

Marks Gate Infant School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	101210
Local authority	Barking and Dagenham
Inspection number	376524
Inspection dates	16–17 January 2012
Lead inspector	Nick Butt

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	326
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Roger Gayler
Headteacher	Wendy Heffernan
Date of previous school inspection	30 June 2009
School address	Lawn Farm Grove Chadwell Heath Romford Essex RM6 5LL
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Age group	4–7
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Introduction

Inspection team

Evelyn Riley

Additional inspector

David Lewis

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 17 lessons taught by 10 teachers. Meetings were held informally with parents, carers and pupils, two members of the governing body, including the Chair, and a wide range of staff. Inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. They observed the school's work, and looked at a wide range of documentation including self-evaluation documents, strategic plans and other development plans. Inspectors scrutinised 77 questionnaires returned by parents and carers and those returned by staff and pupils.

Information about the school

Marks Gate is larger than the average-sized infant school. Half the pupils are from a wide range of minority ethnic heritages and a minority speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. The school has two deputy headteachers, one full time and one part time. The Early Years Foundation Stage consists of a Nursery and three Reception classes.

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

- Marks Gate is a good school. The senior leadership team provide a strong sense of purpose and commitment to improvement, which results in a consistent approach by all members of staff to the raising of standards.
- Achievement is good. All groups of pupils make good or better progress from often low starting points and standards have been improving over time. Attainment is average in reading, writing and mathematics, although only a small number of pupils attain the higher Level 3. In the case of reading, this is because pupils do not always have sufficient opportunities to practise the more advanced skills through discussing their reading in depth.
- Teaching is consistently good. Teachers match work well to pupils’ abilities and make learning exciting and enjoyable. They employ a wide range of strategies to engage and enthuse pupils. Very occasionally, more-able pupils are not given sufficiently challenging mathematical problems to solve.
- Children made a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They become confident very quickly and familiar with classroom routines. Assessment does not highlight the next steps for individual pupils often enough.
- Pupils behave well and have a good understanding about safety. Parents, carers and pupils say that there is hardly any bullying and they have every confidence in staff to deal with any concerns they may have.
- Parents and carers say they find all staff very approachable and feel welcome in school.
- The extremely thorough analysis of data ensures that all staff and the governing body have an excellent understanding of pupils’ progress. Rigorous monitoring procedures give leaders and managers a good understanding of the school’s strengths and areas to develop, which are reflected in accurate and useful strategic plans.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure more pupils attain the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - developing pupils’ advanced reading skills through giving them more opportunities to discuss their reading in class
 - always providing sufficient challenge for more able pupils when problem-

solving in mathematics.

- Refine assessment procedures in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - ensuring observations are used more often to identify the next steps in individual children’s learning.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils are enthusiastic about learning and engage fully in lessons. They work with concentration and pay careful attention to instructions. The impact of teaching on their progress is good. Teachers know pupils very well as individuals and tailor work to meet their needs, so that they learn quickly. Despite joining the school with skills and knowledge well-below expectations, pupils’ attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is broadly average by the time they leave the school. In 2011, almost all pupils attained the expected Level 2 in each of these subjects. The proportion of pupils attaining the higher Level 3 was lower, and the school has implemented measures to increase this, such as running a breakfast club for more-able readers. Staff identified that boys were not doing so well as girls in writing and introduced a programme of measures to accelerate their progress. As a result, the standard of boys’ writing was above average by the end of Year 2 and the gap has narrowed considerably.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage achieve well. Outcomes are broadly average by the time they leave Reception. This is because well-planned activities develop their early literacy and numeracy skills effectively, and the stimulating learning environment fires their imagination both inside and outside. For example, children very much enjoyed working on the ‘construction site’ outdoors, and serving in a local ‘hardware shop’ inside. Thinking about quantities of materials and how much they would need enabled them to practise their skills in calculating.

The school systematically teaches the sounds that letters make from Nursery onwards. Children learn to blend sounds together to read words and develop wider skills as they mature. Pupils who speak English as an additional language have made particularly rapid progress in reading, because they are given the specialist support and guidance they need. Occasionally, more-able pupils do not have so many opportunities to use their more advanced reading skills, for example in discussing what they understand from a text.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because their needs are identified early and timely and effective support is provided, often by highly-skilled teaching assistants, to boost their confidence and help them to overcome their difficulties. Pupils known to be eligible for free school meals achieve better than their counterparts nationally because they also benefit from the consistently good teaching. All parents and carers who returned questionnaires justifiably said that their children were making good progress and that the school was helping them to develop key skills.

Quality of teaching

Teachers have high expectations of pupils to work hard and productively, and they rise to the challenge. Movement around the classroom from one activity to the next is efficient with no time wasted, so that every moment counts. Teachers use technology well to make learning relevant and interesting for pupils, for example by projecting a child's piece of writing onto a screen so that their classmates can evaluate it. The planned curriculum has a positive impact on teaching, with exciting themes and good links across subjects. For example, Year 1 pupils considered how they might house homeless aliens by creating a brand new planet for them. They could express their imaginative ideas confidently in whole sentences.

Teachers use questioning well to extend pupils' thinking and to assess their responses. They have good subject knowledge, especially in teaching the sounds that letters make to promote early reading. Staff work together well to show pupils what they expect, for example when the teacher and assistant played the roles of two pupils talking to each other about their learning. Planning is usually well matched to pupils' abilities, although sometimes more able pupils do not have sufficiently difficult problems to solve in mathematics. Teachers use background music to create a calm atmosphere when pupils are writing independently, and discuss dilemmas with them. They build anticipation by introducing new stimuli, such as dinosaur bones, into classes, so that pupils wonder why they are there and what they will lead to. Pupils studied the parables of Jesus in the context of telling a good story, and have many opportunities to share and celebrate their different cultures. Children in the Nursery and Reception sing rhymes to remind them about classroom routines.

Parents and carers strongly believe that their children are taught well, a view supported by inspectors. Pupils are also very positive about their lessons. One said, 'My teacher checks my work and tells me if I have achieved my objectives.' Marking is good and helps pupils to improve. They generally know their individual curriculum targets and the next steps in their learning. While assessment is thorough in the Early Years Foundation Stage and builds up a clear picture of children's achievements, staff do not always identify the next steps often enough for individual children.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils say they feel safe in school and all the parents and carers who returned questionnaires agree with them. Pupils have a good understanding of keeping safe and know how to cross the road carefully and not to talk to strangers. Their behaviour is consistently good, in classrooms, around the school and in the playground. Pupils say this is typical. They know and understand how the school's behaviour charter works. The school has staggered playtimes to reduce congestion and appointed a play leader to run games. This has made playtimes safer and more enjoyable for pupils. Parents and carers believe that hardly any bullying goes on and that it is 'nipped in the bud' by staff as soon as they hear about it. Pupils also say that bullying is extremely rare. Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and listen and cooperate well in class. Teachers manage behaviour extremely well and are very consistent in their approach. They create an ethos in which all pupils feel

comfortable and secure, especially those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. The governing body's recent investment in security fencing has made the site even safer.

Leadership and management

The headteacher's ambitious vision for the school is shared by the deputy headteachers and all staff, who work together extremely well to drive forward improvement. Policies and procedures are implemented consistently, resulting in pupils making good progress in every class. Rigorous and regular monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning has increased the proportion of good or better teaching, so that very little is ever only satisfactory. Teachers are given clear feedback about their strengths and how to improve, which is followed up by senior leaders to measure its impact. Professional development is highly valued and used to develop individuals and support whole-school priorities for improvement. Teachers also undertake research with other schools to share good practice, such as a new approach to promoting speaking and listening in the classroom.

Senior leaders have a comprehensive understanding of the school's strengths and areas to develop because monitoring arrangements are vigorous and systematic. They use data extremely well to identify any unevenness in performance and to intervene to support any pupils at risk of falling behind. This supports them in ensuring that the school is inclusive and promotes equal opportunities and tackles discrimination well. Strategic plans are revised termly and used as working documents to inform school improvement. The governing body is fully involved in this process and governors have a very good understanding of the school's performance, as well as helping to shape its future direction. They take their legal responsibilities very seriously and ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are met fully and that all staff have up-to-date training. The school has made good progress since its last inspection and has a strong capacity for further improvement.

The curriculum excites and engages pupils and makes a positive contribution to their good progress and enjoyment of school. It is adapted and revised to meet their needs well and responds to their interests and aspirations. Pupils enjoy the opportunities to undertake research on their class computers and make links across subjects, such as studying health and well-being through science and physical education. The curriculum also makes a positive contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, actively involving them and developing in them a love of learning. Pupils take pride in sharing cultural celebrations, such as Eid, and contribute well to their local community. For example, they sing carols on the green and at a local residential home.

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.



18 January 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Marks Gate Infant School, Romford, RM6 5LL

Thank you for sharing your thoughts with us when we inspected your school. We enjoyed meeting you and reading your responses to the questionnaire. We agree with you that Marks Gate is a good school. Here are some of its strengths.

- You all make good progress and enjoy your learning.
- Your behaviour is good and you care for one another well.
- You have a good understanding of how to stay safe.
- The teaching is good and helps you develop the skills you need for later life.
- The school cares for you well, especially if you are having difficulties.
- Children in the Nursery and Reception classes get off to a good start.
- The school is led and managed well by the headteacher and the deputy headteachers.

There are always things that can be improved. We have asked the school to:

- help more of you to reach high standards in reading, writing and mathematics
- discuss your reading with you in more detail
- give some of you more difficult problems to solve in mathematics
- show the youngest of you even more ways to improve your learning.

You can help by working hard and telling your teachers what you enjoy about reading.

Our best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Nick Butt
Lead inspector

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