

Whitmore Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114819
Local Authority	ESSEX LA
Inspection number	311717
Inspection dates	11–12 September 2007
Reporting inspector	George Derby

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	182
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Claire Barford
Headteacher	Mrs Iris Cerny
Date of previous school inspection	28 June 2004
School address	Whitmore Way Basildon Essex SS14 2TP
Telephone number	01268 520435
Fax number	01268 289673

Age group	7–11
Inspection dates	11–12 September 2007
Inspection number	311717

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Whitmore Junior School draws its pupils from an area of high social and economic need. Most pupils are of White British origin. The percentages eligible for a free school meal and of those with learning difficulties, including pupils with a statement of special educational needs, are very high. Many pupils join or leave the school during the course of Key Stage 2. Staff turnover in the past few years has been extreme. At the request of the local authority, a very experienced consultant headteacher joined the school at the beginning of the last school year; she is now running the school permanently. An acting deputy headteacher was seconded to the school at Easter on a part time basis. The school has seen a significant drop in pupil numbers since the last inspection. Pupils enter the school with attainment generally below average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

Whitmore Juniors has come through immensely troubled times. It still has a long way to go before it can be judged to be providing a satisfactory quality of education for its pupils but the 'dark cloud' of decline and underachievement is beginning to lift. The senior staff, aided by key governors, has halted the recent decline and are now leading the school on a secure journey of improvement. They have a clear view of what needs doing and how best to move the school forward. Much that needed addressing from the last inspection has not been tackled until recently; this is why the school is in such a weak position and improvement is inadequate. As a result, even though there are positive aspects to its work, the school is not yet providing a satisfactory education for its pupils or giving satisfactory value for money.

Whitmore now has the confidence of the community, staff, pupils and their parents. It works well with external agencies to support its improvement. The headteacher has made a significant difference, particularly to pupils' attitudes and readiness to learn. A few parents still have concerns about children's behaviour and progress, and rightly so in the latter case. However, many parents praise the changes made as do children and staff, stating that... 'the headteacher has her finger on the pulse' and 'the school has improved greatly...'. Their views indicate that over the past 12 months Whitmore Juniors has become a different school.

Staff morale is high. The headteacher is doing a good job at building the staff team and developing their capability. The climate for learning is good; the school is a safe place in which children can play and learn and pupils' behaviour is now satisfactory. They love coming to school, as seen by the notable improvement in their attendance. A satisfactory range of opportunities and activities is in place to enable children to make progress. However, the use of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills across subjects is just beginning and these are still not used enough to support pupils' learning, a weakness from the last inspection.

Standards in English, mathematics and science have been extremely low for the past four years. Pupils have not made the progress that they should. However, there are green shoots of improvement and recent work in English, especially in reading and writing, is paying off, particularly lower down the school.

The leadership of the headteacher and the acting deputy headteacher is good. With the chair of governors, they make a formidable and effective team, which has already put a great deal in place, but there is still much to do; they know their school well. However, the school's leadership and management remains inadequate overall because the work of subject leaders is only just beginning. This lack of leadership has had a devastating impact on the achievement of all pupils. The capacity to improve shown by the whole management team is now satisfactory. A lot of work has been done to improve the quality of teaching and to ensure that all teachers gain qualified teacher status. However, there is still too much inconsistency in teaching and learning and these are inadequate, as a result. There is not always enough focus on what pupils will learn, on matching work closely to their needs and on ensuring, the pace of learning is appropriate. All this leads to pupils' unsatisfactory achievement.

Care is satisfactory. Pastoral support for pupils is good. Systems for assessment are improving, but the information available is not always used by teachers to inform their planning of lessons. While pupils' progress is now carefully tracked there is not a systematic process in place which monitors pupils' progress over time. Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory.

They have a sound knowledge of how to keep safe and healthy. They make a satisfactory contribution to the school and local community but their economic well-being is inadequate because of their limited achievement.

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools (HMCI) is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to pupils' standards and achievement, the quality of teaching and learning and the role of subject leaders.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise pupils' standards and improve their achievement, particularly in English, mathematics and science.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that staff are knowledgeable about their subjects and pupils' needs, that there is a closer match of work to ability, and that the pace of learning increases.
- Improve the work of subject leaders so they have a better understanding of pupils' standards and achievement, influence the quality of provision and actively monitor and evaluate work in their subject areas.
- Increase the variety of ways pupils' learning is assessed in lessons and improve the use of the information gained to inform planning; ensure there is a systematic process of tracking pupils' progress over their time in school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

The headteacher has correctly prioritised pupils' reading and writing skills as a major area for improvement. Weaknesses in these in the past have held pupils back and were one of the reasons for the school's very low standards. The expertise of the acting deputy headteacher in these areas, means that significant numbers of pupils are now beginning to make the expected progress or better, especially in Years 3 and 4. Although the progress throughout the school in English was still not sufficient to raise standards in the 2007 Year 6 national tests the improvement in English was encouraging. The results of the tests in mathematics and science in 2007 were very low because initiatives to raise standards had not been in place long enough to impact on these. There was a small, but significant, rise in mathematics, but the schools' standards and progress overall are still limited. The school's use of challenging targets to support improvement through its raising achievement plan is sound.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Behaviour has improved. Last year far fewer pupils were excluded from school than in previous years, although exclusions still occur. However, pupils' attitudes in lessons are positive. There are still some incidents of a racist nature recorded although these are closely monitored. The school works hard to ensure that the few pupils who find it difficult to behave well do not disrupt the learning of others. Attendance is below average, but improving, because of the school's efforts to reward good attendance and discourage parents from keeping their children at home unnecessarily.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall. Pupils develop a good sense of responsibility as they move through the school, helping younger pupils, acting as play leaders and peer mediators. They raise funds for a range of charities, for example for a boat for a village affected by the Tsunami. Pupils have a satisfactory 'voice' in the running of the school through the school council. They have a sound understanding of the need to be healthy through eating and exercise but do not yet develop satisfactorily the basic skills they need for their future life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

The school's evaluations show that over the past year the amount of inadequate teaching has reduced and that there are good or better features to lessons; this picture was confirmed during the inspection. However, many teachers are still learning their 'craft' and there are inconsistencies in teaching and learning throughout the school. Staff put a great deal of effort into planning their lessons and write detailed plans. These still do not always make clear the different things that different groups will learn, including pupils with learning difficulties.

Most teachers use too narrow a range of ways to assess learning and make too many assumptions that pupils have understood. In only one class was planning adjusted on the basis of the teacher's evaluation of pupils' progress; the quality of this was outstanding and a model for others to learn from. While teaching assistants make an effective contribution to the practical part of the lesson they are not always deployed effectively during the introductions or the ends of these.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school is beginning to link subjects to develop and apply key skills that have been acquired in one subject in another. Planning documents ensure that pupils in the new mixed year groups in Years 3 and 4 are offered work that is appropriate for their aptitudes and ages although this is still in outline form and detailed planning is taking place over the year. Provision for personal, social and health education is satisfactory and promotes pupils' personal development soundly. Visits and visitors, including a well-known 'pop star' who shared his music and experiences to inspire the pupils, satisfactorily supplement lessons. A good range of extra-curricular activities, including golf and cheer leading, supports pupils' learning and social development. The curriculum is adapted satisfactorily to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties although teachers do not always take sufficient account of pupils' targets in their individual education plans in lessons.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall. The school takes good care of its pupils' physical and emotional needs. The home/school liaison officer is a valuable resource, particularly in supporting pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Procedures for safeguarding are in place and risk assessments take place regularly. Pupils feel safe in school and say that they can talk to their teachers. Academic guidance is satisfactory. The school has developed good systems to track progress over the course of last year and this is to be developed to show

year on year progress. Staff are now in a better position to know how well their pupils are doing. Senior leaders use this information well and are also guiding staff to make effective use of it. Pupils have targets in English and mathematics but most do not know what they need to do to improve. Marking is inconsistent and does not always help pupils understand how well they have done or how they can do better.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

There is a clear strategy for improving the school which is beginning to pay off. The headteacher has been particularly successful at helping staff to take more responsibility for pupils' learning and for building the capacity of the senior team. The senior team's skills and capability are satisfactory overall. Some are new and relatively inexperienced. They are a cohesive team with a strong desire to make things better and they have a clear remit. The leadership of subjects is not yet sufficiently effective because some subject leaders have not yet developed the skills they need. However, the development of their capability has already started with the acting deputy headteacher being an effective role model.

Governance is satisfactory. All statutory requirements are met and the governing body has been recently strengthened; it now has a measured approach to financial management. The chair in particular has done sterling work in moving the school forward and has a thorough knowledge of its issues. She is very astute and supportive but also makes demands on the school by asking 'hard questions'. A small number of governors make regular visits to the school. However, minutes do not always show how governors have monitored or responded to issues regarding standards and achievement.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

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

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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	4

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4
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?	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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?	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

13 September 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Whitmore Junior School, Essex, SS14 2TP

When Mrs Pangbourne and I visited your school on Tuesday and Wednesday this week we could not help noticing how polite and well behaved you were. You certainly enjoy your lessons and are keen to learn.

Many of you attend activities outside school, such as breakfast club and early morning homework club. It was good to see how sensible you are and how well the staff, such as your learning mentors, support you during these times. This makes a good start to the day for many of you.

We also agree with you and your parents that your headteacher has made a real difference to your school. Lots of improvements have been made over the last 12 months. Your attendance is better, you feel safe and the school is better equipped to help you learn. However, your school is doing less well than most other schools.

Mrs Cerny still has a lot to do to make your school even better and she is getting good help from the senior staff and governors.

You are doing better with your reading and writing and this is helping you with your learning in all sorts of subjects. You still need to improve your maths and science skills and you are capable of doing so!

Mrs Cerny is already working with your teachers on all of this. She is helping them to know how well you are learning because you sometimes need work which is harder to help you to learn much faster. This will help you do better in English, mathematics and science. She is also supporting the staff to make subjects better and to keep a track of your progress.

Yours sincerely,

George Derby

Lead Inspector