

John Ray Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114941
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	357653
Inspection dates	14–15 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Selwyn Ward

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	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	264
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Neil Macdonald
Headteacher	Sandra Way
Date of previous school inspection	28 April 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 20 lessons and observed 10 teachers. They spoke with staff, parents, representatives of the governing body and groups of pupils. Inspectors looked at samples of pupils' work, the analysis of the tracking of pupils' progress, school policies and procedures, school leaders' monitoring records, school improvement planning and risk assessments. They also analysed the questionnaires received from staff and 133 parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- How does the school provide for pupils' different needs in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 and help to bridge the gap between boys and girls?
- What has been the impact of leaders' initiatives to track pupils' progress, improve provision and raise attainment?

Information about the school

This is an average sized school. Most pupils are White British. Around 10% of pupils come from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds, and several of these pupils are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average. The principal need identified is for speech and language support. At the time of the inspection, some of the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage were attending full-time and some were only in school for part of the day. John Ray Infant School has an Activemark award and Healthy Schools status. The headteacher was appointed in September 2009.

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: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school. Pupils achieve well over their time at John Ray Infant School. From a below average starting point at the start of Reception Year, the pupils go on to attain average standards by the end of Year 2. However, they make faster progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage than in Key Stage 1, and attainment is weaker in writing than in reading and mathematics. Parents greatly appreciate what many describe as 'excellent home-school links'. As one explained, 'The school has a wonderful atmosphere. I attended a "stay and read" session for my daughter, and the classroom was calm but with a buzz of enthusiasm.' Parents like the way the headteacher and staff are approachable and responsive to suggestions. Many wrote to commend the quality of the arrangements for pupils' care and welfare which results in pupils developing an awareness of how to keep themselves healthy and safe that is unusually keen for their ages. Parents and children alike fully understand, appreciate and subscribe to the school's 'core values' of 'respect, fairness, caring, curiosity, honesty, responsibility'. These are proclaimed proudly in every classroom, and are evident in the good relationships throughout the school and pupils' consistently good behaviour. A parent also outlined their impact: 'There is a strong emphasis on social development at this school and it is recognised by the kindness and politeness of the majority of children. My once painfully shy little girl is blossoming into a much more confident child.'

The good curriculum is interesting and exciting for the pupils. There is a wide range of enrichment activities, including visits that make extensive use of facilities and attractions in the locality. Creative links are made between different subjects so that, for example, poetry and science were seamlessly woven into a Year 2 art lesson on designs based on the colour palette of autumn leaves. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. There are several good features about the teaching, particularly in the way teachers extend pupils' speaking and listening skills. Progress slows, however, when pupils of widely different abilities are all set similar work. This is especially the case in those subjects where pupils are routinely given worksheets to complete. For all lessons, teachers set out 'learning objectives' at the start. These are intended to show pupils what they should be learning but they sometimes lack focus or merely detail the task that the pupils are expected to complete. Too often, pupils are all given the same 'success criteria', which can mean a lack of challenge for the more able. The pace of learning slows on those occasions when children are not clear enough about what is expected of them. Assessment has been a key priority for the school over the past year, and leaders have succeeded in establishing a consistent approach to assessment and marking that ensures that pupils all benefit from good guidance on how they can improve.

The school is well run. School leaders and managers have a mostly accurate picture of the school, but they have an overly positive view of the effectiveness of the teaching in Key Stage 1 because their observations of lessons tend to look out for the good features of the

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teaching rather than homing in on the progress made in the lesson by all the pupils. Although leaders' observations have pinpointed where improvements could be made, these have not always been followed up in subsequent observations. Leaders and managers have introduced a range of initiatives to enhance the curriculum and to raise standards. Even though some are too recent to show through in terms of measurable impact, the school can already point to key successes. An initiative to encourage boys' writing, for example, has helped to narrow what was a previously wide gap between the attainment of girls and boys. Achievements such as this, and the establishment of a climate for learning where pupils are keen to work hard and do well, together show the school's good capacity for continued improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate pupils' progress in Key Stage 1 and raise attainment in writing by:
 - always setting work in lessons that is matched to pupils' different capabilities
 - ensuring that the objectives set out at the start of each lesson are sharply focused on what the pupils are expected to learn
 - setting success criteria that are appropriate to the pupils' different capabilities and encourage them to work at a good pace
 - reducing the use of worksheets in science, religious education, history and geography, so that pupils have more opportunities to use and apply in other subjects what they learn in literacy.
- Increase the effectiveness of monitoring arrangements by:
 - focusing lesson observations on the progress pupils are making rather than on the features of teaching
 - following up in subsequent observations the points for development identified by school leaders when they visit lessons and examine pupils' books.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Children join the Reception Year with attainment that is below that expected for their ages. They make good progress over their time at John Ray Infant School, and they attain average standards by the end of Year 2. However, in the books in which pupils complete their science, religious education, history and geography, all of the work so far this year is in the form of worksheets that do not vary sufficiently to cater for pupils' different capabilities. For more able pupils, this limits opportunities to further extend writing skills. For lower attaining pupils, including some of those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, this untailed work can make it a struggle to complete activities. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress overall, but this masks quite wide variation. For some, the progress is rapid but for others, particularly those pupils who join the school with very low attainment, support measures and interventions across the school have less impact. A disappointed parent complained, 'My child is in need of one-on-one help as she is falling behind', but other parents praise the extra support their children have been given. Pupils learning English as an additional language make good progress. Again, parents endorse this picture. One wrote: 'I am

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extremely pleased about the support and teaching given to my son who is learning English as an additional language.'

In keeping with some of John Ray Infant School's 'core values', pupils treat each other with respect, so that the school functions as a friendly, harmonious community. A parent commented on how her child 'regularly speaks to us at home about responsibility and kindness'. Pupils enjoy taking responsibility within the school, including as school councillors, and they show their caring attitude in their support for charity events. Pupils work together collaboratively and their above average attendance, prepares them well for the next stage of their education. The pupils demonstrate an understanding of how to keep themselves healthy and safe that is impressive for their ages. When planning a school trip, for example, the pupils themselves raise the issues they need to consider in order to minimise any risk of mishap.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Teachers' questioning helps pupils to develop in confidence and to improve their speaking and listening skills. Pupils are encouraged, for example, to discuss ideas with a partner and report back to the class on what their partner has suggested. Teachers know the pupils well and the feedback that they give them through marking has given pupils a clear picture of how they can improve their work. Increasingly, teachers involve pupils in assessing their own and each other's work, although the scope for this is limited when

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'learning objectives' lack precision or when pupils are not given clear success criteria against which they can measure their progress. Pupils are eager to learn because the school provides a stimulating environment. The many visits and other enrichment activities extend this beyond the school gate, and it is a feature of this school that pupils see school as just the starting point for their learning within a wider world in which they take a growing interest. There is a strong partnership with other schools, especially the neighbouring junior school to which pupils transfer. Joint working across the two schools has helped teachers to sharpen the accuracy of their end of key stage assessments. It has also led to very well established arrangements to prepare pupils for their transition to Key Stage 2. Other welfare arrangements are equally strong. Pupils in vulnerable circumstances are well supported. Systems to chase up absences and promote good attendance have proven successful in maintaining attendance rates that are above the average for all primary schools and markedly higher than most infant schools.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher, leadership team, staff and the governing body have a shared commitment to pupils' welfare and development that is aptly summed up in the school's 'core values'. These permeate everything that the school does. Parents, with whom the school works in very close partnership, greatly appreciate this. There have been some notable improvements since the last inspection, including to the systems for keeping track of pupils' progress and ensuring the accuracy of teachers' assessments. Initiatives to better engage the interest of boys have proven successful and have enabled the school to narrow the previously wide gender gap in performance. This, and the way in which pupils from different backgrounds mix and get on so well together, illustrates leaders' impact in promoting equal opportunities well. Although leaders regularly monitor provision, the follow-up from their observations has not always been rigorous enough. A recent focus by leaders on challenge for the more able, for example, correctly identified that work was not always matched to pupils' abilities, but the lack of individual follow-up has meant that this shortcoming remains.

The governing body is supportive but also routinely challenges school leaders over standards and progress. It has been assiduous in ensuring that all regulatory requirements have been met. The school's community cohesion audit, for example, is comprehensive. It accurately identifies the strength of the school's contribution to cohesion within the locality and in its partnership with the neighbouring junior school, but it also shows the work done within the school to broaden pupils' horizons of the wider world. Safeguarding procedures are thorough, with the governing body taking the lead in carrying out regular checks. As

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with the 'core values', this also permeates the school, to the extent that pupils have an impressive awareness of safety considerations.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

'My son has only been going to school for four weeks but he is very happy to go every day and is learning and picking up new things and ideas all the time.' This comment from a very satisfied parent summed up the views of the many who wrote to praise provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Both full-time and part-time children settle quickly into the Reception classes because of early established partnerships with parents, including 'stay and play' sessions where parents and carers are invited to come into the classroom and play alongside their children. Staff take care to accurately assess each child's starting point. This enables teachers to put in place structured activities matched to children's individual learning and welfare needs. These help the children to make good progress, especially in their social development, language and number skills. Information and communication technology is used well, including as an option that children can choose to work on by themselves. Children enjoy using the low-mounted interactive whiteboards, computer workstations and a range of digital devices, such as speech recorders. Their language development is boosted through regular shared phonics sessions and group reading, and the children's early writing skills are encouraged through opportunities for mark making, including in the role play areas.

In this well-run provision, there is good coordination across the three classes. For example, once the children have settled in, staff rotate between the classes so that they can corroborate each other's judgements about children's progress. Staff act as good role models and children respond positively to this, demonstrating a sense of responsibility for their behaviour and caring for others. Healthy practices are actively promoted, including

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healthy eating, with fruit snack provision offering simple first challenges, such as a responsibility for peeling fruit for themselves and identifying daily what fruits they have eaten. The outdoor curriculum is well-developed, with a shared area that provides opportunities for children to learn through play and to take part in physical activities such as riding cycles and other wheeled toys. For children with additional learning needs, regular intervention sessions with trained support staff help to further develop fine and gross motor skills.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	2
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

More than half the parents and carers returned questionnaires. They express very positive views on almost every aspect of the school. Many wrote to praise the high quality information they receive from the school to help them support their child's learning at home. Inspectors agree that parents are kept well informed, although some parents say they would welcome more frequent updates on their child's progress.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at John Ray Infant School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 133 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 264 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	97	73	36	27	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	92	69	41	31	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	66	50	58	44	8	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	61	46	66	50	4	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	75	56	56	42	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	74	56	55	41	2	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	70	53	61	46	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	63	47	61	46	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	62	47	66	50	1	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	52	39	68	51	4	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	52	39	75	56	2	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	70	53	59	44	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	84	63	47	35	1	1	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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 October 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of John Ray Infant School, Braintree, CM7 1HL

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful when we came to visit your school. You go to a good school. We were pleased to see how well you all try to live up to the school's 'core values'. You behave well and you all get on well together. That helps to make your school such a happy place to be. We were especially impressed by how much you know about how to keep healthy and safe. Staff take good care of you and all the trips and other activities make learning interesting and fun.

You make good progress over your time at John Ray Infant, but progress is faster in the Reception Year than in Key Stage 1. Many of you are better at reading and mathematics than writing. We have therefore suggested some ways of helping you to make faster progress in lessons and to improve your writing. We have asked teachers to make sure that they always give you work to do that is neither too easy nor too hard. In those lessons where you are all given similar work to do, such as when you have worksheets to complete, you do not all make as much progress as you could. We have also suggested more opportunities for you to use the skills you have learnt in literacy to help you write more in other subjects. We were pleased to see you telling teachers at the end of lessons whether or not you think you have met the learning objectives. We have asked teachers to always be sure to check that the objectives help you to think about how well you are learning. We have also asked them to make sure that the success criteria that they give you are the right ones to push you all to do as much as you can in lessons. You can help your teachers by telling them when you find your work too easy or too hard.

Your school is well run and we could see that there have been some important recent improvements. We were impressed by how closely the school works with your parents and carers. We have made suggestions to help all the staff to make the school even better. When they visit each other's lessons, we want staff to look particularly at the progress you are all making. We have also asked that, when they spot things that could be better, they check later that improvements have been made.

Thank you again for helping us on our visit, and our very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Selwyn Ward

Lead inspector

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