

Friars Grove Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	114761
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	378921
Inspection dates	19–20 January 2012
Lead inspector	George Logan

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 of pupils on the school roll	383
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rod Goody
Headteacher	Helen Dudley-Smith
Date of previous school inspection	27 November 2008
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Age group	4–11
Inspection date(s)	19–20 January 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

George Logan

Additional inspector

Ronald Elam

Additional inspector

Jane Richmond

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors spent nine and a half hours visiting 20 lessons taught by 15 different members of staff. They held meetings with the Chair of the Governing Body and two other representatives of the governing body, and with staff and two groups of pupils. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at the school's documentation, which included records of teaching, the main improvement plan, records relating to safeguarding and extracts from the school's tracking of pupils' progress. An extensive scrutiny of pupils' written work was also undertaken. The inspection team analysed 134 questionnaires returned by parents and carers, together with 26 questionnaires from staff and 107 from pupils.

Information about the school

Friar's Grove Primary is larger than the average-sized primary school. Most pupils are of White British heritage. A small number of pupils are at an early stage of learning to speak English as an additional language. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is below average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The school meets the current floor standard. The school has gained a number of awards in recent years, including National Healthy School and International Schools Awards. The school offers breakfast and after-school clubs, which are managed by the governing body and are reported on as part of this inspection. At its last inspection, the school catered for pupils from Reception to Year 2. In September 2010, the infant school amalgamated with the adjacent junior school, following an extended period of unstable leadership in the junior school. The headteacher and deputy headteacher of the former infant school retained these roles in the new primary school.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

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

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school. However, it has many strengths, both embedded and emerging and, following the amalgamation, is improving at a rapid pace.
- Children achieve well in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Good progress is sustained through Years 1 and 2, with a clear trend of improvement in pupils' attainment. This is now above average. Progress in Years 3 to 6 had slowed in the years prior to amalgamation, but increasingly rapid progress is now evident across these year groups. The increased momentum of learning is beginning to have an impact upon consistently average attainment at the end of Year 6.
- Teaching is satisfactory overall. However, in the many good lessons, pupils are challenged effectively and learn quickly. Systematic development of quality teaching is ensuring increasingly good learning in Years 3 to 6. The school is working to resolve remaining issues around the quality of presentation and to ensure that marking shows pupils what they need to do to improve.
- Behaviour, safety and pupils' personal development are good. Pupils enjoy their learning and attend regularly. Provision for pupils' welfare and for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are well supported. The school is very inclusive and has well-established systems for managing pupils' behaviour.
- Leadership and management are good. The amalgamation of the two schools has been successfully managed. Systems are increasingly well embedded and staff are committed to sustaining the accelerating pace of pupils' learning and, in time, to raising their attainment. The school has good capacity to improve.
- Although the curriculum has strengths and supports the acquisition of basic skills increasingly well, there are few opportunities for older pupils to find more enjoyment in learning through having quality practical learning experiences.

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Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Sustain the accelerating progress of pupils' learning in Years 3 to 6 to ensure that the above average standards in Years 2 and 3 are reflected in a corresponding increase in standards by the end of Year 6, by:
 - ensuring that older pupils are consistently challenged by the level of work set
 - more informative marking of pupils' work to ensure improved outcomes
 - setting higher expectations for the quality and presentation of pupils' written work.

- Ensure that there are more planned opportunities for practical, creative experiences to promote learning and enjoyment in Years 3 to 6.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Parents and carers feel that their children make good progress in the school. They are largely correct although overall achievement is satisfactory. Children's attainment on entry to the Reception classes is slightly below average. However, children make consistently good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. This is because teaching is good and sometimes outstanding, assessment is thorough and the curriculum is appropriate and well-planned for all abilities, both indoors and in the outside area. This brisk pace of learning is effectively sustained in Years 1 and 2. Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2, now above average, has been rising steadily for several years. The proportion of pupils attaining the higher Level 3 is slightly above average.

Pupils are now entering Year 3 with higher levels of attainment than previously. However, pupils' progress in Years 3 to 6 had not shown a similar, positive trend of improvement in the years immediately prior to the amalgamation, so that attainment by the end of Year 6 was seldom better than broadly average. Senior leaders quickly identified the need to accelerate progress in Years 3 to 6, to ensure that the momentum of learning, now well established in Years 1 and 2, would be effectively sustained. Higher expectations, new progress targets and a more rigorous focus on learning are supporting better progress across these years, particularly in Years 3 and 4. There has not yet, however, been sufficient time for this to have a significant impact on attainment by the end of Year 6, so that standards there remain broadly average. Standards and progress in reading are, however, slightly above average.

While many lessons are briskly paced, there are occasions when the pace of learning

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is a little slow. Within ability groups for mathematics, for example, tasks are not always subdivided sufficiently or tailored to precisely match pupils' needs. However, where teachers have a consistent focus on raising attainment, as was evident, for example, in an unsetting Year 4 mathematics lesson, activities were subtly pitched to match and challenge the needs of different ability groups. Good provision to meet the needs of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs ensures that these pupils make mostly good progress. Pupils who speak English as an additional language receive effective initial support when they enter the school and make good progress in their learning in all year groups.

Quality of teaching

Much of the teaching seen during the inspection was good or better, a view shared by pupils, parents and carers. However, while teaching has a clear and demonstrable impact on the progress of the younger pupils, and upon the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all pupils, there is still work to do to ensure that the learning of the older pupils is more rapid and consistent.

There is much existing good practice. Teaching and learning are good, sometimes outstanding, in the Reception classes. This is because teachers move learning on rapidly, questioning children, suggesting new ideas and developing learning opportunities. Staff constantly assess pupils' awareness and understanding of letter sounds and prompt them to think about what they are learning. This establishes a brisk underlying pace to sessions and an enthusiastic commitment to learning which supports consistently good progress. In Year 2, for example, effective teaching of phonics (the linking of sounds and letters) was supported by a wide range of activities accurately matched to the needs of several groups and by a wide range of teaching strategies. In an outstanding Year 4 mathematics lesson, the rapid pace, lively style of presentation and highly customised activities for pupils, ensured that learning was also outstanding. Across the school, there has been good progress in implementing several assessment strategies, including self-assessment by pupils, which is now well embedded, and the use of detailed target cards. However, the marking of pupils' work only occasionally identifies the next steps they need to make in their learning. The pace of some lessons, particularly in Years 3 to 6, is sometimes rather slow. There are missed opportunities in some lessons to review learning and check pupils' understanding and to extend the challenge for more-able pupils. There is still work to do to raise expectations of the quality of pupils' written work. Overall, the curriculum is well developed, promoting increasingly good progress in pupils' core skills. However, teaching and learning in Years 3 to 6 remains rather 'desk-bound', with fewer opportunities for imaginative and engaging practical activities than for the younger pupils.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Most parents, carers and pupils recognise the positive relationships and high quality of care in the school. This is a happy, increasingly cohesive community. Close, positive relationships between adults and pupils, and the good range of extra-

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curricular activities and shared experiences engage and inspire pupils and support a growing community spirit. The breakfast and after-school clubs are well managed and provide a safe and caring environment for pupils who arrive in school early, or remain after the end of the school day. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is, for the vast majority of pupils, good. Pupils and most parents and carers have few concerns about behaviour in the school. Indeed, almost all pupils say that behaviour has improved and that they feel very safe. Almost all parents and carers feel that their children are safe in school. However, a small number of parents and carers have voiced concerns about the behaviour of individual pupils. The ethos of the school is very inclusive, providing, as required, for pupils with a wide range of needs, including a small number with significant behavioural difficulties. Prior to the amalgamation of the two schools, there had been few systematic interventions for the management of pupils' behaviour in Years 3 to 6. While school records indicate that isolated incidents have occurred over time, the school has, since the amalgamation, implemented effective systems for managing behaviour and, in consequence, episodes of inappropriate behaviour are now relatively rare. There are few recent reports of bullying of any type. Good procedures are in place to manage any issues that arise.

Leadership and management

School leaders are very effective in supporting the personal development and well-being of pupils and this is rightly recognised by parents and carers. Senior leaders and the governing body ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective, that the school is active in tackling discrimination and promoting equality. In the last four terms, senior leaders have been highly successful in surmounting the challenges arising from the amalgamation of two schools with shared interests, but very different cultures and organisational styles. Building upon their successful leadership of the infant school, they have prioritised the need to ensure that the consistently good progress evident up to the end of Year 2 is extended across the school so that the standards by the end of Year 6 begin to rise. They have an accurate view of the school's strengths, and of what still needs to be done. They have established a committed and capable leadership team, drawing upon staff from both constituent schools, so that there is a powerful impetus for change across the school. Senior leaders are very focused on the improvement of teaching and, particularly, on the effectiveness of pupils' learning and staff are increasingly held to account for the progress pupils make. Even now, it is clear that capacity for improvement is good. Provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage and that for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, and for inclusion issues generally, are well led and managed.

The governing body demonstrates a high level of commitment in its regular visits and the active support its members provide. They recognise that there is still work to be done to align the quality of provision and outcomes in all phases of the school, but know that this is well under way. The school, through its good extra-curricular programme and its commitment to the individual, is very effective in promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils now have satisfactory

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opportunities to develop awareness of other cultures. The curriculum is good in the support that it gives for enhancing pupils' basic skills and is a mostly effective framework within which to drive standards up. It has been imaginatively developed and, particularly in Years 1 and 2, offers a well-judged range of opportunities for pupils to learn through practical experiences. The culture of learning through 'hands-on' activities has been less evident in Years 3 to 6 and this continues to be a limitation upon learning and enjoyment in these years.

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.



23 January 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Friars Grove Primary School, Colchester, CO4 0PZ

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you, spending time in lessons and hearing your views. Thank you to those who completed our questionnaire. While we found that yours is a satisfactory school at this point, there is much about it that is good and, as a new primary school, it is making rapid progress. Our main findings are listed below.

- You get a good start in Reception and continue to make good progress in Years 1 and 2. Standards are now above average by the end of Year 2. Progress used to slow down a little from Year 3 on, but it is improving rapidly. You usually make the best progress in reading.
- Much of the teaching is good. You learn well in most lessons, but in others the pace is slower. The standard of your written work could sometimes be higher.
- You have good attitudes to learning, behave well and attend regularly.
- Staff care for you really well, but marking and guidance are not always detailed enough to ensure that you make consistently good progress. There is good provision for those of you who need additional help.
- Senior leaders are really helping the school to move forward. They are very focused on ensuring that your academic progress is good. The curriculum offers many interesting activities.

To help you to do better, we have asked the school to:

- build upon the good progress you make up to Year 2, so that standards rise at Year 6, by giving you really challenging activities, helping you improve the presentation of your written work and marking your work in a way that tells you how to improve
- ensure that you have more practical and enjoyable 'hands-on' activities to help make learning more exciting in Years 3 to 6.

All of you can help by continuing to work hard and doing your best. We hope that you will have every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

George Logan
Lead inspector

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