

Marks Gate Junior School

Rose Lane, Romford, Essex, RM6 5NJ

Inspection dates 7–8 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Although teaching is improving rapidly, there is more to do before achievement can be consistently good.
- Lessons do not always maintain a lively pace, provide all pupils with work at the right level or help them develop greater independence.
- Levels of progress in writing and mathematics, though improving, lag behind those achieved in reading, especially for White British pupils.
- The way that leaders and managers track the progress of different groups of pupils across the school is not sufficiently precise.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders and managers, including governors, have been successful in eradicating poor teaching, raising achievement and improving attendance.
- Leaders and managers have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Adults work hard to create a positive climate for learning so that pupils are motivated and eager to learn.
- Pupils' behaviour is good overall, and sometimes outstanding. Pupils say with confidence that they feel safe in school.
- Pupils who join the school other than at expected times receive focused help that enables them to swiftly catch up with their peers, particularly in their basic skills.

Information about this inspection

- Twenty three lessons or parts of lessons were observed over the two days. All 13 classroom teachers present were observed teaching. Almost all were observed at least twice. Inspectors undertook two joint lesson observations with the headteacher.
- Discussions were held with senior leaders, staff, members of the governing body and different groups of pupils.
- Inspectors heard individual pupils read and discussed with them their reading preferences and individual reading records.
- Inspectors sampled pupils' work, scrutinised the school's tracking records of pupils' progress and took account of the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans.
- The lead inspector held a discussion with a member of the local authority's advisory staff.
- The views of parents and carers were sought at the start of the day and the three responses to Parent View were examined.
- The views of staff were sought through a questionnaire. In total, 23 questionnaires were scrutinised.

Inspection team

Gordon Ewing, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Janice Thomas

Additional inspector

Gill Walley

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger than average-sized primary school.
- Nearly a half of pupils are from a White British heritage. Other pupils are from a variety of other ethnic heritages, including Black African.
- A well above average proportion of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in local authority care and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action is well above average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average.
- The proportion of pupils who join or leave the school, other than at expected times, is above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school hosts a breakfast club managed by the governing body. In addition, some after-school clubs are provided by external organisations. These are not managed by the governing body and were not part of this inspection.
- An executive headteacher, with overall responsibility for both the junior and infant schools, was appointed at Easter this year and remains the headteacher of the infant school on a day-to-day basis.
- The governors of Marks Gate Infant and Junior schools are currently consulting with parents and carers regarding the formation of a hard federation involving the two schools.
- The school does not use alternative provision.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and improve rates of progress, particularly in writing and mathematics, through making teaching consistently good or better, especially by ensuring that:
 - lesson activities are well tuned to pupils' different needs, as indicated through regular assessment, so that they tackle tasks that are not too easy or too complex for them
 - teachers understand how to set a good pace throughout each lesson by using an appropriate amount of teacher talk, careful questioning and using activities that provide a balance between sharing ideas with each other and opportunities for pupils to tackle tasks independently
 - the existing good practice in teachers' marking and guidance on how to improve pupils' work is shared across the staff, so that pupils are less reliant on adults in managing their learning
 - teachers provide pupils with more opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills across the curriculum to extended writing activities
 - teachers provide pupils with a wide range of opportunities to apply their calculation skills in a wide range of contexts across other subjects, such as science, and through investigational activities.
- Improve the methods and impact of tracking pupils' progress with a particular emphasis on writing and mathematics, so that no pupil is left behind, by:
 - closely monitoring the progress of different groups of pupils in order that underachievement is swiftly identified and intervention is triggered to close the gap

- using the half-termly pupil progress meetings to more astutely hold teachers to account for the progress of different groups, especially those of White British heritage.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement has improved over time, and particularly so more recently. Progress is consistently good in reading throughout the school because teachers have a good understanding of the teaching of phonics (linking letters and sounds). As a result attainment in reading, by the end of Year 6, is above average.
- Progress in writing and mathematics lacks consistency across the school because the quality of teaching, though improving rapidly, is still variable. Furthermore, methods to track the progress of pupils, especially key groups, are not yet astute enough to swiftly identify underachievement in writing and mathematics.
- Attainment in writing, by the end of Year 6, is broadly average. It is now rising as weaknesses in teaching are being addressed. That said, there is still more to do in providing younger pupils with more opportunities to write at length.
- Attainment in mathematics, by the end of Year 6, is also broadly average. Prior to 2012, attainment in mathematics was falling year on year. Through robust action, including the introduction of a new calculation policy, the legacy of underachievement in mathematics is now being addressed successfully and robustly.
- The proportion of pupils making the expected progress is improving rapidly and is now broadly average overall. The progress of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs follows the same pattern, as does the progress of pupils who join or leave the school other than at expected times. This is also the case for those who are entitled to funding through the pupil premium. However, the progress of pupils from a White British heritage is less consistent than that made by pupils from other backgrounds.
- Pupil premium funding has been well used to increase attendance through the support of the parent support adviser and to provide small-group tuition in English and mathematics. As a result, pupils' attendance has risen significantly and they are now attaining at levels above those found nationally in English and mathematics.
- A key factor in securing better progress has been the leadership's drive to improve teaching through coaching and in tracking pupils' progress each half term. Teachers, themselves, report that their practice has improved significantly, as a result.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Weaknesses in teaching are being eliminated as teachers are more rigorously being held to account for pupils' progress. However, too many lessons still have aspects that require improvement for teaching to be good overall.
- Most teachers have high expectations, good subject knowledge and make the purpose of the lesson clear. Consequently, pupils are motivated and keen to learn. In some lessons, however, teachers talk for too long and the pace of learning drops because pupils are not able to spend enough time on tackling the task.
- New approaches to teaching, through focused training and coaching, are paying dividends. As a result, in many lessons, teachers successfully plan activities that are set at the right level for pupils to be challenged but not overstretched. However, this is not always the case and some activities in some lessons are not well suited to pupils' ability. As a result, their learning is held back, they lose focus and their behaviour becomes more variable.
- These new approaches are being used effectively in developing pupils' writing skills through paired talking, where pupils share ideas, develop collaborative skills and clarify their learning. That said, sometimes this absorbs significant portions of the lesson. As a result, opportunities are sometimes missed for pupils to concentrate on tackling an extended task independently for a longer period of time.

- The teaching of mathematics is improving, particularly through the consistent application of the new calculation policy. Consequently, pupils' skill in solving problems mentally in mathematics is a key strength. However, opportunities to apply their numeracy and calculation skills across different subjects are less well developed.
- Teachers use resources well in order to stimulate pupils' thinking and to accelerate learning. This was the case in an outstanding Year 5 literacy lesson where pupils were exploring the use of metaphors. The teacher ably set the scene around the story of 'The Highwayman' and pupils were on the edge of their seats as they used the imagery to create new metaphors such as, 'The moon was a ghostly figure upon the terrifying hand-shaped tree.' The pace of the lesson was demanding but pupils rose to the challenge as their specific tasks were set at the right level. Consequently, no pupil was left behind.
- Most teachers make good use of the able team of teaching assistants. In the best lessons, teaching assistants take an active part in the activities and ensure that particular pupils are fully engaged and have work that is adapted to their needs. On these occasions, tasks are adjusted in the lesson to ensure these pupils make the most progress possible.
- There are good examples of teachers' marking and guidance, particularly for older pupils. The best marking seen celebrates pupils' learning and sets new challenges for the next lesson. This is not consistently the case throughout the school and, on too many occasions, pupils do not understand how to move their learning forward. This reduces opportunities to help pupils become less reliant on the teacher and thus, more independent.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in their good behaviour and improving attendance. One pupil said, 'It's a big, joyful school. I love it.' The school has been strident in improving attendance so that is now above average. The parent support adviser has played an important part in making the school more welcoming to those who are new and those families who find working with the school difficult.
- The very few parents and carers who expressed a view said that behaviour was not a cause for concern.
- Pupils typically show high levels of respect for each other and are polite and courteous. Occasionally, especially when tasks are too easy or not well explained, some pupils lose concentration and their learning falters.
- Pupils work well together. Such positive attitudes have been further strengthened by new teaching approaches that encourage pupils to work collaboratively.
- Relationships are good. Pupils from a wide range of backgrounds play and work together and bullying is uncommon. They have a good understanding of most types of bullying and pupils confidently report that they feel safe at school.
- Exclusions are a little higher than average but decreasing. That said, this involves a very small number of pupils and the school is very successful in reintegrating these pupils into school. Consequently, they quickly catch up on their learning and continue to attend regularly.
- Pupils who attend the breakfast club enjoy and participate in a range of activities that help them to get off to a good start each day and develop good attitudes to learning.

The leadership and management are good

- The seamless partnership of the senior leadership team has been very successful in addressing weaknesses. This is particularly the case with eradicating poor teaching and in holding teachers more rigorously to account for the progress of pupils. The executive headteacher has built on and sharpened existing good practice so that the school is set on a clear path to improve further.

- Leaders and managers at all levels, including governors, know the school's strengths and weaknesses and improvement planning is realistic and well judged.
 - Higher expectations are improving teaching. As a result, achievement in reading is good and improving in writing and mathematics. The introduction of a new calculation policy has had a significant impact in improving attainment in mathematics. This is evident in pupils' good mental agility in solving number problems.
 - The local authority's support has been notable in raising the quality of teaching. This is particularly the case through the provision of effective training in coaching and in developing writing through classroom talk activities. Improvements in teaching, for example, through peer coaching, are being sustained over time. Consequently, staff commitment and morale are high. The use of annual performance targets for each teacher is bearing fruit in improving pupils' achievement over time.
 - The introduction of half-termly meetings with each teacher to focus on individual pupils' progress is now paying dividends. However, there is more to do in precisely tracking the progress of different groups of pupils, for example, those of White British heritage.
 - The school is effective in ensuring staff and pupils are safe. It ensures that discrimination is not tolerated and equal opportunities are provided for all. For example, pupils supported by the pupil premium receive good intervention activities, small-group teaching and the help of the parent support adviser. As a result, these pupils attain at levels that are higher than those found nationally and their self-esteem and attendance are strengthened.
 - The curriculum is currently under review, following initial steps to introduce the International Primary Curriculum. The school leaders have identified the need to ensure that more opportunities are provided for pupils to develop and enhance their literacy and numeracy skills in their learning in different subjects. That said, in its current form, the curriculum is appropriately matched to meet the needs of most pupils and provides a sound range of experiences that contribute well to pupils' achievement. It promotes effectively positive behaviour as well as pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
 - The school works effectively with parents and carers to improve attendance and raise pupils' achievement. For example, parents and carers value the workshops run in school to help them support their children's learning in reading and writing.
- **The governance of the school:**
- is good. Governors are well informed and take an active role in improving the school. They regularly attend training, visit lessons and challenge the school's leadership in order to improve teaching and pupils' achievement. They have a good understanding of performance management and have played a key role in eliminating inadequate teaching and ensuring that decisions regarding salary progression and promotion are rigorous and consistent. They closely check the school budget and ensure that additional funding for specific pupils is used to best effect. Governors are effective in ensuring that safeguarding practices and procedures, including staff recruitment, meet national requirements.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	101224
Local authority	Barking and Dagenham
Inspection number	404752

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	316
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Roger Gaylor
Headteacher	Wendy Heffernan
Date of previous school inspection	9–10 June 2011
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