

R A Butler Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115304
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	290198
Inspection dates	23 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Roger Brown

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	7 – 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	313
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Caroline Lanskey
Headteacher	Mrs Gayle Mawson
Date of previous school inspection	4 – 8 March 2002
School address	South Road Saffron Walden Essex CB11 3DG
Telephone number	01799 523651
Fax number	01799 521350

Age group	7 – 11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the school's leadership to evaluate its impact on the standards pupils now achieve and to confirm the progress that pupils make in their learning. Also, aspects of teaching and learning were evaluated to check that pupils now receive high quality academic guidance to support their development. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation, national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records, policies, minutes and the parents' questionnaires. In addition, the work of the teachers was observed in visits to all classes, and interviews were undertaken with some teachers, senior members of staff and a range of pupils. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

R A Butler Junior School is of above average size. It serves the market town of Saffron Walden and three nearby villages. Almost all of the pupils are of White British heritage, with a small number from a variety of different backgrounds. A very small number do not speak English as their first language. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average, as is the number of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities. The school's population is socially and economically mixed, but the attainment of the pupils when they start at the school is usually above average. The school has been awarded Healthy School status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

R A Butler Junior School is an outstanding school in almost every respect. The pupils achieve standards that are well above those achieved nationally in all respects. This has been the case since the last inspection, but the school's results have been improving at a faster pace than the results nationally and are exceptionally high overall. Standards in science and reading are exceptionally high, and standards in mathematics are now almost as outstanding. The one element that is a relative weakness is writing. Standards in writing are above average, but even though the progress pupils make with their writing is very good, it is not as outstanding as is their progress in every other area.

Learning at all levels in this exciting school is dynamic, thoughtfully conceived and highly effective. Teaching and learning are outstanding. All pupils thrive because the teachers and teaching assistants are focussed on doing their absolute best for every individual child. The teaching is challenging, interesting and varied. The strong and diverse range of skills and expertise amongst the teachers mean the pupils have a rich resource to learn from. The school believes that every child is gifted and talented in some respect and has developed a very effective three tier system of learning to put this philosophy into practice. It begins with the identification of the skills and talents of each pupil. Then the pupils get the chance to attend special events such as science demonstrations and artistic presentations; and finally, the school has begun to develop individual programmes of learning supported by a mentor. It also has exceptionally successful systems to support pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities. The school's response to the needs of each pupil is flexible, agile and informed by an impressive array of knowledge, skills, experience and talent.

The school has created a superb learning environment for pupils. Despite having to work with a diverse and complex arrangement of 'temporary' and permanent buildings the school makes excellent use of every aspect of its facilities. The high quality library and librarian contribute to the outstanding progress in reading. The excellent drama provision which is supported by good quality lighting and stage effects, along with a quality wardrobe department, ensures that every pupil can take part in a demanding and entertaining production each year. This supports the development of their confidence, enhances their speaking and listening skills, and transfers into lessons where drama is used to great effect. This allows pupils to express empathy with the subject matter whilst exploring complex and difficult themes.

The school grounds are constantly being developed. Great sporting facilities, supported by high quality professional coaches encourage pupils to participate in a rich variety of events and disciplines. These enhance their commitment to the school and help to motivate their desire to explore new areas of learning. Science, mathematics, art and design all draw on the school's facilities. A thoughtful series of visits and residential experiences all help to ensure that the curriculum provides a rich and stimulating diet to support all pupils' learning.

In this school, learning is often viewed as great fun. There is an undoubted focus on high achievement, but this is balanced by a freedom to enjoy oneself, and from time to time, to excel at an event or in a discipline that is not just focused on the basic, but essential academic disciplines. It is little wonder then that the pupils hold this school in such high regard and that their level of attendance is so high.

The vast majority of parents are wholly supportive of the school, with many writing to express their thanks in such terms as, 'Our son has made excellent progress during his time at R A Butler, and has benefited from a wonderfully diverse and broad education delivered by a team of enthusiastic and dedicated staff.' Every pupil that was spoken to recognised the quality of the school. Some older pupils who had started their education elsewhere spoke feelingly about how much better their experience was after moving to this school, whilst those who had only attended this school explained with pride how it had got better and better over the last few years.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding, guided and supported by excellent care, guidance and support from all staff. A smooth transition from the infant school is complemented by excellent preparation for the pupils to move on to the high school. Exceptional cooperation between the schools allows some Year 6 pupils to tackle elements of the high school curriculum and hence accelerate their progress. Pupils have many opportunities to say what should happen at the school. Presently, one of their main concerns is to reduce the environmental impact of their school, and their ideas are being implemented. Pupils run a full programme of activities in support of a wide range of charities and show a great commitment to supporting their community. These factors make a significant contribution to their preparation for adult life, but the school recognises it could do more to develop pupils' economic awareness.

Successful leadership at all levels characterises this school. The headteacher, supported by the governors has established a culture of high expectations and strong commitment to the development of each individual child. Great communication, strong teamwork and first-class levels of cooperation allow all staff to play a full role in the school's development. Detailed, comprehensive and powerfully effective systems of monitoring and evaluating pupil progress have helped to raise the quality of teaching and learning. Taken together, these explain the sustained, continuous improvement over the past four years and augur well for its future.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the standard of writing that pupils achieve to bring this into line with the outstanding quality that is achieved in other aspects of their work.
- Develop pupils' economic awareness in preparation for a successful role in adult life.

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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
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	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
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
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 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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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

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.



24 May 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of R A Butler Junior School, Saffron Walden, Essex CB11 3DG

Thank you for your warm welcome when I visited your school. I really enjoyed my visit and would like to share with you what I thought about your school.

You go to a great school. Your headteacher, staff and governors are working very hard to make it the best school it can be and have some wonderful ideas about how to do this.

I was impressed by the role you play in making R A Butler such a super school. For instance, your ideas about making your school even more environmentally friendly are excellent, and I know your teachers intend to act on them. I was also delighted to see how hard working you were in your classrooms and really impressed with the quality of your work. The one thing I would like you to improve is the quality of your writing. I know that it is already good, but it is not yet as stunning as the quality of your reading, or as splendid as the work you do in science.

With so many great things happening in your school – the gifted and talented programme, sports, drama, art, music, French, visits to interesting places, along with your work for charities and your local community – it is hard for me to ask your teachers to do even more. Nevertheless, I would like them to develop stronger links with businesses and industry so that you are even better prepared for your next school and when you become adults.

Thank you once again and good luck in the future.

Roger Brown
Lead inspector