

Fairhouse Community Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114899
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	311747
Inspection dates	12–13 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Helen Ranger

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 (total)	179
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr A Oliver
Headteacher	Mrs Jenny McCutcheon
Date of previous school inspection	26 April 2004
School address	Long Riding Basildon Essex SS14 1QP
Telephone number	01268 523960
Fax number	01268281916

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

In this smaller than average junior school, pupils come almost entirely from the local area. The school is part of the national Excellence in Cities initiative and a Behaviour Improvement project. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is around twice the national average. At present, 12% of pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds and a third of these do not speak English as their first language. In recent years, the standards of pupils starting the school in Year 3 have mostly been much lower than the national average. A large proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the proportion who have a statement of special educational needs is higher than average. Frequently, over half the pupils in a year group receive extra adult support with learning.

The school's feeder infant school and a separately managed pre-school setting, Learn and Grow Nursery, share the site.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Fairhouse Junior School gives its pupils a satisfactory education. The school has worked successfully to stabilise and improve its staffing situation over the past few years. The current staff work as a harmonious team under the effective leadership of the headteacher and deputy head, and with satisfactory support from governors. Most notably, staff have improved pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning. This has taken time but is now having a positive impact on pupils' progress. Hand in hand with these moves, staff have established good arrangements to assess and track each pupil's achievements and to provide activities that are more tailored to individual needs.

Academic achievement is satisfactory. Records show that pupils' progress has improved over the past two years, including for those who need extra help with learning. This is especially the case in key English skills. By Year 6, standards in speaking, listening, reading and writing are well below average but represent satisfactory progress compared with pupils' starting points. Progress in mathematics is also improving but standards in the Year 6 national test have often been exceptionally low. Having analysed the reasons for this, staff are aware of gaps in pupils' learning. Appropriate activities have been planned to plug these gaps, although the impact of this initiative is yet to be fully reflected in pupils' standards.

The most striking improvements have been in pupils' personal development and well-being, which are now satisfactory. The previous inspection report judged behaviour unsatisfactory and referred to poorly developed attitudes to learning, especially among the younger pupils. These weaknesses no longer exist, due to well-targeted action led by the headteacher, who joined the school in the year before its last inspection. Staff set high expectations for conduct and pupils are fully involved in the systems for sanctions and rewards. They show great pride in their school community, enjoy activities and know that their views are valued by the staff. They show a good commitment to healthy lifestyles, embracing the many opportunities for social development and physical exercise well.

Developments in provision mean that, while further improvement is necessary for lessons to be consistently good or better, teaching and the curriculum are satisfactory in promoting pupils' learning. Senior staff, in conjunction with the local authority and other agencies, have worked alongside teachers to sharpen their professional skills. This has led to better planning and assessment arrangements, especially in lessons that focus on basic skills. A weaker characteristic of some lessons is that the noise generated by pupils' conversations means that learning is not fully efficient. This is mostly due to lively working discussions but, at times, the volume is too high. Particular strengths in provision are the good arrangements for care, guidance and support. Pupils who need help to settle into class or have difficulties in their personal lives are looked after very well. Pupils receive clear guidance on their progress. They are more skilled than many of their age at being able to identify what they need to do next to improve their learning.

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The school is developing secure self-evaluation systems. Senior staff have ensured that all teachers are developing the skills necessary to check each pupil's achievement and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Subject leaders take an increasingly effective role in determining what will be developed next. The school is not at all complacent about how much remains to be done for pupils to achieve their full potential. It is also, rightly, continuing its work to involve parents more effectively in their children's learning. The response by parents to their efforts to date

has often been disappointing. Nevertheless, the improvements of the past few years and the competence of the current staff team provide a sound capacity for the school to develop further in the future.

What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate progress in mathematics by ensuring that teachers fill any gaps in pupils' previous learning.
- Ensure that arrangements to monitor and improve teaching result in a higher proportion of lessons that are good or outstanding.
- Ensure that classroom noise levels are conducive to efficient learning.
- Continue to work with parents to strengthen the partnership in children's learning.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Increased stability in staffing and pupils' improved attitudes to learning have led to day-to-day progress by all levels of ability and all backgrounds that is at least satisfactory and quite often good. The very high proportion who find learning difficult make sound progress, as do those from minority ethnic backgrounds. The 2008 test results for pupils in Year 6 were the best since 2003. A substantially higher proportion of pupils reached both Level 4 and Level 5 in English, mathematics and science than in previous years. While the school did not meet its very challenging targets for the nationally expected level, it exceeded its expectations for the higher level. Teachers' tracking of current year groups shows satisfactory progress and increasingly better progress term by term. Year 6 pupils are on track to exceed the school's 2008 test results in 2009.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Improved behaviour has played a pivotal role in school development. Pupils feel safe in school and form productive relationships with staff and with their peers. They comment on how much they enjoy their schooling and parents endorse this. A very high rate of exclusions peaked in 2004 and has fallen dramatically to its current low level. While lessons are sometimes too noisy for full concentration, there are examples of exemplary behaviour in assembly, in lessons and in the playground. Attendance has risen to a level that is close to the national average so that poor attendance is now rarely a factor in how well pupils achieve. Their overall spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory but they have a relatively limited understanding of the diversity of cultures in modern Britain. The oldest pupils in particular play key roles in ensuring that the school community functions well, by acting as peer mentors and play leaders, for instance. All pupils are supported well by the democratically elected school council. The school is now in a position to develop its role in the wider community more fully. This has begun through events such as attendance at civic occasions and the launch of a full-length book to which pupils contributed. Such opportunities, alongside pupils' improving academic achievements, provide a satisfactory preparation for their transfer to secondary school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

School observations show that most lessons range from satisfactory to outstanding and that inadequate teaching is rare. Inspection findings mirror this picture. Classes are orderly and relationships good. Activities are generally matched to the range of pupils' needs because of the improved use of assessment information in teachers' planning. Pupils learning English as an additional language are supported well. Time is mostly used well but in weaker lessons, the pace of learning sometimes slows towards the end. Occasionally, lessons are too teacher-directed and learning is rather passive. There is good liaison between teachers and teaching assistants. In particular, this aids the learning of those pupils who benefit from extra help. In an outstanding lesson, the teachers' questioning of pupils was very skilful and the lesson took excellent account of the different ways that they learn. The school knows that, to improve pupils' progress further, more lessons will need to be at least good. Staff development arrangements continue to address this aim.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

At the time of the last inspection, the curriculum was unsatisfactory but this is no longer the case. The school places a high priority on developing pupils' basic skills in English, mathematics, science, and information and communication technology (ICT). This is bearing fruit in English and ICT in particular and there is a current focus on improving activities in mathematics. A carefully planned programme of intervention groups gives extra support, including for those who have underachieved in the past, and is promoting more rapid progress. Teaching time is used soundly and practical resources are much improved. Staff are starting to make relevant links between subjects to engage pupils' interest more effectively. There is a good range of popular clubs and visits, including a well-organised breakfast club, a gym trail and a wide range of sports. Good programmes of personal, social and health education and citizenship are contributing successfully to the improvements in pupils' personal development and have resulted in a Healthy School award.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Good arrangements in these areas have underpinned the improvements of recent years, especially in pupils' behaviour and enjoyment of learning. Staff are aware that continued vigilance is needed for progress to continue. Parents and pupils are very positive about how the school cares for pupils and goes out of its way to welcome and include any who need extra help or reassurance. The inclusion manager works alongside learning mentors and a pupil support worker to offer pupils and their families access to a wide range of services. Arrangements for child protection and safeguarding are robust. Recent moves to forge closer links with the infant school have resulted in projects such as the joint moderation of Year 2 pupils' work. Because of this, Key Stage 2 staff are better informed about pupils' standards on entry and better able to support their progress. Staff give pupils good quality academic support and guidance, for example, through informative marking and target setting. They expect pupils to assess their own performance and respond to adults' feedback. This happens effectively so that pupils are well placed to understand how well they are working and what to focus on next.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and her deputy form an energetic team with a positive, well-focused approach to the school's development. They have established a lively group of staff who are determined to do the best they can for pupils. One of the main reasons that pupils' progress is improving is that staff are much more rigorous in how they analyse tracking information and monitor provision to establish initiatives for further development. The school improvement plan and its action plan for raising attainment describe a good vision for the future and set clear targets. Staff development systems are good.

The school makes numerous efforts to work effectively with its community, for example, by encouraging parents to work more closely in pupils' learning. Parents' views of the school are very complimentary, although relatively few responded to the inspection questionnaire. The governing body reflects the local community well, but the school often finds it difficult to recruit parent governors. A core group of experienced governors ensures that statutory duties are covered and helps to train less experienced colleagues. The chair of governors is very capable, determined that the school will do well for its pupils and acts fully as a 'critical friend' to the staff.

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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?	3
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?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
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?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
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 eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
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?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

14 November 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Fairhouse Community Junior School, Basildon, SS14 1QP

I am writing to say a big 'thank you' for your welcome and help when inspectors visited your school recently. Special thanks go to the Year 6 pupils who showed us round. It was one of the best tours we have ever been given and helped us to appreciate how much your school offers you. Your school council acts really well to help the staff make your school better for all of you. Many improvements have been made over the past few years. In particular, you told us how much better behaviour is and how much you enjoy school. You have many opportunities to learn how to lead safe and healthy lives. Your attendance is improving well too, so that you can take advantage of all the school offers.

Your school is providing you with a satisfactory education. We have asked Mrs McCutcheon, the staff and the governors to keep making sure that lessons get even better. Your teachers have improved the ways they plan lessons and check your progress. The way you check to see what you are doing well and what you need to concentrate on next is particularly impressive. You get extra help if you need it. Many of you are doing much better in English now. Your teachers want you to get better at mathematics too and we agree with them. You can make sure you listen carefully in lessons and ask for help if there is something you do not understand. Another way you can help to make lessons better is by working more quietly sometimes. Some lessons are rather noisy and it is difficult for you to concentrate. You have done really well to improve your behaviour in assembly and the playground so we are sure you can find ways to keep noise levels just right in lessons too.

The staff and governors have worked hard in recent years and made many good changes to the way the school works. Some of your parents wrote to say how much they appreciate this. The staff want to meet your parents more regularly to discuss your achievements. Perhaps you can encourage your parents to visit the school more often when special events are happening, so that you can show them how you are getting on.

I hope you carry on enjoying life at Fairhouse Junior.

Best wishes

Helen Ranger

Lead inspector