

John Ray Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114941
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	311766
Inspection dates	28–29 April 2008
Reporting inspector	John Messer

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	245
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Neil MacDonald
Headteacher	Mrs V Hackett
Date of previous school inspection	22 September 2003
School address	Notley Road Braintree Essex CM7 1HL
Telephone number	01376 323071
Fax number	01376 340749

Age group	4–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average sized school. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. Most pupils are from White British families. A small proportion are from ethnic minority backgrounds and a small number speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. The main difficulty experienced by these pupils is with speech and language development. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school is below average. The school has received the Basic Skills Quality Mark and the Investment in People and Healthy Schools Awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school and pupils' personal development is outstanding. From their very first days in school, children are encouraged to talk about their thoughts and feelings. They are eager to talk about themselves, what they are learning and what they think about the world in general. Staff listen carefully to pupils' views. Pupils make outstanding progress in developing speaking and listening skills. Opportunities are grasped to stimulate pupils' curiosity. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exceptional and supports their learning well. They are reflective and think through different ways to solve problems before trying out various solutions. Pupils are happy, well behaved, polite and sensitive to the feelings of others. They take their responsibilities seriously. The school councillors carefully consider how to improve the school. Pupils back recycling initiatives and enthusiastically support charities to help those less fortunate than themselves.

Teaching and learning are good so pupils make good progress and attain standards that are above average. In most lessons, teachers show pupils exactly what they expect them to learn and pupils are encouraged to judge for themselves how successful their learning has been. Pupils discuss their learning sensibly and develop a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve their work. Learning support assistants make a strong contribution to the quality of pupils' progress. They are especially good at helping those who find learning difficult. Some of the more able learners do not always make as much progress as they should. This is because teachers do not always expect enough of them and do not seize opportunities to fully extend their learning. The curriculum is good and includes a good range of extra activities, such as after school clubs and educational visits. There are inconsistencies in teaching the curriculum. In most classes, a creative, imaginative approach generates a buzz of excitement that results in powerful learning. Some lessons however, are not very inspiring and do not provide opportunities to investigate, explore and chase lines of enquiry. Here teachers do not capitalise on pupils' curiosity and their powers of imagination.

The care, safety and security of pupils are given the highest priority. Procedures for safeguarding children are fully in place. Relationships between staff and pupils are warm and friendly and pupils are treated with great respect. Pupils develop an excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles. Pupils become confident learners and develop a good range of skills that give them a secure platform for moving on to the junior school. The overwhelming majority of parents are pleased with the education provided for their children. One comment was typical, 'Children are encouraged to develop skills that will help them throughout life, one example being the way each child is helped to understand the school's code of conduct and core values.'

The school's self-evaluation is accurate. The headteacher gives energetic leadership and provides clear direction for further improvement. The leadership team are committed to helping all pupils to enjoy school and to learn effectively. They share a conviction that every child matters. There is no complacency as leaders constantly consider ways to develop provision and raise standards. Ambitious targets are set for the amount of progress that pupils are expected to make each year and leaders do their best to support staff in enabling pupils to reach these targets. The governing body provides good support and has taken positive initiatives to raise standards. Significant investment in bringing in support from outside agencies to aid school improvement is having an impact and standards are rising. There have been improvements on many fronts and the school is poised to make further advances. It has good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Leadership of the Foundation Stage is good and the team of teachers and support staff share an enthusiasm for creating exciting learning experiences. High quality pastoral care and warm relationships boost children's confidence and independence. Children are encouraged to share their ideas about how to solve problems. They rise to the challenges set and even the shy ones soon become confident about voicing their opinions. Teaching is imaginative. A letter arrived from Lucy Ladybird asking what clocks looked like and how they worked. Children were bursting with ideas about how to respond. 'The face is a circle, no corners or sides, and we need arms.' 'Use our clock and send her a photograph of what we've made.' All became fully involved in making clocks and describing how they are used. This approach to learning about telling the time typified the way that the staff in the Reception classes create powerful learning experiences. A rigorous approach to teaching children about letters and the sounds they make gives a good basis for learning to read and write. Sometimes opportunities are missed to extend the more able children pupils. Children make good progress but assessments show that by the end of the Reception year standards are still slightly below national expectations.

What the school should do to improve further

- Grasp opportunities to extend more able pupils and help them to attain the highest possible standards.
- Develop a more consistent approach to teaching and extend the creative, imaginative methods of promoting learning that are proving so successful.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The good grounding that pupils receive in the Reception classes helps them to continue to develop a wide range of skills in Years 1 and 2. By Year 2, standards are above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils who find it difficult to master new skills are supported well and make good progress. Faster learners do not always achieve as well as they should because teachers do not expect enough of them. Pupils who speak English as an additional language achieve well. Pupils are eager to learn and their positive attitudes help them to make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning. They enjoy coming to school and so attendance is good. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding because it is embedded in the life of the school. Experiences, such as watching blue tits hatching their eggs via a live video, are awe-inspiring. Behaviour is good and pupils are invariably polite to one another, adults and visitors. They are generous and enjoy celebrating each other's achievements. Pupils have an excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles and of personal safety. They use equipment, such as digital cameras, carefully and responsibly.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Staff give much praise and encouragement and pupils are extremely well motivated. Classrooms are well organised, bright, colourful and inviting. Interactive whiteboards are used well in most classes to enhance learning. Some teachers use an excellent electronic system to assess pupils' learning. This is used well to fill in gaps in learning and to correct any misconceptions. Special provision, such as the 'Skills Shop' sessions, boosts learning and confidence. Teachers do not always grasp opportunities to extend the faster learners and do not always expect enough of them so that they reach the highest possible standards.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Pupils receive a well-rounded education. Sports, music, art and design feature strongly. Good links are made between different subjects as when pupils use measuring skills to design and make a shelter for the animals they are studying. Drama is used well to illustrate the life cycle of a butterfly, for example. Daily 'Take Ten' aerobic sessions help to make pupils alert and ready for learning. Lessons in philosophy and personal, social and health education help them to consider a range of social issues. Pupils use carefully selected websites to support their learning. Imaginative approaches to curricular development are proving successful and one of the school's key priorities is to extend this initiative.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral support is outstanding. The needs of most pupils are identified quickly and this is at the heart of the positive climate for learning which contributes to good achievement and outstanding personal development. Pupils know what to do if they feel bullied and are confident any issues will be resolved. Procedures for monitoring academic progress are good. Pupils' knowledge of, and involvement in, assessing their own learning is impressive.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides very clear leadership. She leads the development of strong and able staff teams that work closely together to ensure that pupils are happy, cared for and generally achieving well. Staff question themselves and analyse all aspects of their work thoroughly. They rigorously check the benefits of any change. The effective governing body supports the school well whilst holding it to account. Morale is high because all staff have a voice. Everyone is encouraged to feel part of the school and to use their skills to the benefit of pupils. For example, the site manager has set up a live video from a nesting box that fascinates and enthralls pupils. The school gathers a good range of assessment information and it is used well to successfully target areas for improvement.

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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 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	2
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
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

30 April 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of John Ray Infants' School, Braintree, Essex, CM7 1HL

What a lovely school! I thoroughly enjoyed the short time I spent with you. Thank you for being so helpful and for telling me all about your learning.

Several of you said that your school was a 'kind school' and I agree. Everybody is so friendly and all of you look after each other well. It was great to watch the blue tits on their nest and I know that you were all sad when something bad happened to the birds last year. I hope they are more successful this year. You are good at reading, writing and mathematics. You are brilliant at talking. You are good at thinking about things and sharing your ideas with others. I don't think that I have ever had so many interesting conversations. The way that you share your ideas helps you all to develop a deeper understanding of the world we live in. You are polite and you are careful not to hurt anybody's feelings. You are good at remembering the school's core values, such as being caring, curious, honest, responsible, safe and kind. You work willingly but also enjoy having fun. Those of you who find it rather difficult to learn new things get lots of help and do really well. Some of the faster learners do not always make as much progress as they could because sometimes tasks are a bit too easy. You are good at sport and keep yourselves fit by having plenty of exercise. The 'Take Ten' sessions certainly help you to get your brains in gear. You know how to stay safe and look after yourselves and others. You told me that you really like your teachers because they are friendly and do so much to help you learn new things. All the staff work hard to help you and are keen to make your lessons even more exciting.

I think that there are two things that would make the school even better. I think that some of the faster learners should be helped to reach higher standards. I also think that there should be more of the super lessons, which help you to learn in exciting ways. I think that you could help to make things even better by continuing to do your best at all times. Remember VCOP.

I wish you every success in the future.

John Messer

Lead inspector