

Dunmow St Mary's Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115299
Local Authority	ESSEX LA
Inspection number	290195
Inspection date	11 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Gulshanbir Kayembe

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	4-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	387
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs K Hepper
Headteacher	Mrs Val White
Date of previous school inspection	26 June 2002
School address	High Stile Great Dunmow Essex CM6 1EB
Telephone number	01371872340
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Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The school is situated near Stansted Airport in Great Dunmow. The low level of eligibility for free school meals reflects the good employment opportunities locally. However, pupils' social and economic circumstances are not as good as this figure suggests and are broadly average. The nature of the school itself changed shortly after its last inspection. At that time it was a junior school. In September 2002, it became an all through primary school, as in 2004 did the local infant school, thus for the first time providing local parents with a choice of schools for their primary aged children. The school's roll increased rapidly to over 400 but is now stabilising at a lower level. Since the change of status, there has been a high level of mobility into the school. Some is due to rapid expansion of the local population and some is a result of local parents exercising choice. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is broadly average. There is a small, but growing, number of pupils who speak English as an additional language. Attainment on entry is generally a little below average, but was lower than usual in the current Reception year. The school has the Investors in People, Basic Skills Agency, Silver Arts Mark and Advanced Healthy Schools Awards and is a training school.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with some outstanding features. Pupils receive an excellent start to their education in Reception, where they are provided with rich and exciting learning experiences. Current pupils in Reception have made substantial progress from low starting points to reach average standards. They are very well prepared for Year 1. The quality of teaching in Years 1 to 6 is good overall, enabling learners to make good progress. Standards are a little above average at the end of Year 2 and are above average by Year 6. After a period of upheaval following the school's change in status, pupils are reaching challenging targets and achievement is now consistently good. It is very good in mathematics. Standards in writing, although broadly average, are not as high and progress not as consistently good as in other aspects of English. Teachers know this, and improving pupils' written work is a top priority for the school.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding, mostly because of the outstanding curriculum, which nurtures their personal qualities and actively engages them in learning. Pupils' very high attendance reflects their enormous enjoyment of all that the school has to offer. Behaviour is good overall and usually excellent in lessons. The outstanding opportunities for enrichment and extra-curricular activities, especially in sport, contribute to the excellent spiritual, moral and social development of pupils. Many aspects of cultural development are also outstanding, because of the rich opportunities for art, drama, literature, music and design and technology. Pupils produce work of very high quality in these areas. However, they have more limited understanding of the different cultures that make up modern Britain because they do not have enough first hand experiences of these. Pupils actively adopt healthy lifestyles and enjoy exercise and healthy foods. They make a notably outstanding contribution to the school community. Care, guidance and support are good and pupils are very well looked after, so that they feel safe and find the school a happy and friendly place. There is good support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, enabling them to make good progress. Staff have revised systems for guiding pupils on how to improve their work. However, these need further development because pupils are not entirely clear about what they need to do to make their work better.

The leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and has very successfully taken the school through significant change. In particular she has established strong teamwork and common purpose amongst staff. This is evident, for example, in the consistency with which staff have developed the curriculum and created vibrant and stimulating learning environments in every classroom. Governors provide good support to the school and carry out their responsibilities well. They and staff have a singularly accurate understanding of how well the school is doing and what needs improvement. This is due in no small measure to the excellent systems for collecting and analysing information about the quality of the school's work. Hence, staff are poised to make further rapid and sustained improvements.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve writing standards so that they are as good as standards in other aspects of English.
- Ensure that pupils understand what they need to do to improve their work.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to learn from first hand experiences about the different cultures in British society.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are average by the end of Reception, where children make marked progress in all areas of learning, but particularly so in literacy. The results of national assessments and tests in 2006 were broadly average at the end of Years 2 and 6. Current standards are much better, signalling an acceleration of the improving trend of the last few years following a dip in standards when the school became a primary. Standards in Year 2 are slightly above average and particularly good in mathematics. In Year 6, they are now above average in English, mathematics and science. Very high standards of work are evident in the vibrant displays of art and design and technology work.

Pupils make good progress in reading. Progress in writing, though satisfactory, is slower. Even in the current Year 6, writing is not as good as reading. Many pupils demonstrate weak spelling, especially in the younger classes. Handwriting and sentence structure are also areas for continuing improvement. In contrast, progress in mathematics is often very good and pupils enjoy solving problems. Able pupils achieve well as do those with learning difficulties and disabilities. This is a result of good provision. The small number with English as an additional language achieve very well, often making rapid progress in learning English.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. Their enjoyment of school is palpable and is reflected in their excellent attendance and attitudes to work. Pupils in Reception thrive in the rich environment. They rapidly learn to work with others, becoming confident and independent learners. Older pupils make outstanding progress in developing excellent personal and social skills, growing in confidence and establishing lasting relationships. Pupils work exceptionally well with others as well as on their own. Outstanding provision for health awareness and physical education enables pupils to develop, and put into practice, their understanding of healthy lifestyles. They take care when using tools, or playing, not to hurt themselves or others. They develop their sense of citizenship and take on leadership roles exceptionally well.

School councillors take their responsibilities very seriously and successfully initiate improvements to school life such as developing the outdoor environment and the playground. Pupils value the views of others and have a strong sense of community.

Whilst pupils learn about different cultures, there are given limited opportunities for first-hand experiences of these cultures, so they do not always develop deeper insights about people whose way of life might be different from theirs. By the end of Year 6, their good basic skills and excellent social skills prepare pupils well for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers create an excellent atmosphere for learning so that pupils focus intently on their work. Lesson plans identify expected outcomes clearly and these are shared with pupils so they know what they are expected to learn. Teachers make good use of questions to help pupils think about their work. In the Reception classes, exceptionally good use is made of resources

and practical activities to promote pupils' learning through first hand experiences. Adult interactions with Reception pupils are very good, although pupils could be given a little more time to answer questions. Tasks that actively involve pupils are also used well in the rest of the school to engage pupils' interest. Good use is made of group and pair work to help pupils share and develop their ideas. In the best lessons, the quality of pupil discussion is of a very high order. On occasion, however, tasks are not as well tailored to individual needs as they could be, especially writing tasks. Pupils' work is well assessed and they are increasingly involved in assessing their own work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

An innovative and creative curriculum contributes significantly to the development of pupils' personal skills and their love of learning. It is well tailored to the needs of individual pupils. The curriculum for children in Reception is outstanding. Excellent opportunities for role play, not just in Reception but across the whole school, significantly aid pupils' learning and the development of their imagination and creativity, along with their ability to articulate ideas. In subjects such as mathematics, science and history, approaches to enquiry, problem-solving and analysis are deeply embedded. Excellent use is made, for example, of graphical displays to analyse information collected in science. Cross-curricular themes provide interesting topics through which literacy and numeracy are taught. Good opportunities for pupils to write across the curriculum are starting to impact positively on the quality of written work.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Health and safety and child protection procedures, including checks on staff backgrounds, are rigorous in keeping children safe. The school receives good support from outside agencies and the local authority in promoting pupils' personal and academic development. Teaching assistants are well used to provide additional input and coaching in small groups for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. This has a positive impact on their learning.

Assessment information is used well to set challenging targets. Teachers identify useful success criteria in lessons to help pupils assess their progress and mark work with them, giving them good oral advice on how to improve. Hence written guidance or targets are not felt to be necessary. However, pupils are not always sure of what aspects of their work need to improve or what they can do to make their work better.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has provided outstanding leadership in taking the school forward following its new designation as a primary. She is well supported by the senior leadership team. A key success has been to establish vibrant and stimulating provision for Reception and an innovative and creative curriculum across the school. Others have been to address fully all the issues from the last inspection and to rapidly improve standards across the school over the last year. Subject leaders, many of whom are still at the start of their teaching careers, are developing their roles well. They are actively involved in assessing standards and provision in their subjects. The overall quality of self-evaluation is excellent and the school is spot on with its own assessment

of what needs to improve. A new and robust system for tracking pupils' progress, introduced in September, enables staff to rapidly identify and address any underachievement. This and other successes place the school in an excellent position to improve further. Governors provide good oversight of the school's work, although not all are able to be actively involved in its work. They manage the budget well: a challenging task given the changes in pupil numbers. Overall, the school provides good value for money.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

12 July 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Dunmow St Mary's Primary School, Great Dunmow, Essex. CM6 1EB

I enjoyed visiting your school very much and particularly enjoyed talking to you. I would like to thank you for making me feel welcome.

The school is providing you with a good quality education, some of which is excellent. I saw many things that were really good, including ways in which you help to make the school a better place.

- You enjoy school immensely and your attendance record is outstanding.
- Children in Reception get an excellent start to their education.
- Teaching is good, enabling you to make good progress and achieve well.
- You develop your personal skills exceptionally well and leave school as confident and well rounded youngsters.
- You are given many exciting and interesting things to do at school.
- Your headteacher works with the staff to make sure that the school is as good as it can be.

There are a few things that could be better. These include:

- helping you to improve the quality of your writing
- making sure you know and understand what you need to do to improve your work
- providing more opportunities for you to learn from first hand experiences about the different kinds of people living in Britain today, for example by making links with a school where there are a lot more pupils from different cultures.

You can certainly help to improve the school by continuing to work hard and continuing to enjoy school.

I wish you all well in the future.

Gulshan Kayembe

Inspector