

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045  
F 020 7421 6644  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



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Mrs Sarah Beale  
Headteacher  
Westmeads Infant School  
Cromwell Road  
Whitstable  
Kent  
CT5 1NA

Dear Mrs Beale

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Curriculum Innovation

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 14 September 2006 to look your school's curriculum and how you have promoted innovation.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions, but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff, parents, governors and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and visits to some lessons and the school at work.

The overall effectiveness of the curriculum was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Taken as a whole, pupils' achievement across all subjects and aspects of the curriculum in all year groups is outstanding. Pupils learn rapidly because they are so enthusiastic and actively involved in their learning. Standards are particularly high in speaking and listening, an area of significant emphasis in the school. Pupils listen to adults and each other very carefully and respectfully. They generally speak with accuracy, humour and understanding of their audience. However, the pupils' achievement in national tests in reading, writing and mathematics, whilst consistently good, does not stand out as strongly as it does in other areas. In particular, fewer pupils reach the higher levels than might be expected given the overall excellence of the work of the school.

## Quality of curriculum

The pupils really enjoy a very exciting and engaging curriculum. It is based on the whole school working on an interesting topic question at the same time. Examples are 'Are people the same all over the world?' or 'How can we make a bath toy which floats and moves?'

Each of these topics involves several investigations and problem solving activities which help make pupils independent, excited learners. Also underpinning the topics are key skills and understandings identified by the school for each subject, which fulfil the National Curriculum. These are used differently for every age group and the varied needs of the pupils in each class. This ensures a very rigorous cross-curricular approach, with clear lines of progression in each subject. The curriculum is exceptionally broad, with Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) at its centre. Because of this, pupils gain many skills which will help them in later life, such as perseverance, teamwork, commitment and sharing and developing ideas. Classrooms, and outdoor areas, are constantly a hive of purposeful, happy activity.

This curriculum is carefully personalised to each pupil. This relies heavily on the regular and accurate assessments of individual pupils, made by staff informally and formally, in all subjects including PSHE and personal development. This begins early: there is an effective individualised induction and assessment system for new pupils before they start school, including home visits. As they move through the school, all pupils' learning styles and preferences are appropriately analysed and shared, and pupils know how they are individually special. All pupils receive helpful personal targets three times a year in every subject, and more frequently in English and mathematics. Members of staff work very closely together in planning and delivering the curriculum, modelling strong teamwork to the pupils. They carefully adjust their planning each day to take account of assessment information which helps pupils make fast progress.

## Leadership and management of the curriculum

The headteacher is a very effective leader and manager. Working closely with her supportive deputy and staff, she has led the school from having serious weaknesses four years ago to a position of considerable strength now. The school community, including parents, is actively involved. The headteacher is very clear about what she believes about the curriculum, based on evidence. She makes sure that assessments made of children are across the whole range of skills and subjects. With her staff, she has a well-developed philosophy of how children learn and how this can be so different for each individual. At the same time, she is reflective and open to change. These strengths have enabled the rapid curriculum development in the school.

As a result of the trust shown in them, and their success, members of staff form a close-knit, confident and dedicated team who help and challenge each other. Subject leaders play a key role, ensuring each subject is important even though much of the curriculum is not taught in subject lessons, as such. They support their colleagues in monitoring carefully how individual pupils are achieving in each subject. However, there is currently no system for making whole-school summaries of standards and pupil progress in each subject, including English and mathematics, or identifying overall trends clearly enough. In discussion, the school recognises this is a gap, and, wasting no time on the day of the inspection visit, the headteacher began to make plans with staff to address this.

## Inclusion

This is an exceptionally inclusive school and one of its many strengths. All pupils receive appropriate personalised provision whatever their needs or background.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensure that the assessments of individual pupils are better aggregated, so that whole school standards and trends can be more readily identified
- consider ways of involving pupils in understanding their learning further still by discussing with them why the school curriculum is planned in the way it is.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton  
Her Majesty's Inspector