

John Ray Junior School

Notley Road, Braintree, CM7 1HL

Inspection dates

23–24 January 2013

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher provides the school with a very clear direction. She has put together a strong staff team who share her aim of improving the way pupils are taught and making sure that all pupils are included in every aspect of school life.
- Senior leaders regularly check how well teachers and pupils are doing in order to identify what can be done to improve their performance and that of the school.
- By senior leaders working continually to improve teaching, pupils now make good progress and their attainment is rising.
- The school works closely with the infant school to provide a seamless experience for the pupils. This also means that staff can identify where pupils need extra help so that support can be provided as quickly as possible.
- Pupils are proud of the school and their contribution to its improvement. Their good behaviour helps to make it a happy place in which all can thrive.
- Pupils enjoy school as shown by their very regular attendance. Staff and governors have their welfare and safety as the highest priority.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all teaching is of a high quality and, in a small number of lessons, teachers do not use methods and activities to move the learning of all pupils forward, particularly when teaching the whole class.
- Teachers do not always give pupils time to respond to the written comments in their marking or refer them back to their targets.
- Teachers do not always provide suitable activities to develop some reading skills such as comprehension.
- Pupils have too few opportunities to apply their mathematical skills in other subjects.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 23 lessons or parts of lessons, of which three were joint observations with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils, school staff, members of the governing body, including the Chair, and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 57 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and held informal discussions with parents and carers at the start of the school day.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including the school's own data on the pupils' current progress, planning and monitoring documentation, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Martin Beale, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Mark Jones	Additional Inspector
Sandra Teacher	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is above average in size.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils speaking English as an additional language is below average and rising, but few are at an early stage of learning English.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for funding through the pupil premium is average. This is extra money given to schools for looked after children, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children of service families.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is average. The proportion of pupils supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The school does not use alternative provision for its pupils.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching in order to accelerate the pupils' progress by:
 - making sure that teaching to the whole class, particularly in phonics sessions (letters and the sounds they make) and lessons to develop basic skills in mathematics, is pitched at the next steps in learning for all pupils
 - making sure that activities to develop wider reading skills are interesting and sharply focused on the next steps in each pupil's learning
 - planning and providing regular opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills across different subjects.
- Increase the impact of marking on the pupils' learning by:
 - referring pupils to their personal targets in lessons and in their written comments so that they remain a focus for them to aim for
 - ensuring that teachers provide time for pupils to respond to the written comments in their marking and check that they have done so.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Pupils make good and improving progress. Attainment by the end of Year 6 is average and rising in both English and mathematics. Year 6 test results have followed an upward trend over the last five years and were broadly average in 2012.
- Pupils find writing more interesting since it has become more closely linked to their topic work. This has helped to engage boys more, particularly when they can see examples of high-quality writing by teachers to which they can aspire and by talking through what they want to write with others. Year 6 pupils greatly enjoyed the performance of *Macbeth* by a visiting theatre company during their Shakespeare topic. This led to some very creative writing about the characters and then to writing letters to Juliet while studying *Romeo and Juliet*.
- Sessions in phonics (letters and the sounds they make) in Year 3 are securing basic reading skills more effectively. Regular reading at home for all pupils reinforces these skills and exposes pupils to a wide range of authors. Pupils develop skills of comprehension and inference rapidly when working through texts with their teachers. However, activities to develop these skills independently do not always hold their attention or move their learning forward sufficiently.
- The introduction this year of a weekly basic skills lesson in mathematics is giving pupils greater confidence and a wider range of methods to fall back on when calculating. Homework tasks identify what gaps need to be filled during these sessions, although not all teachers use this information to make sure that pupils are learning new skills. Pupils apply their skills to solving problems regularly in mathematics lessons but infrequently in other subjects.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress through the strong relationships they develop with staff supporting their learning. Their independence is encouraged well, such as when pupils with a statement put on a Christmas party for their support staff and teachers having planned the event and bought and prepared the food.
- Pupils attracting additional funding through the pupil premium also make good progress. The gap between their attainment, based on average point scores, and pupils nationally by the time they leave Year 6 closed last year in all areas except for writing. With more of this funding now spent on individual tuition and resources, this gap is starting to close.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Much action has been taken to improve teaching and tackle areas of weakness identified at the last inspection. This has led to an increase in the proportion of good and better teaching, along with acceleration in the rate of pupils' progress. Qualities such as perseverance and resilience are promoted at every opportunity so that pupils become more confident when tackling problems by themselves.
- Enthusiastic teaching, making lessons interesting through a variety of activities, plenty of discussion between pupils, and teachers making clear their high expectations are common features of the best lessons. Teachers question with skill to develop and extend the pupils' learning while encouraging them to keep going when they find work hard. Demanding work is set for all pupils, with more able pupils challenged to think deeply such as when Year 6 pupils solved complex, multi-step problems involving ratios, percentages and fractions.

- As senior leaders have identified, there is still a small amount of teaching that requires improvement. On occasion, in phonics and basic skills sessions in mathematics, too much time is spent on whole-class teaching when there are pupils for whom this is not relevant. This can either be because the work is beyond the next steps in their learning or has already been fully understood.
- Action has been taken to improve teachers' marking and the way it supports pupils' learning, but some inconsistencies remain. Written comments by teachers suggest how work can be improved but their impact is lost because pupils are not always given time to respond. Pupils understand what they do well and the individual targets they are aiming towards, but these targets are not regularly referred to in lessons, or in marking and other feedback, so they are not kept in the forefront of the pupils' minds.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils are very polite and respectful of each other and adults. Pupils understand how they can take responsibility for their own behaviour. The school makes its expectations for the pupils' behaviour and attendance clear and, through termly mentoring sessions, helps pupils to identify what they can do to meet these expectations. As a result, their behaviour at times in lessons and around the school is exemplary and attendance is well above average.
- Pupils are keen to do well and have very positive attitudes towards learning. They support each other well in class and enjoy sharing their ideas in discussion, giving lessons a sense of purpose. Pupils mostly concentrate for long periods on their work, although their attention wanders at times when tasks are not interesting.
- Parents and carers agree with their children that they are safe and well looked after in school. Pupils understand different forms of bullying but say that incidents are very rare. They express great confidence in the headteacher and staff to deal with such matters swiftly. They can also cite the rapid response to a few occurrences of racist name-calling.
- Pupils have been asked where in school problems might occur, such as on the playground, enabling leaders to take action to minimise problems. Year 6 playground leaders help to make lunchtime a happy time, even helping younger pupils in classrooms during inclement weather.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher is highly ambitious for the school and makes sure that everyone understands what she expects from them. The strong senior team have a clear vision as to how to move their areas of responsibility forward and are taking all staff with them. Rigorous checking of the school's performance, well-planned actions and the record of improvement mean the school is well placed to meet its objectives.
- Teaching is continually under the spotlight. By carefully checking each teacher's performance and providing individual training, teaching is good and improving. The headteacher uses the tools at her disposal through the formal management of performance to reward those teachers who are able to demonstrate that pupils they teach meet their challenging targets.
- The local authority has taken a light-touch approach in recent years to its support for the school. This is because it has great confidence in leaders to make the right choices about how to move the school forward. The authority has also recognised that there is considerable teaching expertise within the school from which others can learn and improve.

- Teachers and support staff undertake joint training activities with the infant school and cross-check their assessments. This has led to an accurate and shared understanding of each pupil's attainment as they move into Year 3. The two schools have developed a shared vision for working with and supporting families. This enables potential barriers to learning to be identified and wide-ranging pastoral support to be targeted where it is most needed.
- The organisation and teaching of subjects is continually under review. This has led to the introduction of the initiatives in phonics and basic mathematics as well as a tighter linking of subjects, with the development of writing at the heart of topic themes. Sport and music play a major role in school life. Enrichment days, including some undertaken jointly with the infant school, add breadth and enjoyment to the pupils' experiences.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. The school has increased the pupils' awareness of the lives of others and their role in British society by a sharper focus on religions and their customs and a visit to the Houses of Parliament.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is effective in its role of holding the school to account and acting as a critical friend, challenging where necessary. Governors know the school well, understand its strengths, particularly where teaching is concerned, and the action the headteacher is taking to maintain and improve its quality. Governors ensure that the headteacher only rewards good performance. Governors keep a tight rein on financial matters and are rightly confident that pupil premium funding is having an impact on the pupils concerned. Regular training, including in assessment data, enables governors to ask pertinent questions of the school so they understand how its performance compares with others.

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	115028
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	401483

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	370
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dorothy Griffin
Headteacher	Verity Boreham
Date of previous school inspection	7 December 2009
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