

East Stour Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118367
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	295410
Inspection dates	12–13 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Patricia Davies

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	343
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	A Young
Headteacher	Elizabeth Shears-Warren
Date of previous school inspection	8 March 2006
School address	Earlsworth Road South Willesborough Ashford TN24 0DW
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

East Stour is a larger than average school on the outskirts of Ashford. Numbers are rising and so is the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, which is now well above average across the school and high in some year groups. More pupils are moving in and out of the school and this is particularly high in Years 5 and 6. Most pupils are from White British families. More pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds are joining the school, although they are still a very small minority. A few pupils are learning to speak English as an additional language. Not all the children who attend the school's Nursery go through to its Reception group and many more new children join at Reception. Attainment on entry to the Nursery is below the expected level and well below expectations on entry to Reception, especially in language and literacy skills and within aspects of mathematical development.

When the school was last inspected it was found to be in need of significant improvement and given a Notice to Improve.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness of East Stour is satisfactory. The school has worked resolutely to advance the improvement noted at the time of its last inspection. As a result, academic achievement is now satisfactory, as is the quality of teaching and learning. Therefore, in accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. The close attention to pupils' pastoral needs is a strong element of the school's satisfactory care, guidance and support. This focus has brought about important improvements within pupils' satisfactory personal development and well-being, securing good behaviour and increased attendance. These factors create a valuable foundation for learning, as do pupils' good attention and enthusiasm during lessons.

A satisfactory curriculum provides a secure structure for teaching. The careful tracking of assessment information enables staff to modify the curriculum to pick up on particular areas of weakness and meet pupils' needs more successfully. Consequently, pupils now make good progress in lessons much more often than they did before. Progress is consistently good in the Nursery and Reception classes because activities here are especially imaginative and stimulating. Progress is more variable in other year groups. In particular, some of the very small group of pupils learning to speak English as an additional language make relatively slower progress than many other pupils, largely because their progress is not checked against key objectives. The school is very well aware that there must be consistently good progress in order to make up lost ground. Improvements to provision and progress have not yet significantly influenced standards and, because attainment is also affected by the growing numbers of pupils with learning difficulties, standards are still very low in English, mathematics and science.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher continues to give a strong lead on improvement and is well supported by the governing body. There is a secure grasp of the school's academic effectiveness and where it needs to go. Teaching and learning are checked rigorously by the most senior leaders. The school is gradually developing the monitoring role of other key managers and subject leaders so that they can play a similarly robust role in improving achievement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make sure that achievement is consistently good for all pupils to raise standards in English, mathematics and science.
- Check the performance of pupils learning to speak English as an additional language against key objectives to ensure that they make the best possible progress.
- Ensure all key managers and subject leaders monitor the school's work rigorously and play a full part in improving academic performance. A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory, including for those pupils with learning difficulties. Progress is now consistently good across the Nursery and Reception classes. Standards by the end of Reception are below expectations, these children having started school with attainment well below the expected level. Although there has been some good achievement in Years 1 to 6

during this school year, progress varies and is satisfactory overall. In addition, some of the few pupils learning to speak English as an additional language are not progressing as well as many other pupils.

Increased progress has not yet had enough time to make significant inroads on standards. In addition, attainment is also affected by the greater proportions of pupils with learning difficulties. As a result, standards remain very low in Years 2 and 6. The school has focused especially, and with growing success, on improving English, particularly writing. Whilst mathematics has received a lighter touch, weaknesses in mathematical calculation are also being tackled effectively. Science remains the weakest subject. It has also been selected by the school as a priority for improvement and pupils are now making at least satisfactory progress during science lessons.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Pupils behave well, particularly in lessons, and are very courteous and friendly. Good personal and social skills are nurtured rapidly in the Nursery and Reception, so that most children are confident and independent. These, and other pupils, are keen to get on with their work, showing good levels of enjoyment. Pupils point to a wide range of subjects that they particularly like, and the occasional noisiness in lessons generally arises from their enthusiasm. Attendance has improved considerably over the last year and is now satisfactory. Placed alongside their gradually increasing academic progress, these attributes contribute satisfactorily to pupils' future life at secondary school and beyond.

Improvements to provision have not yet had a full impact on the extent to which pupils eat healthily, even though they know which foods they should avoid! Although there have been some concerns about bullying in the past, this was not raised as an issue by pupils during discussion and indicates that they are now much more aware of how to keep safe from behaviour of this kind. Pupils make valuable contributions to the school and wider community through their 'buddying' of new arrivals from abroad, mentoring of younger pupils, and fund raising. Regular meetings of the school council enable pupils to influence decisions about, for example, improving playtime facilities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Much of the teaching is now good, but still too variable for pupils' longer term progress to be consistently well paced. Detailed planning and clear learning goals give teaching a strong steer. Lesson activities are generally matched appropriately to pupils' abilities, although tasks should, sometimes, be more demanding for the more able. In all classes, pupils are interested and engaged because new skills and knowledge are presented within imaginative themes and tasks. This approach has been particularly successful in encouraging boys to write more and with enjoyment. Teaching assistants are fully involved during lessons, working closely with small groups.

Where teaching is relatively less successful, too much noise is tolerated and some pupils lose their good attention or miss instructions. Sometimes, the best use is not made of questioning

to draw back pupils whose attention has temporarily wandered during discussion, or to explore and extend understanding.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is well focused on English and mathematics, using an intensive programme of support that builds up pupils' basic skills systematically. Because assessment information is used more extensively, planning is regularly modified to tackle areas of weakness in pupils' attainment. Although improvements to science are not as far ahead as those in English and mathematics, the school has started to tackle specific weaknesses in the use of scientific language to help pupils explain their ideas. Information and communication technology has a much higher profile, particularly through improvements to resources.

Trips and visits, dramatic and musical performances, sporting tournaments with other schools, and learning about the traditions of other countries valuably extend pupils' cultural awareness and social development. The introduction of French has added a further dimension. Staff and pupils are keen to add to the vitality and richness of the curriculum. Themed weeks and 'Challenge Time' have allowed for connections to be made between subjects and similar links are now appearing more frequently in lessons. This approach has already been implemented across the Nursery and Reception classes, where a wide range of lively and stimulating activities are both academically successful and good fun.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school devotes considerable care to families and pupils who are particularly in need of support. Members of staff responsible for working with families, mentoring pupils and supporting those with learning difficulties work in close liaison. This work has been very effective with the most needy and vulnerable pupils. The increasing numbers of pupils who come from other countries are settled quickly and happily in to school. Strategies to promote good attendance have also proved to be greatly successful. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils and ensuring pupils' good health and security are thorough. In all this work, links with outside agencies are extensive and used well. Good links with secondary schools include a transitional programme that allows pupils to confront and explore their hopes and fears for the next stage of their education.

Staff use assessment information with increasing confidence, especially to identify those not meeting their targets and arrange extra help. Learning targets are a well established feature in English and mathematics. However, the school has yet to make secure arrangements for tracking the progress of those pupils learning to speak English as an additional language against locally agreed criteria. Work is marked regularly, although comments do not always suggest where improvements could be made.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The focus on improvement is steadfast and led strongly by the headteacher, and with the close support of other members of the senior leadership team. Over the past year teaching has become more effective and, when combined with pupils' good behaviour and increased

attendance, there is a positive climate for learning which is evident in the increasing rate of progress. The school is fully aware, however, that it still has much more to do to make sure that good progress is routine and standards rise above their present very low levels.

Leadership skills continue to develop amongst other staff. The work of year group teams has established valuable lines of communication between senior leaders and other staff members. There is stronger team work and greater shared accountability for academic performance. Nevertheless, whilst teaching has been monitored robustly by the most senior leaders, those responsible for year groups, subjects and other key aspects of the school's work are not yet checking the quality and impact of initiatives to the same extent. They are not, therefore, able to play a full part in bringing about improvement. Given all these factors, the school's capacity for further improvement is satisfactory.

Governors are now a good source of challenge and support. They have actively sought bespoke training to develop their role and are closely involved in planning and evaluating the school's strategic direction through their leadership group.

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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
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

13 June 2007

Dear Pupils

East Stour Primary School, Ashford, Kent TN24 0DW

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. You were polite, friendly and helpful and we enjoyed talking with you. This letter is to tell you some of the things we found out about your school, and what it has been asked to do to make sure you all do the very best you can. When your school was last inspected it was found to need a lot of improvement. Now, however, your school is doing a satisfactory job. All the staff and governors have worked hard over the last year to make improvements and, as a result, your progress is satisfactory. The children in Nursery and Reception make good progress.

Here are some other important things about you and your school.

- Your behaviour is good, particularly in lessons, where you are attentive and interested.
- Teaching is satisfactory and made much more fun by imaginative topics and activities - like testing out the best material to make a crash mat for Humpty Dumpty, or planning your production of 'Joseph and his Technicolour Dreamcoat'!
- You all come to school much more regularly which gives you lots more opportunities to learn.
- Staff take good care of you and track carefully how well you are doing.
- Staff are also planning ways in which they can make learning even more interesting and have already made a start with your theme weeks and 'Challenge Time'.

This is what your school has been asked to do to make things even better.

- Make sure that your progress is good all the time so that you reach much higher standards in English, mathematics and science.
- Make sure that those of you learning to speak English as a new language all do as well as you possibly can.
- See that all the members of staff who look after subjects and important areas of the school's work check what is happening very closely so that they can play a much greater part in making things better.

Our very best wishes for the future. Yours sincerely

Patricia Davies Lead inspector