

Stifford Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	114885
Local authority	Thurrock
Inspection number	378947
Inspection dates	24–25 April 2012
Lead inspector	Michael Bartleman

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	670
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Den Goodyear
Headteacher	Mark Jones
Date of previous school inspection	17 November 2008
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Michael Bartleman	Additional Inspector
Janev Mehmet-Christofides	Additional Inspector
Victoria Turner	Additional Inspector
Justina Illochi	Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 35 lessons for a total of 18 hours, observing 27 different teachers. They held meetings with members of the governing body, parents and carers, staff and groups of pupils. 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 data on pupils' attainment and progress, procedures for keeping pupils safe and the school's self-evaluation. They analysed questionnaires from 168 parents and carers, as well as those completed by staff and a sample of pupils.

Information about the school

In this larger than average-sized primary school the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. Most pupils are of a White British heritage with other pupils coming from a range of ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs (supported by school action plus or a statement of needs) is also above average. The number of pupils who join and leave the school mid-way through the school year is increasing. The school meets the current floor standard, which sets the government's minimum expectations for attainment and progress. The school has received a number of awards, including Artsmark, Healthy Schools status and Investors in Families.

A new Early Years Foundation Stage unit was opened in September 2011 consisting of four Reception classes adjacent to the Children's Centre where the school's Nursery class is located. There is a before-school club managed by the governing body. A privately run pre-school and Children's Centre are on site but are subject to separate inspection arrangements.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. It has improved since the last inspection. Attainment has risen, pupils' progress has accelerated and their behaviour has improved. It is not outstanding because a few pupils do not make good year-on-year progress in writing and not enough teaching is outstanding. Parents and carers are supportive of the school; many wrote comments referring to the school's welcoming atmosphere.
- All groups of pupils achieve well in this inclusive school. Most children enter the school with skills that are low, particularly in communication, literacy and language. Pupils make good progress as they move through the school and attainment is broadly average by the end of Year 6, although reading and mathematics are stronger than writing.
- Pupils respond well to the good teaching they receive. Teachers know their pupils well and have good relationships with them. Teachers' clear explanations, good subject knowledge and use of interesting resources all contribute to the good progress that pupils make. The pace of learning is slower in lessons where activities are not precisely matched to pupils' needs.
- Behaviour and safety are good. Pupils and their parents and carers say that the school is a safe and friendly place. Most pupils behave well, and are sensitive to each other's different cultures and opinions. Attendance has improved through the school's concerted actions, and is average.
- The headteacher, ably supported by the deputy headteacher, provides determined leadership. He has a clear vision for school development, which is based upon accurate school self-evaluation and is shared by members of the governing body and all staff. The effective management of teaching and learning, the constant focus on staff training and regular checks on school performance have led to improvements in pupils' achievement. The curriculum successfully meets the needs of all pupils.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By July 2013, improve pupils' year-on-year achievement in writing to match that reached in reading and mathematics by:
 - ensuring teachers 'model' writing at every opportunity
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to write at length in all areas of the curriculum.

- By July 2013, raise the proportion of outstanding teaching by:
 - precisely matching activities to pupils' next steps in learning
 - ensuring that there is an effective balance between teacher-talk and pupils' independent activities
 - ensuring marking in all subjects provides pupils with clear guidance on how to improve their work and opportunities to respond and learn from their mistakes
 - giving more opportunities for pupils to be involved in, and to reflect on, their learning.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Most pupils achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics. Caring relationships ensure that children settle quickly into the Early Years Foundation Stage and feel safe. Children's social skills, attitudes to learning, and speaking skills develop rapidly within the vibrant learning environment.

Work in books and assessment evidence shows that all groups of pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 are making good progress. By the end of Year 6, the proportion of pupils attaining or exceeding the expected level in English and in mathematics is broadly average, and increasing steadily, which represents good progress from their starting points. This is because teachers' planning is detailed, meets the needs of all groups of pupils and maximises learning opportunities. This was evident in an English lesson, where pupils were able to work in pairs to develop autobiographical writing after watching a video clip. Pupils were engrossed in the activities, which allowed the class teacher to extend learning effectively for the more able pupils. In a few lessons, pace of learning slows because pupils are not so actively involved. This occurs when teachers talk for too long and so pupils do not move rapidly enough to independent tasks.

Pupils' attainment in reading is average at the end of Year 2 and Year 6, with increasing numbers attaining the higher levels. The impact of the rigorous phonics programme (linking sounds and letters) and the school's focus on reading is evident in pupils' rising attainment and enjoyment of reading across the school.

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In lessons, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, as well as those at an early stage of learning English, are supported well by highly skilled teaching assistants. They learn well and make similar progress to other groups of pupils. The emphasis on developing speaking and listening skills and appropriate vocabulary helps individual pupils overcome specific academic and emotional barriers to their learning. Consequently, this helps to minimise and close any gaps between what these pupils are achieving and what is expected of them nationally.

Quality of teaching

The inspection findings of good teaching match the school's own assessments, the positive views of parents and carers and those of pupils. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, there is a good balance of child-initiated and adult-supported tasks, and effective use of both the indoor and outdoor environments. The greatly improved provision is having a highly positive impact on pupils' progress and attainment. The topic approach engages children well, as was seen when children were making telescopes and hunting treasure as part of their pirate topic. The good intervention by adults (when they question or suggest things while children explore through play) takes learning forward extremely well.

Teachers capture pupils' interest quickly with well-resourced and lively introductions, which develop curiosity and make learning fun. The teaching of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is good. Teachers and teaching assistants question pupils effectively, making sure that all are involved and deepening their understanding. This was seen in an outstanding Year 1 lesson, where the teacher introduced parts of the body. Pupils learnt a vast amount rapidly because of the clarity of the activities, effective discussions with partners and excellent questioning. Teachers know pupils and their capabilities, but do not always set tasks which are fine-tuned to match their learning needs exactly. Reading is taught effectively, and teachers have a good understanding of the teaching of phonics. Although the development of writing skills has improved teachers do not routinely 'model' writing and sometimes miss opportunities for pupils to write at a greater length.

In the increasing number of outstanding lessons teachers ensure that pupils know what they are going to learn and have opportunities to review their success. Work is marked regularly and, together with oral feedback, this helps pupils to understand the quality of their work and what they have to do next to improve. However this practice is not consistent across the school. The planned curriculum enables teachers to make meaningful links between subjects. Pupils are encouraged to work together and to respect one another's views, which effectively promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils believe that behaviour and safety are good. In lessons and around the school,

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behaviour is at least good and sometimes outstanding. Clear guidelines and effective use of rewards help to ensure that pupils know what is acceptable. The school is a harmonious community where pupils make a good contribution through the school council, acting as playground buddies and mentors for those new to the school or who are at an early stage of learning English. Pupils are confident that staff will sort any issue out because they are well cared for. Most parents and carers believe that behaviour is good and that their children are kept safe. A small minority of parents and carers raised concerns about behaviour and bullying. Inspectors found that most pupils behave well. School records support the view that behaviour over time is good and there are effective systems to help pupils who find it difficult to behave well. Pupils say that any cases of bullying are dealt with promptly and effectively. They are aware that bullying can exist in a variety of forms including cyber-bullying and prejudice-based bullying related to sex, gender, race and disability.

Pupils who attend the well-run breakfast club are helped to make a good start to their day. Pupils' positive attitudes to learning and enjoyment of the things they study are demonstrated in the sustained improvement in attendance, which is now average and continuing to rise. Strong links with external agencies, together with staff who know their pupils well and an ethos of care, help to ensure that pupils whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable receive the support they need. Transition arrangements for pupils leaving and joining the school are successfully developed. The school has made effective links with the Children's Centre, which is located on the school site, and other local providers.

Leadership and management

High expectations of leaders at all levels have ensured a clear and successful focus on improving pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching. Improvement has been brought about through well-targeted professional development for all staff as the result of rigorous monitoring of pupils' progress and the effectiveness of provision. Issues identified have been tackled successfully, demonstrating the school's good capacity to improve further. Good leadership in the Early Years Foundation Stage means that this section of the school is particularly effective and children quickly develop the skills and attitudes they need to thrive as learners.

Staff are confident in sharing good practice, supporting each other and drawing on external expertise. Judicious management of staff performance has led to collaborative working with local schools. This has increased expertise among staff, for instance in checking and moderating pupils' work so that assessments are robust. The school promotes equality convincingly and tackles any discrimination. The provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs including those at an early stage of learning English, and other pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable, is effective and knowledgeably managed by the special educational needs coordinator. The high number of pupils who join the school at times other than the start of terms are quickly assessed and supported so that they make good progress and are fully integrated into the life of the school.

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Individual governors are regular visitors, know the school well and are able to effectively challenge leaders. The governing body ensures that pupils are safeguarded; these procedures are robust and meet the current government requirements.

The school has a range of effective partnerships to provide opportunities in music, arts and sport as well as additional support for pupils who are gifted and talented. The broad and interesting curriculum focused on books is continuing to develop. Specialist teaching in music and Spanish greatly benefit the pupils. Regular themed days often celebrating the school's diverse cultures are thoroughly enjoyed by the pupils and effectively focus learning. Well-planned enrichment activities and a wide range of extra-curricular clubs, including residential visits and visitors, help to develop pupils' understanding of other faiths and cultures and have a good impact on their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	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 to 31 December 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.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
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.



26 April 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Stifford Primary School, Grays, RM17 5YN.

Thank you for making us so welcome when we inspected your school. We enjoyed meeting you, reading your questionnaires and hearing what you had to say about your school. We were pleased to hear about how you enjoy everything the school has to offer you. We were impressed with how polite and friendly you are and how you are learning Spanish.

You go to a good school. There are many good things about your school, such as the welcoming atmosphere, your enjoyment of reading and the good progress you make across the school. Your attendance has improved and is now average.

Your teachers look after you well and try to make your lessons fun using video clips and 'partner talk'. You told us that you look forward to coming to school because you like your teachers, the after-school clubs and visits.

To make sure that all of you make even better progress, we have asked your headteacher and other school leaders to do the following things.

- We want them to make your progress in writing as good as your progress in reading and mathematics. We would like to see you learning from the way your teachers write, and doing longer pieces of writing in other subjects, not just literacy.
- We have asked teachers to keep you interested by making sure you start work quickly and do not listen too long, and by giving you work that is exactly right for your ability or need. We want marking always to give you clear guidance on how to improve, and we want you to have a chance to reflect on how well you have done.

You can help by continuing to behave well and trying hard in your lessons.

Yours sincerely

Michael Bartleman
Lead inspector

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