

Spring Meadow Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114834
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	311723
Inspection dates	21–22 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Gulshanbir Kayembe

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	272
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Andrew Schooler
Headteacher	Mrs Linda Gildea
Date of previous school inspection	3 November 2003
School address	Pound Farm Drive Dovercourt Harwich Essex CO12 4LB
Telephone number	01255 504528
Fax number	01255 240957

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average size school. Children start school with skills and knowledge that are well below those expected of this age group; many have particularly weak literacy and personal and social skills. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also above average although there are only a few who have statements for their special educational needs. The school has achieved the following nationally accredited awards: Basic Skills, Healthy Schools, Investors in People and The Football Association Charter Standard for Schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school provides a good all-round education for its pupils. They make good progress from low starting points to reach standards that are in line with national averages by the end of Year 6. Good teaching, leadership and management are key factors in the success of the school. Stimulating first-hand experiences, often involving the outdoor areas around the school, are increasingly used to enrich the curriculum. These engage pupils' interests, adding to their enjoyment. Outstanding pastoral care, strengthened by many external links, ensures that pupils are very well looked after. Hence, they feel safe and happy.

Children in the Foundation Stage get a good start to their education. They make good progress although standards remain below average, especially in literacy. Progress across Years 1 and 2 is a little slower, particularly in English, but satisfactory overall. This is partly because a significant minority of pupils begin with such low levels of literacy that they need more time to master basic skills. Progress is also hindered by missed opportunities for writing. For example, there is some overuse of worksheets in the younger classes. Pupils' progress accelerates as they move up the school and is consistently good across Years 3 to 6. As a result, standards of work improve at a good rate in English, mathematics and science. However, some weaknesses persist in English, such as in spelling and writing skills. Nonetheless, pupils achieve well in comparison to their starting points. They develop a wide range of skills in information and communication technology (ICT), and produce high standards of work in this subject. Given the improvements in English, mathematics and ICT by Year 6, pupils are well prepared for their next step in education and future life.

The curriculum makes a positive contribution to pupils' good personal development. As a result, they develop secure understanding of living healthily, making genuine efforts to put this into practice. Good management of pupils in lessons and around the school ensures they behave well. They get on well with one another and particularly enjoy lessons when actively involved. Work is regularly marked but written comments do not always provide clear improvement points. Consequently, opportunities are missed to focus pupils' attention on ways of improving, particularly in English. Some good examples of pupils assessing their own or one another's work are not yet widespread across the school.

The headteacher provides good leadership. She works in strong partnership with her deputy to pursue the school's vision of a creative and exciting curriculum that actively engages all pupils. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. A clear trend of improving performance, especially across Years 3 to 6, points to good capacity for further improvement. The school has a clear idea of how good it is but is not always systematic or rigorous enough in examining data or information from monitoring activities. This means that it is not always focused sharply enough on the detail of how to secure improvement or assessing the impact of new initiatives. Governors provide good oversight of the school's work and understand its needs well.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The Foundation Stage is well led and managed. A well-planned curriculum ensures that children have a balanced range of enjoyable, practical activities that meet their needs. Teaching is good. A high emphasis on children's personal development means they make good progress. They

behave well and most concentrate well when working. Good questioning helps them develop their ideas. However, sometimes adults do not probe enough or give children enough time to respond. Children's work is carefully assessed. Recently completed improvements have resulted in an excellent outdoor area. The curriculum has yet to be developed to include more extensive use of this for learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide pupils with more frequent opportunities for writing and clear guidance on what to do to improve to help raise standards in English.
- Be systematic and rigorous when analysing data and monitoring information to strengthen improvements and assess the impact of new initiatives.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Current standards in Year 2 are below national averages. Pupils are keen to write when given stimulating experiences to write about. Their ideas then flow and they cannot get them down fast enough. However, written work in Years 1 and 2 often contains poor spelling, handwriting, grammar and punctuation.

Standards are in line with national averages by the end of Year 6 in English, mathematics and science, indicating good achievement. In the 2007 national tests, a relatively strong Year 6 attained results that were above average in mathematics and science. Results remained average in English due to weaknesses in pupils' spelling and writing. Progress in writing is beginning to improve due to a stronger focus on spelling but the school knows it has more to do.

Pupils who find learning difficult make good progress in meeting their targets. Those learning English as an additional language achieve well and participate actively in lessons.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, cultural, moral and social development is good. Their self-confidence and sense of self-esteem improve as they get older. Pupils develop a firm understanding of right and wrong. Their knowledge of cultural diversity is not as secure due to limited opportunities for first-hand experiences. Being willing learners, pupils work well together and participate happily in the activities offered. The school works well with parents and external agencies to achieve average attendance levels.

Pupils have a good understanding of safe practices and behave sensibly in school. They take advantage of the range of physical activities in lessons and after school to increase their fitness. Whilst the school provides good support to encourage pupils to think for themselves, some tend to remain dependent on adults and show limited levels of initiative.

Pupils' contribution to the school and wider community is good. They take responsibility in class and around the school and raise funds for good causes. Through the school council, pupils learn about rights and responsibilities and financial decision-making.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers know their subjects well and provide practical activities that motivate and engage pupils. Planning is thorough and usually well focused on individual needs. Relationships among pupils and between pupils and adults are good. A wide variety of resources, including ICT, support learning well. Teaching assistants are well used to support those who learn more slowly. Good use is made of questioning to help develop pupils' understanding. In the best lessons, work is stimulating, well structured and well paced. In some lessons, however, too much time is spent on one task and the pace of learning slows. Teaching relies a little too much on worksheets in Years 1 and 2 and to some extent in the Reception class which has restricted opportunities for writing expressively in some of these classes. Comments made in pupils' books do not always give a clear indication of how they can improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school is making good progress towards achieving its vision for a creative and practical curriculum that provides for the full range of abilities. Excellent use is made of external providers to engage pupils in projects that are challenging, exciting and innovative. Work for Year 6, once national tests are completed, is very well planned. Good use of ICT enhances pupils' skills and learning across different subjects. New developments in literacy, such as the use of film and drama to improve pupils' skills in analysing character and plot, are beginning to have positive impact. These have yet to be fully embedded across the school.

A wide range of extra-curricular activities, enrichment through visits and visitors and a well-developed programme for personal, social and health education contribute well to an all-round education for pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, support and guidance are good overall. The school works with a wealth of external agencies and other professionals to ensure the well-being of pupils, especially the most vulnerable. Very strong emphasis is placed on meeting the social and emotional needs of pupils. Staff such as learning mentors and a family liaison worker successfully support the personal development of individuals and help to remove barriers to learning. The school has had remarkable success with pupils with emotional and behavioural needs, some of whom have come from other schools. Requirements for child protection and safeguarding children are met.

Academic guidance and support are satisfactory. Teachers regularly discuss pupils' work with them. However, the quality of guidance and use of personal targets to help pupils understand how to improve their work are not consistent across the school. Older pupils are more sure of their targets than younger ones.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has established good teamwork and a strong sense of common purpose amongst staff. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and understood and the management system is well structured. Staff are constructively critical about the school's effectiveness, which contributes to an accurate understanding of how good it is. A well-established system for checking progress helps it to provide timely support to any pupils who are at risk of underachieving. However, the school is less systematic and rigorous in how it pulls together and analyses the data and information from monitoring. As a result, the school improvement plan is not as precisely focused as it could be on how to secure further improvements, and the school is not always aware of how well new initiatives are working.

The school has worked hard and innovatively to involve parents more actively in their children's learning and specific school projects. Governors work well with staff but are not proactive enough in the production of the school development plan or school self-evaluation.

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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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
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 the 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

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?	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 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

23 May 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Spring Meadow Primary School, Harwich CO12 4LB

We enjoyed visiting your school and we thank you for making us feel welcome. It was very nice to meet you and watch your lessons. Your school gives you a good education and prepares you well for your next school.

These are some of the best things about your school:

- you enjoy school and participate actively in all it has to offer
- children in Reception get a good start to their education
- during your time at school you make good progress, especially in Years 3 to 6
- the school works with organisations such as Creative Partnerships to provide some very exciting and stimulating projects for you to take part in
- teaching is good and promotes your learning well
- the school makes excellent use of people from outside the school, as well as specialist staff employed by the school, to support individual pupils and families
- your headteacher makes sure staff work well together to support your learning.

We have asked your headteacher and your teachers to make a few improvements.

- Provide more opportunities for you to write freely, especially in the younger classes, and give you clearer guidance on how to improve standards in English.
- Improve the way that your school examines information about how well it is doing so that efforts to improve are better focused.

You can contribute to improvements by asking staff about how you can make your work better, especially your spelling and grammar.

We wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Gulshan Kayembe

Lead inspector