

# R A Butler Infant School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	115303
<b>Local Authority</b>	ESSEX LA
<b>Inspection number</b>	290197
<b>Inspection dates</b>	11–12 December 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Marina Gough

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Infant
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–7
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	223
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Caroline Lanskey
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Gayle Mawson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	4 March 2002
<b>School address</b>	South Road Saffron Walden Essex CB11 3DG
<b>Telephone number</b>	01799 523652
<b>Fax number</b>	01799 521350

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<b>Age group</b>	4-7
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

The school is located close to the centre of the small market town of Saffron Walden. When children join the school in the Reception classes, their attainment varies, but skills in spoken language and number are generally better than expected, and average in all other aspects. Most children come from the local area and are from White British backgrounds. The socio-economic circumstances of parents are mixed but generally favourable. The school has an average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties, but a higher than average percentage of pupils who have statements of special educational need. The school holds a variety of national awards including Investors in People, The Challenge Award, The Active Mark, Healthy Schools Status, and a Bronze Eco Award.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

This is an exceptional school that provides an outstanding quality of education for pupils of all ages and abilities. Since the last inspection the school has gone from strength to strength under the inspirational leadership of the current headteacher. Staff are very highly motivated and are always looking for ways of helping the pupils to achieve their best. The school is extremely well placed for continued improvement and gives outstanding value for money.

Standards at the end of Year 2 are exceptionally high and are well above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards are also well above the expected level in science and information and communication technology, and there are significant strengths in the way in which pupils use computers as 'tools for learning'. Pupils of all abilities make outstanding progress. Pupils with learning difficulties receive excellent support individually and in small groups, enabling them to overcome their difficulties at an early stage in their education. The school's programme for gifted pupils ensures that higher attainers are very well challenged so that they thrive and are highly motivated.

The pupils' personal development, including their behaviour, is excellent. Pupils are thoughtful, polite, kind and helpful, and are well aware of how their behaviour impacts on the well-being of others. There is a strong sense of community and pupils love coming to school. The school council is an outstanding example of how young children can make informed choices and decisions, and this group has a real input into school improvement planning. Pupils know how to maintain a healthy lifestyle and enjoy the wide range of physical activities provided.

Teaching is outstanding and is characterised by exceptionally high expectations, excellent preparation of activities, and high levels of imagination and creativity. Pupils throughout the school are active learners who ask questions, show a thirst for learning, and demonstrate very high levels of concentration and perseverance. The school provides an exceptionally lively and busy curriculum that is significantly enriched by the wide range of visits and visiting speakers. However, whilst all subjects receive a good amount of teaching time, music has a relatively low priority, and is not used as much as it might be to enhance teaching and learning on a daily basis. The school provides outstanding levels of support, care and guidance, and support groups, such as the 'bubble' groups and the 'Alpha' groups do much to build pupils' confidence and help them over minor hurdles in their learning.

The leadership and management of the school are excellent. The headteacher's impact on school life is truly stunning. She fosters creativity amongst the staff, and engenders an ethos where pupils and staff alike continually strive for excellence. Success is celebrated and mistakes are viewed as a natural part of the learning process. The governors play a critical role in supporting the school in achieving its aims by managing the finances exceptionally well so that new initiatives can be implemented and sustained.

## Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

### Grade: 1

The provision for children in the Foundation Stage is excellent. Classrooms provide exciting and stimulating learning environments which encourage children to explore their surroundings. Standards when children join the school are above average overall with strengths in their spoken language and number skills. Children of all abilities make excellent progress so that by the end of the Reception year most children exceed the learning goals in each area of learning. Teaching

in the Reception classes is inspiring and energetic. As a result, children are enthusiastic and avid learners.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Raise the profile of music in the school so that it is an intrinsic part of the overall provision.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 1**

By the end of Year 2, pupils attain standards that are significantly higher than the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. They also achieve very high standards in science because they thoroughly enjoy carrying out open-ended investigations. Standards in information and communication technology are well above national expectations and, from an early age, pupils use computers to enhance their learning.

The school provides an excellent range of support programmes, including 'bubble' groups, and the 'Alpha' groups, which enable pupils who have learning difficulties to make excellent gains in their learning, and to overcome their difficulties. The gifted programme is run across the school and really challenges the most able pupils so that they achieve their potential and attain the very high standards of which they are capable.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Exceptionally high levels of attendance reflect the fact that pupils love coming to school. Pupils of all ages make a very real and significant contribution to the community of the school. The school council is a superb example of the way in which pupils are prepared for taking their place in the world through activities such as interviewing 'experts' from outside, and lobbying the headteacher and governors. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and contributes to their high levels of achievement in lessons. Pupils are most supportive of individuals who have significant learning difficulties, ensuring that the school is able to provide an inclusive environment. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent, and pupils are tolerant of the views of others, and interested in different lifestyles and traditions. Pupils have an outstanding knowledge about how to lead healthy lifestyles and are safety conscious without being fearful.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 1**

Teaching is of an exceptionally high standard throughout the school. Activities and lessons are prepared extremely well and are very well matched to the pupils' levels of ability. Imaginative resources do much to capture the pupils' interest and to motivate them in their learning. In all classes teachers make excellent use of questions to extend the learning of higher attainers and to check what the pupils already know and can do. Pupils love to answer questions and often show their interest in a topic by posing questions of their own. The excellent input of support staff has a very positive impact on pupils' learning.

The use of assessment to raise standards is outstanding. The excellent use of data provides teachers with the precise information they need to set continually challenging targets and to quickly identify difficulties the pupils are experiencing with aspects of their learning.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 1**

The curriculum is outstanding across the school. In the Reception classes the balance between activities that are led by an adult and those that the children choose for themselves is excellent. The indoor and outdoor areas contain a wealth of stimulating activities that provide excellent opportunities for the children to develop and practise key skills. In Key Stage 1, the curriculum is wide and very well balanced with subjects interlinking with one another in a meaningful way giving a real context to the pupils' learning. However, although music receives its fair share of teaching time, not enough use is made of music across school life as a stimulus for learning, and it does not have a high profile in cross-curricular topics. Throughout the school, excellent use is made of the input of visitors to enrich the pupils' knowledge and understanding, and visits to places of interest do much to enhance topic work by bringing learning to life. The richness of the curriculum does a great deal to prepare pupils for the next stage in their education and to promote very high levels of personal and social development.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

Adults within the school provide an excellent role model for pupils through their own interactions. The ethos across the school is one of helping others, and this is reflected in the way in which pupils and adults support one another.

Support groups for pupils who are vulnerable significantly enhance their self-esteem and provide an excellent forum for the open discussion of matters that are of concern for individuals. Excellent assessment systems quickly highlight pupils who, for one reason or another, require a boost to their learning. Arrangements for safeguarding children are very robust and staff undertake annual training on child protection issues. The governing body plays an excellent role in ensuring that the school provides a safe learning environment for all pupils.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 1**

The leadership of the headteacher is superb. The headteacher has a calm understated approach that belies exceptionally high expectations of both pupils and staff, and a determination for the school to excel in all that it does. She has the full support of an excellent governing body which provides a sounding board and genuinely fulfils its role of 'critical friend', questioning and probing to ensure developments are timely, within budget and focused on raising standards.

The creation of the role of 'project post holder' reflects the imagination of the headteacher and governors, and gives opportunity for individual staff to take responsibility for leading an aspect of whole-school improvement for a fixed amount of time. By capitalising this way on individuals' expertise and enthusiasm, ideas such as the 'gifted programme' are now thoroughly embedded in practice and impacting significantly on the progress and attainment of all pupils. In addition staff gain experience of leadership and management so that they are very well prepared for the next stage in their career.

Since the last inspection the school has made exceptional progress and because of the total commitment of staff is extremely well placed for its next planned phase of improvement.

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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?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

### Achievement and standards

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

### 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	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	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	1

### The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
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?	1

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

13 December 2007

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of RA Butler Infant School, Saffron Walden, CB11 3DG

I am writing to thank you for the lovely welcome you gave us when we inspected your school a short time ago, and to let you know what we found out. We think that RA Butler Infant School is an excellent school, and we were pleased to see how happy you all are. You work very hard in lessons, and make excellent progress in reading, writing, mathematics, science and information and communication technology. We loved talking to the school council about its work, and can see what an important role this group has in helping to improve the life and work of the school. Your behaviour is excellent. You know what makes a good friend, and do your best to be kind to others. If you have worries you told us that you can go to any adult for help. You know very well what you have to do to make sure that you stay safe and healthy, and we were pleased to hear that the school has 'Healthy Schools' status.

We think that your teachers are doing a fantastic job. They make lessons interesting and exciting for you, and keep setting you new challenges so that you do not get bored with your learning. You told us how much you like going on visits to different places in the area, and we know you are very interested when visitors come into school to show you new ideas, such as the mosaics in Reception. We did notice that music is not as popular as some of the other subjects, and we have asked your teachers and the headteacher to make sure that you have more opportunities other than in music lessons to listen to and make music.

One of the main reasons you have such a great school is the headteacher. She is doing an outstanding job of leading the school and knows exactly what the next steps are to make it even better. The governors are very supportive and keen for the school to do well. They too are excellent, and because of their careful management of the budget, the school can keep moving forwards.

We are sorry that we missed your Christmas concert, but hope it went well.

Best wishes from

Marina Gough (Additional Inspector)