

Friars Grove Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114761
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	311700
Inspection dates	27–28 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Kathleen Yates

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	122
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Pat Baker
Headteacher	Mrs Helen Dudley-Smith
Date of previous school inspection	23 February 2004
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Upland Drive Colchester Essex CO4 0PZ
Telephone number	01206 843683
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Age group	4–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This school is smaller than the average infant school and pupils come from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds. Whilst the majority of pupils are of White British heritage, the proportion from minority ethnic backgrounds has risen and is close to the national average. The percentage of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. Few pupils start or leave at other than the expected times. Attainment on entry to the school is typical of that normally found, although in some year groups it is lower in communication, language and literacy. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) are taught in two Reception classes. At the end of Year 2, pupils transfer to the neighbouring junior school. Since the last inspection, there have been changes to the senior leadership team, with the appointment of a new deputy head, two years ago and a new headteacher a year ago.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Friars Grove Infant School is a good school. It has some outstanding features. Every single pupil is important and has the opportunity to succeed. Changes to the senior leadership team since the last inspection have resulted in many new initiatives. At the forefront of the school's success is the dynamic partnership of the head teacher and her deputy. Together they know exactly how the school motto of 'A small world today.... The whole world tomorrow!' is to take shape. In order to fulfil this ambition, they have created a particularly strong partnership with parents, who cannot praise the school highly enough. Typical of many, a parent wrote, 'the home-school relationship is very special and this makes for happy pupils'. The pupils agree, saying, 'our teachers are fantastic.' There are close links with the community, neighbouring schools and outside agencies, which the school is working hard to improve further. All work together well for the benefit of pupils' academic progress and personal well-being.

Pupils get off to a good start in the EYFS and do well in their learning. Even so, the standards attained by the children who left Reception classes most recently were below average in linking sounds and letters and in writing. The school has therefore put in place a range of strategies to improve these skills. By the end of Year 2, in 2008, national assessments demonstrated that standards were above average in reading and writing and pupils achieved well. Standards were average in mathematics and achievement was satisfactory because pupils had not always challenged sufficiently in the past. The school's recent initiatives are proving effective in tackling this area. All pupils make good progress and achieve well.

Personal development and well-being are good. Pupils behave well and try hard to succeed. They thoroughly enjoy the rich range of activities the curriculum offers. The contribution they make to the community is good. They have a good understanding of how to stay healthy and safe and to keep fit. Consequently, their personal development is boosted. The strong emphasis on respect and care for others promotes their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils love helping one another and talk enthusiastically about the school council and their involvement in decision making. They develop respect for, and understanding of, people from different backgrounds and walks of life.

Teaching and learning are good and assessment procedures are much more rigorous than at the time of the previous inspection. These have led to more effective systems to track pupils' progress. Care, support and guidance are good. Pastoral care is outstanding, enabling pupils to grow in confidence as they move through the school.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and her deputy have built a committed team of staff who work together very well. Governance is good. Governors share the drive for improvement and they carry out their duties well. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and the development plan identifies the key areas for improvement. However, it does not contain well-defined step-by-step targets to enable governors to more rigorously monitor how well the school is doing and the impact of initiatives on pupils' achievement. New subject leaders have recently been appointed to oversee English and mathematics. The good progress made since the previous inspection shows that the school is well placed for continued improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Parents rightly say that their children settle very quickly into school because induction arrangements are very carefully planned and very good relationships are forged. Routines are well established and children behave well because adults make expectations for learning and behaviour clear. Children achieve well because the teaching is of good quality and adults plan activities carefully to make sure that learning is enjoyable. Very good use is made of the extensive and well resourced outdoor area, which is a major improvement since the last inspection. Teaching assistants play a very important role and are instrumental in ensuring that children develop independence in their learning. Adults model good relationships well and children follow their lead eagerly. Staff talk to children about what they are doing, extending their vocabulary and understanding. Effective leadership of the EYFS ensures that learning opportunities are well planned, that activities meet the children's needs. All the necessary welfare requirements are met, including paediatric first aid training. Assessment procedures have recently been reviewed and the school has identified that, by the time they move into Year 1, most children reach average levels in all areas of learning, except in linking sounds and letters and in writing where they are sometimes below average. It is therefore placing a higher focus on this area in order to help children to reach higher standards in their writing. Some children exceed expectations in all areas of learning, most notably in their personal, social and emotional development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Maintain the current drive in the EYFS to improve standards in linking sounds and letters, and writing.
- Continue the focus on raising pupils' achievement and standards in mathematics by the end of Year 2 by ensuring that teaching always challenges pupils sufficiently.
- Further develop the school improvement planning to include well-defined step-by-step targets to enable governors to monitor how well the school is doing more rigorously.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The majority of pupils in the current Year 2 class are working at levels which continue to be above average in reading and writing. The school is implementing many new initiatives, including an early morning session where parents can work alongside their children to help them to reach higher standards in mathematics. Because of the good teaching they receive, pupils are likely to meet the challenging targets set for them. Pupils of all abilities, including those with English as an additional language and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, achieve well and make good progress. The main reason for this is the good support they receive for their learning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are enthusiastic and thoroughly enjoy their time in school. They have a good understanding of how to live a healthy and active lifestyle and of how to keep themselves safe. Assemblies, religious education and regular personal, social and health education lessons provide pupils with good opportunities to celebrate their different cultures, to be reflective and to

show consideration for others. Attendance is satisfactory, remaining broadly in line with national averages in recent years. Pupils enjoy the convenience of the school's own swimming pool and most have learnt to swim by the time they leave. Nearly all pupils behave well, although there is a very small minority who sometimes have difficulty in meeting the school's high expectations. Rare incidents of bullying and misbehaviour are dealt with swiftly. Those pupils who sometimes find it hard to make friends are supported well by the school's 'circle of friends' especially at playtimes. Pupils willingly take on responsibility for school life and do so with pride. Good basic skills prepare pupils well for their future lives. Of particular note is the confidence with which they readily engage in paired or group discussions.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

There is a strong emphasis on the basic skills and expectations are high. Good quality teaching keeps pupils focused in lessons and teaching assistants provide valuable support, particularly for pupils who find it hard to learn. Teachers use interactive whiteboards well to capture pupils' interests; they ask probing questions to check pupils' understanding of new learning. Pupils are confident to give clear explanations. Consequently, they learn to write for a purpose and are proud to share their work with others. Staff watch each pupil's progress closely and provide extra help for any who are falling behind. On a few occasions, when those who are forging ahead have completed their allotted tasks, there is not enough further challenge set, particularly in mathematics. An emphasis on reading for information and promoting new vocabulary to stimulate further interest in learning, is becoming an important teaching tool.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The use of staff subject expertise and improvements to the English curriculum have provided more opportunities for pupils to practise writing skills and are accelerating progress. A new library area provides pupils with greater access to pursue their love of reading both for information and for pleasure. Teachers are providing more opportunities for pupils to apply their knowledge of number to solve mathematical problems in subjects such as geography, science, and design and technology and thus make links across subjects. Involvement in a school sports partnership and input from secondary colleagues ensure that pupils' enjoyment of a range of pursuits and their understanding of healthy physical activities. A good range of popular and well-attended clubs acknowledged by the Activemark award, extends pupils' horizons and adds to their physical fitness and enjoyment of school. Music is a strength of the school and many pupils enjoy learning to play an instrument and singing in the choir.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Considerable staff commitment ensures that pupils feel extremely well supported and cared for. The progress of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is carefully monitored by the coordinator for special educational needs, who ensures that they receive good support. All pupils know that any problems they might have would be dealt with immediately. Safeguarding requirements are met fully so that pupils learn and play in a well-ordered, safe environment where there are good procedures for ensuring the health and safety of everybody.

The school makes every effort to encourage pupils to attend school, and does much to dissuade parents from taking their children out of school during term time. Individual targets have been set for reading, writing and mathematics. Some, but not all, pupils are aware of their targets and how to improve their learning. Pupils are beginning to take an active role in making assessments of their own work and that of their peers. This initiative is helping them to grow in independence and enhances their social skills.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school benefits greatly from the hard work and dedication of the headteacher and her deputy who are committed to making this school outstanding. They have worked tirelessly together to bring about much-needed improvements in a short space of time. They have reorganised the deployment of staff very effectively to manage change and secure continuous improvement. For example, the deputy has been overseeing many areas of responsibility, some of which have now been delegated to new subject leaders. Through effective training, they have the expertise and enthusiasm to carry out their duties. Consequently, they are beginning to take a prominent role in monitoring their subjects.

The governing body is hard working, committed, challenging and keenly aware of the strengths of the school. They have been instrumental in supervising the many improvements to the premises, resulting in an attractive and stimulating environment that encourages learning. Fundamental to the success of this very happy school is the palpable sense of team spirit, including that of the administrative team, which permeates into the community.

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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?	2
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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
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

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

1 December 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Friars Grove Infant School, Colchester, CO4 0PZ

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful to me when I visited your school recently. I really enjoyed talking with you, listening to your views and sharing in your lessons. Your discussions in talking partnerships and the trios were very impressive! Now I am going to share with you what I found out about your school.

I agree entirely with you and your parents that yours is a good school. It is easy to see why you enjoy coming to school very much. All the staff look after you exceptionally well so that you feel very safe and well cared for. You and your teachers all get on well and there is a very warm welcome for all those of you who are new to the school. You behave well and work hard so that you make good progress in your learning. Everyone works hard to keep improving your school; the new library area and the fantastic outdoor area for Reception children are very good examples of the changes made.

Your school is now going to help those of you in Reception classes to know your letters and sounds really well so that your writing gets better. To help those of you in Years 1 and 2, teaching will make sure you do as well in your number work as you do in other subjects. Finally, the school is going to make its plans clearer to show how they can make more rigorous checks on the areas identified for improvement.

I am sure that your school will go from strength to strength and you can play your part by coming to school as often as you can and by working as hard as you do now in your lessons.

I wish you well for the future and hope you continue to enjoy your school as much as you do now.

Yours sincerely,

Kathleen Yates

Lead inspector