



**Office for Standards
in Education**

Inspection report
Frobisher Primary and Nursery School

Essex Education Authority

Dates of inspection: 18 and 19 October 2004

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act

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Basic information about the school

Name of school:	Frobisher Primary and Nursery School
Type of school:	Primary
Status:	Community
Age range of pupils:	3 to 11 years
Headteacher:	Mrs C Watkins
Address of school:	Frobisher Drive Jaywick Clacton-on Sea Essex CO15 2QH
Telephone:	01255 427073
Name and address of appropriate authority:	The governing body, address as above
Chair of governors:	Mrs P Doling
Local education authority area:	Essex
Unique reference number:	114757
Name of reporting inspector:	Mr H Parr HMI
Dates of inspection:	18 and 19 October 2004

Introduction

1. Frobisher Primary and Nursery School is situated in Jaywick, a relatively deprived and isolated community on the southern fringe of Clacton-on-Sea. It is bigger than most primary schools, having 296 boys and girls on roll, 48 of them in the nursery. Four pupils in ten are entitled to free school meals and nearly one in four has special educational needs. These figures are higher than in most schools. Four pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Need. The mobility of pupils is high: a third join or leave the school after the start of the academic year. Four pupils speak English as a second language. Many enter the school with low levels of communication, language and literacy skills.
2. The school was inspected in May 2003. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.
3. The governors drew up an action plan to address the key issues from the inspection of May 2003. The school was visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) on three occasions to monitor the progress being made.
4. In October 2004, two HMI inspected the school, assessing the standard of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of May 2003.

Main findings

5. In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils. The main findings of the inspection are:
 - standards are rising, but a backlog of underachievement means that they remain lower overall than they should be;
 - at Key Stage 1, a marked improvement in mathematics in the 2004 national tests was not matched in reading and writing, where the proportions reaching the nationally expected Level 2 were respectively well below average and very low;
 - in the 2004 national tests at Key Stage 2, two thirds of the pupils gained the nationally expected Level 4 in science, but the proportions doing so in English and mathematics were around half the national figures and well below those of similar schools;
 - the school's data confirms that many pupils made significant progress in the last academic year, but too many still work at levels well below those expected for their age, particularly in writing;
 - the pupils behave well and have good attitudes to their work. The school has created the conditions where the pupils can learn well;

- the school's imaginative and vigorous efforts have reduced absence. The pupils are punctual to lessons and to school. However, the rate of attendance remains too low;
- the provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good. Assemblies, extracurricular activities and lessons all contribute well to the pupils' development. They respond well;
- the quality of teaching is always at least satisfactory, and often good. Interesting activities engage the pupils' interest, making them want to attend and to learn. On occasion, expectations are too low, the pace of learning is too slow, or the teacher does not ensure that everyone is keeping up;
- accurate assessment is used well to set targets for the pupils, but these are not always sharp enough to focus the teaching and the marking;
- the curriculum is imaginative, helping the teachers to make links between subjects to deepen the pupils' understanding and interest;
- the school's care and support for its pupils, including the most vulnerable, are very good;
- the school has developed good links with parents and its work is well regarded in the local community;
- leadership and management are satisfactory overall, with many strengths. The headteacher, senior staff and co-ordinators provide good leadership;
- monitoring of the school's work is extensive and thorough, but evaluation is a relative weakness;
- the governors support the school well; their role in holding it to account for the standards achieved is currently being developed;
- the school's expenditure currently exceeds its income. Plans to remove the deficit without compromising the quality of provision are overdue;
- the local education authority (LEA) has supported the school well through its time in special measures.

Key issues

6. In order to improve the pupils' quality of education further, the governors, headteacher, senior managers and staff need to:

- continue to raise standards, particularly in writing;
 - continue to improve attendance;
 - strengthen systems for evaluation;
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- take steps to balance the budget without compromising the quality of provision.

Inspection findings

Standards achieved by the pupils

7. Standards are rising, but a backlog of underachievement means that they remain lower overall than they should be.

8. The pupils in the Foundation Stage make sound progress towards the nationally prescribed Early Learning Goals. Many enter the nursery with significant weaknesses in their communication, language and literacy skills. In both the nursery and the reception class, they extend these skills by being introduced to new vocabulary and using it in songs, rhymes and discussions. They enrich their experience and increase their knowledge and understanding of the world around them both in school and through visits, such as the one to a local garden.

9. Overall results in the 2004 national tests at ages 7 and 11 were well below national figures and those of schools in similar circumstances. At both key stages, the rate of improvement was below the national trend. The school's data indicates that many pupils made good progress from a low baseline, particularly in mathematics. However, progress in reading, and especially writing, was too slow to compensate fully for previously low standards.

10. In the 2003-04 school year, the pupils in Year 2 made good progress in mathematics from a low starting point. The proportion achieving the nationally expected Level 2 in the tests at Key Stage 1 in 2004 was in line with the figure for all schools and above that for similar schools, representing a considerable improvement on the previous year. In addition, almost one pupil in four reached the above-average Level 3. In reading, the school's efforts ensured that no pupil failed to attain at least Level 1, as had been the case for one pupil in five in 2003. However, as in the previous year, only two thirds of the pupils achieved the expected Level 2, well below the national figure. Similarly, the school had some success in reducing the number of pupils failing to reach Level 1 in writing, but only four pupils in ten, a very low proportion, reached the expected Level 2.

11. Results in the national tests at Key Stage 2 in 2004 showed some improvement over the previous year, but reflected the long legacy of underachievement. Two thirds of the pupils gained the nationally expected Level 4 in science, but the proportions doing so in English and mathematics were around half those of all schools and well below those of similar schools. The previous problem of absenteeism was successfully tackled: in 2003, almost one pupil in five was absent for the tests in English and mathematics, but in 2004, only one missed the English test. One fifth of the pupils in English and almost one third in mathematics failed to reach Level 3. Conversely, the significant improvement in science was further illustrated by the fact that 27 per cent of the pupils gained the above-average Level 5. In mathematics, the proportion reaching this higher level increased from 5 per cent in 2003 to 15 per cent in 2004. The school has assembled reliable assessment data which indicates the significant progress made by many pupils during the course of the last school year, although this was not enough to make a significant difference to the test results, particularly in English. Writing remains a significant weakness throughout the school.

12. Standards in English at the end of both key stages remain low, but the pupils are making generally good progress from low starting points. In the 2004 national tests, for example, only two pupils failed to reach Level 1 in writing and none did so in reading. In 2003, one pupil in five failed to reach this basic level. The notable improvement was not enough, however, to move them to the Level 2 expected for their age. Similarly, at Key Stage 2, many pupils made good progress over the course of the year, but one in five did not reach Level 3, when the nationally expected standard is Level 4. This long tail of low attainment illustrates how much ground the school has to make up.

13. Lessons and samples of work illustrated that standards are rising, although not quickly enough in writing. In both key stages, the pupils listened well and spoke up confidently thanks to the frequent opportunities they had to do so. In Key Stage 1, most pupils showed a growing awareness of how sounds are linked with letters and applied this knowledge, for example in identifying words which rhymed. Although some in Year 2 still failed to shape or position their letters correctly, higher attainers were developing confidence in spelling familiar words and in using full stops and capital letters correctly. Many pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 still have considerable problems with basic literacy; for example, with the spelling of common words and with sentence structure and punctuation. Without exception, however, they applied themselves well to tasks that engaged their interest; for example, when building up or redrafting stories, or responding to interesting tasks in other subjects such as history. Although they showed enthusiasm for their work in class, this enthusiasm was not a marked feature when they talked about their wider reading. The technical accuracy of the writing of average and higher-attaining pupils was improving, and higher attainers were beginning to write engagingly, choosing words for effect and using correct punctuation within sentences.

14. Although the standards in mathematics at the end of both key stages remain below average, the rate of progress the pupils make is accelerating as a result of the quality of teaching they receive and the increasing opportunities they have to use and develop their numeracy skills through work in different subjects. In Key Stage 1, the younger pupils sorted shapes accurately according to various attributes. In Year 2, the pupils recognised and read two-digit numbers competently but their knowledge of place value was not yet secure and many were hesitant when attempting to recall number facts mentally. The use of resources such as number lines and digit cards was helping them deal with number problems more confidently. In Key Stage 2, the setting of pupils by ability is proving successful. The higher attainers were being appropriately challenged while the less able were receiving support that was focused on addressing the significant weaknesses in their knowledge and understanding. By the end of the key stage, the pupils had covered a good range of work and used strategies such as partitioning, doubling and halving in their calculations. They accurately recorded data in a variety of forms including charts and graphs although, in one lesson, gaps in the pupils' learning, for example in their ability to tally results quickly and accurately, hindered their progress.

15. Standards in science at the end of both key stages are below average, but rising. Some of the higher-attaining pupils, particularly those in Year 6, work at levels that are close to those expected for their age. The pupils have opportunities to plan investigations, to observe and to predict outcomes. Good links are made with work in mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT), enabling the pupils to record the data from their investigations in different ways. Although they understand the need to draw

conclusions, this is often the weakest aspect of the investigation; some of the older pupils find it difficult to explain the reasons for the results that have occurred.

16. The school's data and the evidence of this inspection indicate that most pupils are making good progress in response to better teaching, often from a very low base. The pupils who have special educational needs make sound progress. Many had made significant gains in relation to the targets in their individual education plans, thanks to well-focused teaching and well-targeted help from support assistants.

The pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

17. The pupils behave well and have good attitudes to their work. This represents a significant improvement over time. There have been no fixed-term or permanent exclusions since December 2003. In the lessons and around the school, attitudes and behaviour were at least satisfactory, and more often good. The pupils are keen to learn and, when they are given the opportunity to work with others, they respond positively. The improvements in the way the curriculum is planned, particularly the increased emphasis that is given to providing interesting practical tasks, has done much to stimulate the pupils' enjoyment in their work; almost all apply themselves well, work on their own initiative and take a pride in their achievement. Good work is celebrated and rewards are frequent. The support that is given to those pupils who have specific social and emotional needs is well organised and sensitively managed by the staff. The school has been successful in creating a family atmosphere where relationships between the pupils and between pupils and adults are good.

18. The attendance rate is rising, albeit slowly, but it remains well below the national figure for primary schools. A range of imaginative and vigorous strategies accounts for the improvements that are being made. An education welfare officer is based at the school and works effectively with the headteacher and the administrative staff to target those families where the children's attendance is poor. A particular problem existed in one isolated part of the school's surrounding area. The school tackled this by purchasing a minibus which it uses each morning to bring to school some of the pupils who previously had poor attendance. Most of these pupils join the breakfast club, which provides a positive start to the day. Certificates and awards give good incentives for the pupils to attend regularly. The pupils are punctual to school and to lessons. Unauthorised absence is in line with the national figure. The school recognises that, in spite of these successes, more work is needed to reduce absenteeism.

19. The provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The daily act of collective worship promotes the school as a community and provides good opportunities for the pupils to think and to reflect. A Key Stage 2 assembly, for example, gave an amusing and graphic illustration of the importance of making the right choices. Time is allowed for quiet reflection and prayer. The school provides numerous opportunities for the pupils to take responsibility, for example through the school council and the playground 'buddy' system. Such activities have helped them to develop a sense of community, and a realisation of how they can contribute to the common good. The pupils have developed their knowledge of world faiths, cultures and traditions through work in subjects such as history, geography and religious education and also through whole-school events such as the recent multicultural day.

20. The school is a well-ordered and cohesive community. The pupils are tolerant of each other, working together well and supporting others when necessary. They are keen to do well, and disappointed in themselves when they make the wrong choices. The pupils rarely waste time when working on their own or in groups. They have developed a strong sense of right and wrong. These positive attitudes have been reinforced because what happens within the curriculum is supported by activities out of lesson time. Friday afternoon clubs run by teachers and support assistants allow the pupils to learn a range of skills from playing a musical instrument to using a digital camera, animating pictures, painting a watercolour or making a model from junk. School clubs at other times include football, hockey, rounders, guitar, computers and ribbon dancing. The school is involved in a number of community activities and has won several prizes. School visits, such as recent ones to Danbury, are spoken of highly by the pupils and have helped classes to work together to a common purpose.

The quality of education

21. The quality of teaching is always at least satisfactory, and often good. Teaching in 9 of the 16 lessons was good; it was satisfactory in the other 7. A key strength of the teaching is the variety and intrinsic interest of many of the activities, which engage the pupils actively, giving them the chance to work independently and in groups. The lessons are well planned and the content is matched carefully to the needs of different groups of pupils. Support assistants play an important part in ensuring that everyone can cope with the tasks, and often work skilfully with individuals or groups, or nip problems in the bud by being vigilant. Routines are well established, and changes of activity in the lesson are well managed so that little time is lost. Lessons are broken up into separate, timed activities to ensure that interest does not wane; on one occasion, for example, a brief bout of physical activity provided a link between a period of sustained concentration and the group activities which followed.

22. Within this overall strong picture, there were areas of relative weakness. On occasion, lessons were unduly fragmented because the teacher's wish to talk to the whole class disrupted the flow of work too often. This was sometimes because, in the initial briefing, the teacher had not ensured that all pupils were following and had grasped the essential points. The natural desire to set a fast pace had the opposite effect because the pupils' working time was reduced by the interruptions. Occasionally, the teacher's expectations of what the pupils could achieve were too low; for example, in one lesson the pupils sorted shapes, but all were doing the same task, which was not challenging enough for some pupils in the group. Additional activities for those who finished quickly filled the time without extending the learning. The lesson lacked a sense of urgency.

23. The school has collected a comprehensive range of assessment data that is being well used to track the pupils' progress, identify gaps in their learning and organise groups for teaching. As a result, the quality of planning has improved and the work is matched more closely to the pupils' learning needs. Although targets for future learning are set, they are often too many in number or are not precise enough to help the pupils to understand how much progress they are making and what they need to do to improve the quality of their work. Although the pupils' work is marked regularly, the quality of this marking is variable. At best, the teacher's comments celebrate the pupils' achievements in relation to their targets, focus on what the pupils were expected to learn and give clear guidance about where improvements could be made. In contrast, some of the marking merely acknowledges that the work has been completed.

24. The curriculum is imaginative, and has contributed to the pupils' positive attitudes to school. In the 2003-04 academic year, the school experimented by having days when the teachers could explore their preferred curriculum area with different groups. This arrangement gave rise to a number of interesting extended projects which involved number work, the use of ICT and the opportunity to speak and write for different audiences and purposes. The arrangement has been reviewed and amended this year, but has left a legacy where the teachers appreciate the motivational power of practical activities and the importance of using other subjects as a context for reading and writing. In most lessons, therefore, the pupils are actively engaged, work routinely against deadlines and have regularly to present their work to the class. Electronic whiteboards are used to good effect, for example in re-drafting work or in illustrating particular points in a graphic way. The pupils show a good level of familiarity with, and competence in the use of, ICT, particularly in supporting their work in mathematics and literacy. This variety of activities has increased the pupils' interest and deepened their understanding of the work.

25. In the Foundation Stage, the staff provide purposeful activities to help the pupils to learn. They routinely talk with them about the work they are doing and introduce the new vocabulary they expect them to use. Songs, rhymes and whole-group discussion times are used appropriately to extend the pupils' speaking and listening skills.

26. The provision for the pupils who have special educational needs is satisfactory and sound procedures are in place to take the work forward. The co-ordinator has worked hard to address the needs of the backlog of pupils who had not previously been identified as requiring particular help. As a result, the help for the pupils is targeted more effectively and the teachers and the support staff are much clearer about how best to plan the work to meet their specific learning needs.

27. The school is welcoming and well resourced. Displays of work in each classroom and in corridors encourage the pupils and give them a sense of pride. The computer room is used well to reinforce work done in the classroom.

28. The school's care and support for its pupils are very good. The education welfare officer works effectively with the school's community liaison officer to ensure that vulnerable pupils are well looked after. The useful work that the support team has done means that they now spend less time in responding to situations and more in doing preventative work. Plans are in hand to extend this work to nurturing classes where basic routines can be taught and the importance of good hygiene and diet stressed, building on the success of the breakfast club. The school is sensitive to the needs of vulnerable pupils, monitoring them carefully and providing sessions where they can develop their understanding and build their self-esteem.

29. The school has developed good links with parents, and its work is well regarded in the local community. A fortnightly newsletter keeps parents informed and is an opportunity to publicise the school's achievements. Parents have been trained to drive the minibus or to escort the pupils. Regular coffee mornings are held, and courses in parenting skills are provided by the school liaison officer. Pupils are involved in community projects. A recently completed questionnaire indicates a high level of parental satisfaction with most aspects of the school's work and the way it has improved.

Leadership and management

30. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall, with many strengths. Sensible and convincing plans have been developed for further improvement. The headteacher has built very effectively on the foundations laid before her arrival. She has maintained and increased the pace of necessary change, ensuring that staff share a common purpose and that parents support the aims of the school. She has given a strong lead in creating an ethos where every pupil is included and feels part of the broader family. She has been ably supported by the deputy headteachers and key co-ordinators. The leadership team shares a common sense of purpose and has a clear understanding of what needs to be done to effect improvement. The co-ordinators have well-judged plans for developing work in English, mathematics and science. Senior staff have monitored the quality of teaching and given teachers useful pointers to improvement. These, however, are not often specific enough to serve as targets to be used to check and record progress on future observations.

31. Monitoring of the school's work is extensive and thorough, but is not sufficiently focused on the outcomes for the pupils. Data has been gathered, for example, on the pupils' progress, and has been used to set targets for future work. This allows the school to make better provision for the individual pupil, but analysis has not established the bigger picture of which groups or sub-groups of pupils are making relatively fast or slow progress to establish where additional resources or effort could usefully be directed. The school prepared a self-evaluation for this inspection which focused heavily on what it had done without showing directly how the work had benefited the pupils. There was therefore little supporting evidence to back the claims that learning and teaching had improved, that punctuality was better, that pupils attended more regularly or that standards had risen. Evaluation is not yet used as a tool to pull together the outcomes of monitoring and to use them to focus sharply on specific areas for improvement.

32. The governors support the school well; their role in holding it to account for the standards achieved is currently being developed. Individual governors have built up a good knowledge of the school's work through regular visiting and observation. The governing body takes a keen interest in school life and ensures that statutory responsibilities are met. However, governors lack the tools, the skills and the confidence to challenge, in a constructive way, the school's account of its performance. They have not yet received training to help them to review performance data and ask pertinent questions.

33. The school's expenditure currently exceeds its income. Staffing is generous, and reflects recent and appropriate priorities to stabilise the school and to remove it from special measures. Levels of support in class, for example, are high, but they have helped to ensure that the pupils learn well. Uncertainties about sources of funding have delayed efforts to rectify a situation where levels of spending have led to a large deficit which will increase in the future if nothing is done. The school has met with the LEA to agree a recovery plan over a three-year period, and a further meeting is planned soon. Detailed plans are urgently required to show how the school will balance the budget in a phased and realistic way without compromising the quality of provision.

34. The LEA has supported the school well during its time in special measures. Its brokering of the arrangement with a neighbouring school and its appointment of a temporary headteacher from the advisory service ensured that the school got off to a rapid start with its

recovery programme. Continued vigilance has ensured that the momentum has been sustained.

Implementation of the action plan

35. The inspection report of May 2003 required the school to address eight key issues. These related to: raising standards; improving the pupils' progress, the quality of teaching, attendance and attitudes and behaviour; developing assessment procedures and links with parents; and strengthening leadership and management. Overall, good progress has been made in improving the school's provision for its pupils, but there is still work to do in raising standards and improving attendance.

36. More accurate assessment has led to teaching that is almost always well matched to the pupils' needs, allowing them to make faster progress. The staff plan more effectively, and have developed interesting ways of teaching their subjects. The profile of teaching has continued to strengthen. The school's data shows that most pupils have made good progress, often from a low starting point.

37. Attitudes and behaviour are much improved. The pupils have responded well to opportunities to take greater responsibility. Clear procedures ensure that issues of discipline are treated consistently. The rate of attendance is still too low, but has improved because of a number of initiatives taken by the school and good work from the education welfare officer.

38. The previous acting headteacher, the previous executive headteacher and the current, substantive headteacher have all played a crucial role in strengthening the leadership and management of the school. Leadership has created a strong forward momentum, but there is still work to do in improving the quality of evaluation. Parents are given more and better information about their children and the work of the school. Close links are helping many parents to support their children's learning in school.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

The school was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in May 2003. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in November 2003, and in March and June 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of May 2003.

In October 2004, two HMI returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Sixteen lessons or parts of lessons, one assembly and one registration session were inspected. The pupils were observed at break and lunchtimes and samples of their work were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior staff and the chair of governors, and informal discussions were held with other staff and pupils. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was also taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of May 2003 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.