

Great Dunmow Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115298
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	326176
Inspection dates	29–30 June 2009
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	Foundation
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	363
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Martin Lee
Headteacher	Mrs Sylvia Ruck
Date of previous school inspection	22–23 March 2006
School address	Walnut Walk Woodlands Park Drive Great Dunmow Essex CM6 1ZR
Telephone number	01371 873184
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Most pupils are from White British backgrounds in this well above average sized school. There are very few pupils with a mother tongue other than English. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is under half of the national average. The proportion of pupils needing help with their learning, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is below average. There are two Reception classes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. A new headteacher has been in post since September 2006. The school has been awarded the Active Mark for its provision for sport and physical education.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school has improved in most areas since the last inspection so that it now provides a good education for its pupils. It has developed outstanding features in some areas of its work because of the calm and skilled leadership of the headteacher who is ably supported by the deputy headteacher and a team of increasingly effective staff. The school is becoming more established in the community now it is four years old. Parents are delighted with all that the school provides and many single out the headteacher for their praise. One parent summed up the views of many here when writing, 'We have found Mrs Ruck to be an approachable person with an admirable management style and a supportive team of teachers'.

The headteacher is resolute in her determination to make the school even better for all pupils and their families. She has high expectations of everyone as shown through the challenging targets she sets and the support for their achievement. This has led to the quality of teaching and learning now being good throughout the school. Better teaching has been the major factor in the pupils' good achievement. The calm atmosphere in classrooms and the confidence teachers give the pupils are conducive to their learning and personal development. Pupils make good and improving progress from skills and knowledge as expected when they join the school. Standards are well above average and rising by the time they move on to secondary school. Writing for the younger pupils is the one area of weakness and progress is only satisfactory. This is largely because opportunities for them to write for a purpose are not extensive. The good development of key skills sets the pupils up well for success in the next stage of their education and beyond.

The high quality of support and guidance means that the pupils feel safe and confident in the knowledge that if they have a concern, they can seek help from an adult, and the matter will be dealt with. The rich and varied activities provided throughout the school add considerably to the pupils' enjoyment of learning and contribute much to their outstanding personal development and well-being. They thoroughly enjoy school, which is reflected in their good and improving attendance.

The pupils are extremely courteous and polite, and show great consideration towards others. They behave well in and around school only needing the minimum of correction. Pupils show a very genuine sense of pride in their school because they have a real voice in its development. They contribute much to the life of the town and have a clear understanding of issues within the wider world. They develop an excellent understanding of the importance of diet and exercise if they are to stay fit and healthy, and know how to keep safe and deal with any risks they might face.

Staff and governors have a very clear view of the school's qualities based on rigorous checking of its performance. The drive to improve the pupils' achievement and personal development is shared by all associated with the school and articulated in carefully identified priorities for improvement. This and the school's record of improvement in recent years under the headteacher's stewardship, mean that its capacity to become even better is good.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make a good start to their school life in Reception. They achieve well and most exceed the goals expected of them by the end of the year. Well organised induction procedures mean that children settle into the classes quickly. They move between the indoor and outdoor areas independently, choosing from the wide variety of activities on offer. However, there is a problem here in that the outdoor area does not provide enough shade during summer or shelter during winter to enable outdoor learning to be completely effective. Planning carefully balances adult led activities with those that children choose for themselves. They were engrossed, for example, in the teacher's explanation of how bees make honey. They were keen to explore the beekeeping equipment and combs carefully, asking pertinent questions to increase their understanding. Opportunities were then available for them to explore how hexagons fitted together, to dress up as butterflies and bees and to make honey sandwiches. Children gained good personal and social skills, developed their language well and learned about the properties of two-dimensional shapes.

Parents are much in support of all that the staff team is doing for their children. This was evident in many of the questionnaire responses including, 'My daughter has just completed her Reception year and she has loved every minute'. Improvements have been secured by the staff team since the last inspection. Adults assess children's achievements regularly, recording them carefully to provide an ongoing record. They meet daily using this information to consider how successful the activities have been and how they can respond to individual needs. Close attention is paid to ensuring that children are safe and healthy. They are encouraged to drink water regularly, although few wear hats to protect themselves from the sun.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing by providing more opportunities for pupils in Reception and Key Stage 1 to write in a wide range of contexts and for a clear purpose.
- Ensure that children in Reception can access the outside classroom during inclement weather by providing better shelter.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils build well on their good start in Reception so that their progress is good in the main school in all key areas. This extends to pupils who need extra help with their learning or their language development because they are supported effectively. Standards are rising throughout the school as pupils make increased rates of progress. Until last year, the results of assessments for Year 2 pupils had remained broadly average since the last inspection. Current assessment information shows standards are rising and are now above average in both reading and mathematics at Key Stage 1. Writing has not shown the same improvement and remains an area of focus in the lower part of the school. Year 6 test results have risen since the last inspection to well above the national average. The school has successfully tackled a

decline in English results in 2008 and pupils are on track to match their well above average standards in mathematics and science. Individual targets are challenging and met or exceeded by all but a few pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Many factors contribute to the pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They think deeply and respond impressively when exploring their emotions such as what it means to be 'human'. They respect and value diversity in school and in the wider world and have developed a good understanding for their age of global issues. They support charities including schools and activities overseas. They particularly enjoy the varied and interesting activities that tap into their interests and learning. Pupils take great pride in their achievements and can explain their next steps to improvement. They make an excellent contribution to their school by activities such as fund raising for their residential visit. They enjoy and readily take on many responsibilities, such as play leaders. They are confident their views are listened to, and significant and very real changes follow, such as the lunchtime salad bar. Through collaboration such as 'talk partners', they learn to cooperate and develop life skills, one pupil stating, 'If you have a good idea, and they have a good idea, maybe you can make a better idea'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The headteacher's focus on developing teaching and learning has been a major factor in the pupils' improving progress. Classrooms are calm and productive places for learning because pupils understand their teachers' expectations for their work and behaviour. Teachers explain at the start of lessons precisely what the pupils will be learning, and refer to this during and at the end. As a result, they are clear about the purpose of their work and remain focused throughout on their learning. They greatly enjoy working and discussing ideas with their learning partner and are often seen to be immersed in their work having a real thirst for knowledge. Teaching assistants are effective in their support for the learning of individuals or groups. Resources such as the whiteboards are used well to stimulate interest and engage the pupils' imaginations. Not all teaching is consistently of this quality. The school has been focusing on how to challenge the more able pupils. There are examples of teachers being quite explicit in their higher expectations of these pupils, but at times work can be 'more of the same' and does not challenge their thinking sufficiently.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is increasingly meeting the school's aim for 'an exciting curriculum that is rich and varied, challenging and inspiring'. Changes are being implemented carefully, ensuring a broad and balanced range of tasks remains. The exception is writing where opportunities for younger pupils to write are not sufficiently extensive to promote better than satisfactory progress. Subjects are increasingly linked so that new learning in one reinforces previous learning in another. Skills are learnt and

practised through relevant activities, preparing pupils well for later life. Programmes are carefully adapted to cater for the academic and personal needs of all pupils. Activities as varied as French, choir and swimming enliven learning opportunities. Themed days, visitors and visits support and extend the curriculum, bring learning to life and add much to the pupils' enjoyment as their clear recollections of these events demonstrates. An excellent range and variety of very popular extra-curricular activities enriches the curriculum further.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school is a safe and supportive environment, providing high quality care for its pupils. All aspects of safeguarding are understood and implemented consistently by all staff. Pupils look forward to school and settle quickly when they join because of the very thoughtfully planned induction programme. They are given excellent guidance to help raise their achievement, which is an improvement since the last inspection. Pupils know how well they are doing and have a thorough awareness of what they need to do to improve. The quality and effectiveness of assessment has improved considerably in recent years. It is used very carefully to tailor support so that an individual pupil's specific learning, language or emotional needs are met. The success of this support is carefully tracked. Links with external partners are outstanding and ensure good access to support and services for children and their families.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has built a strong team of staff who are dedicated to helping all pupils achieve their potential both academically and in their personal qualities. The school promotes community cohesion well. It has developed a cohesive school community that is sharply focused on meeting the needs of its pupils and their families. There is a continual drive for improvement at all levels, with no-one becoming complacent by their success. The relatively new senior team is becoming increasingly effective, although it is taking time to develop its skills and so support school improvement to the full. Formal and informal systems for checking staff performance are linked closely to plans and targets for improvement. The school has become skilled at evaluating assessment data not just to check on the performance of pupils but to identify where additional action is needed. Governors fulfil their responsibilities conscientiously and make sure they not only challenge the headteacher but provide support for their priorities to be met.

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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?	2
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 is 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?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well 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	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
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?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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



1 July 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Great Dunmow Primary School, Great Dunmow, CM6 1RZ

You may remember that inspectors visited your school not too long ago. I am now writing to let you know what we found out. Before I do, I would just like to thank you for making us feel welcome and for being so ready to share your thoughts about your school. We had a chance to talk with many of you, and have told your teachers how you were very helpful and polite. Through our discussions with you, it was great to hear how much you enjoy school. It was also good to hear about how safe you feel and that there is always someone to talk to if you are worried. You, your parents and teachers are right in thinking that your school is good and improving.

You make good progress during your time at school. You attend regularly, work hard and behave sensibly. Your teachers make learning interesting and you clearly enjoy extra activities including clubs and school trips. All members of staff help to make sure you are safe and cared for very well. You take your responsibilities seriously and make a very considerable contribution to the life of the school. You have an excellent understanding of the importance of diet and exercise for a healthy lifestyle.

Your headteacher, other staff and governors are trying hard to make the school even better. The two things we have asked them to do are:

- help younger pupils to improve their writing
- provide better shelter for Reception so that they can use the outdoor classroom throughout the year whatever the weather.

I am sure that you and your teachers will work hard to make these improvements. You can play your part in helping the school to get even better by continuing to show such pride in your school and enthusiasm for learning.

I wish you well for the future.

Yours faithfully

Martin Beale
Lead inspector