commitment to raise standards. Circumstances in the past have forced the staff to be reactive, which limited aspects of the school leadership's drive to raise standards. However, many aspects of the school's provision have been developed successfully, such as pupils' personal development, the curriculum and aspects of care and guidance. Improvement since the last inspection is good overall. The school actively and effectively fosters community links and cohesion through its work as a rural children's centre. Links with the local community have developed since the last inspection. With a stable staff, the school is now in a stronger position to embed the more recent initiatives, and focus more closely on the quality of pupils' learning. Governance is good. Governors play an effective strategic role, for example with regard to the building programme. They have supported the school effectively through a difficult period when staff recruitment has been an issue and have been prepared to make difficult decisions. They undertake training and provide appropriate challenge to the school through informed knowledge of the school.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
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 learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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	2
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

27 October 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ridgewell C of E V A Primary School, Ridgewell, C09 4SA

Thank you for making me so welcome in your school. I enjoyed my stay with you very much. My thanks go to those pupils who gave up some of their lunchtime to talk to me. I also understand that my visit meant that Mr Richbell had to cancel a rugby match. I am sorry about this and do hope that this can be rearranged at another time.

The school is giving you a sound and improving education. Older pupils have had a number of teachers in the past few years and this has meant that they have not done as well as expected. All of you are now making good progress in your lessons because of skilled teaching and Year 6 pupils are now on track to reach at least average standards. The school is helping you grow up as young people well. I was impressed with your behaviour and the kindness you showed to each other. You take your part in making sure that the school is a friendly place very seriously. You enjoy school a great deal and I agree with you that this is because you do interesting things. Because of this, I think some of the older pupils could learn to be a bit more independent of your teachers so that you can work hard on your own. I asked Mr Richbell to work with the teachers to help you develop these skills. In sport, you often hear athletes talking about achieving a personal best. The same idea can apply to schoolwork too! All members of staff care about you a very great deal and they keep a close eye on your progress. I also asked Mr Richbell to work with the teachers to find ways to give you an even greater awareness about the wider world and the rich and diverse cultures found in Britain today.

Now that the school is more settled, I have also asked Mr Richbell and the staff to make sure everyone is following the same procedures.

Mr Richbell and all the staff clearly want the school to go places and with your continued help, I am sure it will.

Sincere good wishes to all of you in your future school careers.

Roderick Passant

(Lead Inspector)