

Essendon CofE (VC) Primary School

School Lane, Essendon, AL9 6HD

Inspection dates 23–24 April 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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.

- Achievement across the school is currently good in both English and mathematics. The school ensures nearly all pupils reach the expected levels by the time they leave the school.
- It is a happy school where all pupils are warmly welcomed. Behaviour is good; pupils feel safe, get on well with each other and enjoy school.
- The teachers and all staff are an effective team who work well together to make sure all pupils do as well as they can.
- Parents value the fact that the school is small and their children get individual attention. They feel welcomed and are able to approach the staff with confidence. They are very positive about all aspects of school.
- The school is well led and managed and leaders have continued to have the positive impact on teaching and achievement that was seen in the previous inspection.
- Governors have a very close understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are determined to improve it further.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Standards dipped slightly to average in 2012 and progress in mathematics has not been as strong as English in recent years.
- Not enough teaching is outstanding. Teachers do not consistently offer clear guidance on how pupils can improve or plan lessons that inspire pupils to want to do really well.
- More able pupils do not always do as well as they should. Lessons do not always move on at a brisk pace and opportunities for pupils to use computers are sometimes missed.
- There are insufficient resources provided to stimulate children's imaginations in Reception and too few opportunities for them to practise writing and calculation skills.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed 11 lessons, and parts of lessons. Five of the observations were done jointly with the headteacher.
- The inspector looked at pupils' work, records of pupil progress, school documentation including the school improvement plan, minutes of governors' meetings and safeguarding information.
- Discussions were held with pupils, teachers, school leaders and four representatives of the governing body and a representative of the Local Authority.
- The inspector spoke to parents and carers and considered the views of 23 responses to the Parent View, Ofsted's online survey of parental views and also a small number of letters that were sent in by parents.

Inspection team

Simon Griffiths, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller-than-average sized rural primary school.
- The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and for whom the school receives additional income (the pupil premium) is above average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is above average, as is the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational need.
- Approximately a fifth of the pupils are from the travelling community.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of pupils.
- At the time of the inspection the headteacher had only been in post for a week.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure all teaching is consistently good and a higher proportion outstanding by:
 - making sure all pupils understand clearly what it is they are expected to learn in the lesson and that activities stretch their thinking, particularly in the case of the more able
 - making sure all lessons are lively, move on quickly, make better use of information technology and inspire pupils so they want to do well
 - improving the quality of marking so that it links directly to the tasks set and gives suggestions for improvement
 - improving the range and quality of resources and equipment available to the children in Reception, both in the classroom and in the outdoor area, and providing more opportunities for children to write and calculate.
- Improve progress in mathematics by:
 - increasing the opportunities for pupils to apply skills they have learned through more problem solving activities
 - ensuring the methods for doing calculations are taught consistently throughout the school to enable pupils to deal confidently with more complex work.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children enter the school with skills and abilities which can vary considerably from year to year. Some have levels below those expected, although more children are now joining the school with the abilities and skills expected for their age. By the time they leave the Reception class they typically achieve levels at least in line with those expected, although standards in early writing are not as consistently secure as they are in early reading.
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 are rising. A much higher proportion of pupils than was the case nationally met the expected level in the phonics test in Year 1 this year. In 2012, Year 2 pupils were in line with the national average and current pupils are on track to do even better. More pupils are well placed to achieve the higher levels.
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 2 have typically been in line with those expected but results vary from year to year. In 2012 the proportion of pupils achieving the required standard in both English and mathematics was in line with national averages whilst in 2011, it was well above.
- The achievement of pupils currently in the school is good. This is clear from the school's tracking data and from pupils' work in books. Standards have improved in English because of the attention the school has given to linking sounds and letters for younger pupils and writing at length for older pupils. Current pupils are now achieving better standards in mathematics but opportunities to extend their understanding by way of problem solving activities are limited. The school is better at ensuring good progress for lower ability pupils than for higher attainers.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress and do well. They achieve higher standards than those seen nationally. This is also the case with traveller pupils but for some pupils, persistent absence means they do not do as well as they should.
- Pupil premium funding is a significant amount and has been used effectively to provide additional learning support in both key stages. Extra resources have been purchased and extracurricular activities have been funded for the pupils who qualify for it. These pupils achieve better than equivalent pupils nationally and are approximately one term behind other pupils in the school in English. In mathematics they achieve the same standards as other pupils in their year by the time they leave.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers know their pupils well and carefully plan activities which, in almost all cases, meet their needs and abilities, although this is not always the case with the more able. Teaching is supportive and this helps all pupils to tackle their work confidently. However, marking is not consistently detailed and capable of helping pupils who do not understand how to improve.
- A key strength of the teaching is the strong teamwork evident across the school. Teaching assistants work well together well and liaise carefully with teachers, often undertaking a direct teaching role in order to give pupils as much individual attention as possible.
- Teachers make good use of opportunities for pupils to share their ideas together and work well in groups as well as on their own. Noise levels in classrooms are low because pupils are expected to work hard and quietly. The pace of learning is usually, but not always, brisk.

- Leaders have invested heavily in the provision of additional adult support to enable pupils to be taught in smaller groups. Although improving rates of progress show that this approach is working, there are too few opportunities for pupils, particularly the more able, to really explore learning in depth or become excited by their learning. This is particularly the case in mathematics.
- Teachers in the Early Years Foundation stage plan work for their pupils carefully and provide a caring atmosphere. Pupils' achievements are observed and recorded carefully in order to plan next steps. However, there are too few opportunities for children to develop their writing skills at a fast enough rate. The learning area is spacious but is not an attractive place for children to learn. Improvements are needed both to resources and to the outside area.
- Visitors are used purposefully to broaden the range of experiences for pupils. For example, in one Key Stage 1 lesson, a local resident enthralled the pupils with his talk on wildlife. Good use was made of technology in this session although pupils do say they would like to use computers more often.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils' good behaviour and attitudes are clear strengths. There is a strong sense of community and care throughout the school. This is immediately apparent in the relaxed relationships between parents and all staff.
- Pupils' behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. They listen carefully and work well together. Even when teaching is not inspiring they try hard to do their best. Pupils say that interruptions to lessons are rare.
- Pupils feel very safe in school. They say that there is very little bullying and this is backed up by school records and parent's views. They understand the different forms of bullying but are not as sure about cyber and text bullying and say that what they know, they have learned at home. They are taught about road safety and substance misuse. Pupils say they are generally free from name calling.
- Attendance overall is below average but this is caused by the persistent absence of a few pupils. The school works hard to address this and attendance is improving. This is very important as it has been a factor in the underperformance of a small number of persistently absent pupils.
- The very large majority of parents think that pupils are well behaved and are safe.

The leadership and management are good

- Leaders have successfully maintained the same level of effectiveness as was seen in the previous inspection. When standards slipped last year, the school took immediate action to identify and address the reasons. This work is now being taken forward by the new headteacher. In the very short time she has been in post staff have recognised that she has very high expectations and a determination that the school will improve further.
- The leadership of English has been effective in raising standards. Writing is taught confidently and pupils are able to write at length but over time, leadership in mathematics has not been as strong as it is in English.
- The headteacher has already demonstrated that she is able to judge the quality of teaching

accurately and robustly and provide suggestions for improvement; these are already being acted upon. She is very clear on the importance of establishing a direct link between any increases in teachers' pay and pupil performance.

- Safeguarding arrangements are secure.
- Pupils are generally well prepared for life in a global society. They are aware of different cultures and religions and understand why this is important. The school makes strong efforts to ensure the traveller community feels welcome and that parents are able to come to the school to discuss any concerns they might have.
- The Local Authority knows the school well and was quick to work with leaders to address the dip in 2012. It is continuing to provide further support for new members of staff.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance has improved considerably from the time of the last inspection. They have bought in expertise to ensure they are able to record their decisions accurately and also keep up to date with the latest information. They are now fully informed about how well the pupils are doing. The information on mathematics presented on the new 'dashboard' confirmed their concern about mathematics in 2012. Under the very strong leadership of the Chair they provide high levels of support and challenge and are very aware of the need to ensure the school gets best value for money from their spending decisions. They come into school regularly and are now carrying out focused visits which are recorded and include actions to be taken. This enables them to have a close understanding of what is being done to improve teaching and whether the pupil premium funding is being spent effectively.

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	117393
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	411989

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	110
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lesley Reith
Headteacher	Barbara Young
Date of previous school inspection	12 October 2009
Telephone number	01707 261209
Fax number	01707 258278
Email address	head@essendon.sch.uk

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