



Friars Primary School and Nursery

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 134704
Local Authority SOUTHEND-ON-SEA
Inspection number 298611
Inspection dates 7–8 February 2007
Reporting inspector Martin Beale

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Constable Way
School category	Community		Shoeburyness, Southend on Sea
Age range of pupils	3–11		Essex SS3 9XX
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01702 294837
Number on roll (school)	455	Fax number	01702 382820
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Michael Lambert
		Headteacher	Mrs Anne Germanacos
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This large school was formed in September 2004 by the amalgamation of the former infant and junior schools. It is in an area where many families experience considerable social and economic disadvantages. The number on roll is falling because of declining birth rates in the area. Free school meal eligibility is double the national average. Pupil turnover is high and constitutes a real barrier to raising attainment. Attainment on entry is falling year by year and is currently well below that normally expected of three-year olds. All but a few pupils are of White British heritage and only a very small number speaks English as an additional language. An average proportion has learning difficulties or disabilities and a small amount of pupils have statements of special educational needs.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The inspection confirms the school's view that its effectiveness is satisfactory. Good leadership and management have moved the school forward enormously since its opening. The headteacher has skilfully managed the school through this period with valuable support from senior staff and governors. All aspects of the school's work are improving and some are already good because school self-evaluation is accurate and thorough. However, it is too soon for improved provision to impact fully on learning and achievement because high levels of pupil mobility continue to lower standards. Pupils who leave have generally been more able than those replacing them. Nevertheless, parents are very pleased with the children's progress and express much support for the school.

The school is an interesting place in which to learn, not least because of its good curriculum. Links with other organisations are exploited well to support individuals, and contribute much to the good care, support and guidance. Pupils say how safe they feel, and that there is always someone to turn to with a problem. As one pupil said, 'We are one big family'. Personal development and well-being are good. The pupils grow into polite young people who enjoy learning. They make sensible choices about diet and exercise, and contribute much to the life of the school and the community.

Many inconsistencies in teaching have been tackled successfully but some still remain. Although there are many good lessons and the quality of teaching and learning are improving it remains satisfactory overall. The high expectations of many teachers are not universal, and teachers do not always use classroom assistants effectively. However, much attention is placed on finding ways for pupils to succeed, even if they are only at the school for a short time. Support for pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities and for the small number with English as an additional language is effective, and enables them to make satisfactory progress. Pupils learn to be part of a team, but have limited opportunities to take responsibility for improving their learning, because teachers do not always use assessment information effectively or mark work in a way that shows pupils clearly how they can improve.

The youngest children make a good start through effective teaching in the stimulating environment of the Nursery and Reception classes. However, their weak skills on entry mean many do not reach standards expected of them by the time they enter Year 1. Progress is satisfactory across Years 1 to 6 but inconsistent. Targets are reasonably challenging and generally met. Progress in science has been slower than in English and mathematics because of insufficient teaching of enquiry skills. Weaker writing compared with reading is partly the result of very low attainment on entry. However, until recently, basic skills have not been taught effectively, and opportunities for writing in other subjects were not fully exploited. Achievement is satisfactory, but standards are below average by the end of Year 6, largely because of the impact of pupil mobility. Nevertheless, pupils' satisfactory academic progress combined with their social skills provides a solid base for the next stage of their education.

Even though standards remain below average, the school provides good value for money because senior staff and governors have built a good capacity for further improvement. In a relatively short time, they have dealt effectively with the challenges of low attainment on entry, high pupil mobility and considerable staffing changes. They have also steered the school through constraints on funding caused by falling pupil numbers and a shortfall from the time of the amalgamation. Their careful planning and securing of other funding has led to much improvement to the environment and resources, although there is scope for more effective and creative use by teachers of the technology available to make learning more interesting.

What the school should do to improve further

- Bring teaching more consistently to the quality of the best by ensuring that expectations are consistently high, more effective use is made of technology and support staff are better deployed.
- Raise standards in writing by teaching basic skills more effectively and giving pupils opportunities to develop writing in a wider range of subjects.
- Base science teaching throughout the school on learning through the development of skills of enquiry and investigation.
- Make better use of assessment information and marking so that pupils are clear about their targets and the steps they need to take to achieve them.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall, although there are clear indications that effective leadership and management is already beginning to improve the progress that many pupils make. Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage, although the standards of a large proportion are below those normally expected of five-year-olds by the time they enter Year 1. The 2006 results for pupils in Year 2 were below average in reading, writing and mathematics. However, the school's tracking indicates that the 2006 scores represent good progress in reading and mathematics, but satisfactory progress in writing in relation to their attainments on entry to school or at the beginning of Year 1. Progress is satisfactory overall in Years 3 to 6, but more able pupils make slower progress in science than in the other core subjects. The action taken to improve science is bearing fruit but has not reached the top of the school. Test results in 2006 for Year 6 pupils were below average overall, but were better in English than in mathematics and science. Here again, the school's results were affected by the performance of lower attaining pupils who joined the school during Key Stage 2. Many pupils actually made better progress than the overall results suggest. However, the school is not complacent. Effective monitoring has been quick to identify writing as a weaker area and as a focus for attention, although it is too early yet to judge if this is leading to sustained improvement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being are good. Pupils are friendly, confident and helpful. They are happy at school, enjoy learning and are enthusiastic about school life, particularly the clubs and additional activities. There is little they would change. Attendance has improved through the action taken by the school and is now close to that in schools nationally. Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They are confident that the very rare incidents of bullying are dealt with firmly and effectively. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They grow in self-awareness and reflect on their feelings and actions. Pupils take their responsibilities seriously, such as the buddy system and the school council. One pupil said 'The school council is a central part of the school.' They develop a respect for the beliefs and customs of others, for example through links with a school in Shanghai.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The overall quality of teaching is improving because effective procedures for managing teachers' performance are beginning to make a difference. However, teaching is currently satisfactory overall because the good features seen many lessons are not consistently in place across the school. Teachers encourage all pupils to participate and feel valued. Interactive whiteboards are often used well to stimulate interest and help develop ideas, but some teachers do not use this resource to the best effect. When carefully deployed, teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning, for example by supporting lower attaining pupils or pupils new to the school; this is another area where practice is not consistent. Homework plays an increasing part in the learning of pupils through the development of key skills or research for topics. Pupils are generally clear about what they are expected to do and why. Teachers plan lessons to meet individual needs, but marking and assessment do not give pupils a clear understanding of how well they are doing and how to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school's good curriculum places emphasis on developing basic skills and supporting the pupils' personal development. Recent measures to improve provision for writing and the teaching of investigative skills are beginning to take effect but will need to be further embedded in order to have their full impact on standards. Pupils particularly value the wide range of relevant and interesting programmes and the contribution of specialist staff. These activities meet their needs and stimulate their interest and imagination. The enrichment activities during and after the school day greatly enhance their experiences and are much enjoyed. Gifted and talented pupils have an increasing range of challenges to extend their skills and thinking. Music, dance and art feature

strongly in the school's life and there are many opportunities for pupils to learn about other cultures. They talk enthusiastically about additional activities such as 'Chinese Week' and clearly benefit from this in-depth experience. Effective use is made of the outdoor areas to enhance learning and enjoyment.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Parents are very happy that securing their children's welfare is paramount to the school. Pastoral care is excellent. A very wide range of strategies have been adopted to help pupils to feel safe and secure and to integrate newly arrived pupils. These support very well their personal development and also generate a really happy atmosphere throughout the school. Child protection and health and safety procedures are very thorough and clearly understood by all. The needs of pupils who find learning difficult are carefully identified and action taken to support their development results in satisfactory progress in respect of the targets that are set for them. The school has good procedures for tracking the progress of pupils and setting targets. This enables effective programmes to be put in place where a pupil is not meeting expectations. However, these targets are not always shared with pupils in a way that helps them to understand how well they are doing or the steps they need to take to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are effective because pupils' achievements, though currently satisfactory, are improving. This stems from a shared view of how the school can get better. Members of staff are a strong team. They are committed to the direction the headteacher has established and keen to improve their own performance. Together they place considerable emphasis on finding ways for all pupils to be included in, and benefit from, all that the school provides. Governors have been fully involved in supporting the school through its recent changes and fulfil their responsibilities well. Processes for helping staff to do their jobs better are clearly established and this is improving the quality of teaching and learning. However, the role of subject managers is not yet sufficiently developed for them to take a major role in leading improvements. Nevertheless, monitoring is thorough. It leads to accurate school self-evaluation and prompt action to bring about improvements. In less than three years, the school has built an impressive record of successful improvement and a strong platform from which to meet remaining challenges.

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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?	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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
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	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
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?	2
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.

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	2
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

8 February 2007

Dear Pupils

Friars Primary School and Nursery, Constable Way, Shoeburyness, Essex SS3 9XX

I am writing to thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave to the inspectors when we visited your school. You were all very kind, helpful and showed how proud you are of your school. We enjoyed talking with you and your teachers and watching you learn, particularly during the activities in 'Chinese Week'. There are many aspects of your school that we liked. You, your parents and teachers are right in thinking that you go to a school that is improving.

You make satisfactory progress during your time at Friars. You thoroughly enjoy school, attend regularly, work hard and behave sensibly. Your teachers provide a wide range of interesting activities to help you learn. You settle in well when you join at whatever stage. The care and support you receive is good, particularly when you find learning difficult. You are learning the importance of diet and exercise for a healthy lifestyle. You take your responsibilities seriously and make a considerable contribution to the life of the school.

Your teachers and governors are trying hard to make the school even better. There are some areas where we judge that improvements could be made. In some classes, more should be expected of you. Better use needs to be made of the interactive whiteboards and your teaching assistants. Your written work is improving but there is still more to be done if you are to maintain this. You need to be given more opportunity to undertake scientific investigations. I am also suggesting that it is made clearer to you how to improve your work so that you can achieve your targets. I feel sure you and your teachers will work hard to make this all happen.

We wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Martin Beale

Lead Inspector