

Barnes Farm Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115044
Local Authority	ESSEX LA
Inspection number	311801
Inspection date	10 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Alison Pangbourne

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	217
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Miss Sharon Stevens
Headteacher	Mrs Mary Horsted
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Henniker Gate Chelmsford Essex CM2 6QH
Telephone number	01245 467474
Fax number	01245 461949

Age group	4-7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

The inspection evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: provision for more able writers and mathematicians, the quality of teaching and how the leadership and management are planning to develop further partnerships with other schools and agencies. The evidence base stems from observing work in classrooms, scrutinising school documentation, records of pupils' achievement and progress as well as discussions with senior leaders and with pupils. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail.

Description of the school

This is a large infant school. Most pupils come from White British backgrounds. Very few speak English as an additional language. When children start school, their attainment varies but it is often a little below what is expected for their age, particularly in language and mathematical skills, although this is not the case for all children. The proportion taking a free school meal is below average as is the number of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities. The proportion that has a statement of educational need is below average. The school has recently been awarded Healthy Schools status, Investors in People and an Active Sportsmark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. Parents cannot praise it highly enough. One wrote: 'An excellent, cheerful approach to learning! A fantastic school!' The pupils agree saying: 'Its fun here and we've got extra helpers if you have trouble with learning!'

Fundamental to the school's success is the outstanding leadership of the headteacher, ably supported by the bursar and senior staff. She has built a very committed team of teachers, support staff and governors, who constantly search for ways to improve on what is already of high quality. Parents, who are very supportive of their children's learning, recognise this saying: 'The headteacher's confident, enthusiastic approach is mirrored by the whole staff.' Staff are skilled at taking on new initiatives and adapting them to meet the needs of the pupils. For example, the regular reading club and writer's workshops, as part of literacy work, and the able mathematicians' group, make an excellent contribution to standards in these subjects, particularly for more able pupils. Subject leaders have an excellent understanding of their subjects through regular monitoring. The governors have an excellent view of the school. Everything that the school does is closely monitored, evaluated and improved to ensure that it is of high quality. The progress of individual pupils is regularly assessed to make sure that help is provided for any who are falling behind and extra support given to those who are shooting ahead.

Given this very firm steer from the leadership of the school, it is hardly surprising that pupils' achievement is excellent. When children start school, their literacy and numeracy skills are often underdeveloped. They make excellent progress through the Foundation Stage and most of them exceed the early learning goals by the beginning of Year 1. Pupils continue to make excellent progress and by the end of Year 2, standards have been consistently above average for many years. In 2007, standards were well above average in writing and above average in reading and mathematics. A well above average proportion of the pupils reached the higher Level 3 in reading and writing and an above average proportion reached this level in mathematics. This year similar standards are expected but with more pupils reaching Level 3 in mathematics. Pupils who need extra help with literacy and numeracy, and the very few who speak English as an additional language, make excellent progress because they are given plenty of high quality support.

Other factors help pupils do so well: teaching is outstanding. Teachers have extremely high expectations and are very aware of each pupil's ability. They are skilled at offering tasks that are just right for each pupil, especially in the mixed age classes. Excellent relationships mean that pupils are confident in asking questions or giving reasons for their answers. Teachers focus in on pupils' interests and make learning interesting. Pupils also contribute: they know their own targets and try very hard to meet them. The outstanding curriculum inspires pupils because it is very practical and so well matched to their needs. Theme weeks, such as the recent problem-solving week, give pupils opportunities to work in depth on a topic and to develop many skills across the curriculum. The pupils spoke with enthusiasm and pride about what they had learned. Artwork on display is of a very high quality and shows the impact of the many visitors who share their skills with the pupils. Embedded within the 'fun' is a strong emphasis on developing, literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills. This contributes very positively to standards and provides pupils with an excellent foundation for the future.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent, based on a very strong ethos of respect and care for others. From their first days in school, pupils are encouraged to be independent and to take responsibility. Consequently, they are extremely polite and their behaviour is excellent. They love acting as 'friendly owls' in the playground and befriending lonely pupils. Pupils take their responsibilities in class and school councils very seriously. They receive outstanding care, guidance and support, so they grow in confidence. They thoroughly enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in their above average attendance. However, a few parents persist in taking their children on holiday during term time. The exceptional emphasis on healthy lifestyles and keeping safe means that pupils know how to keep fit. They make an excellent contribution to the community by raising funds for a range of charities.

There is a tangible sense of seeking continual improvement throughout the school. Its self-evaluation is accurate, if a little modest, and the excellent progress since the previous inspection shows that the school has an excellent capacity for continued improvement. Much of the good practice, particularly in the teaching of writing, is shared with local schools. However, the school does not yet widely share excellent practice and the development of government initiatives, to celebrate its successes and give it opportunities to learn from others to develop provision still further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Many parents praised the start that their children receive. One wrote, 'My child couldn't have had a better introduction to her school life.' The exciting opportunities offered contribute very strongly to the children's flying start. This does not happen by chance. Excellent leadership and management of the Foundation Stage ensure that activities are imaginatively linked to cover all the areas of learning. Tasks are very closely matched to children's needs and there is a strong emphasis on social skills. As a result, children's behaviour is excellent. For example, they quickly donned their coats and were very sensible when going to an outside classroom for reading club in inclement weather. There is a strong emphasis on basic literacy and numeracy skills, with children enjoying reading club where they work with an adult in a small group to enjoy a text and then play a game related to it. The outdoor area has been improved significantly since the previous inspection and provides a delightful place in which children can learn and play. The excellent teaching is tailored so well to children's needs and interests and helps them to make excellent progress. Consequently, most exceed the expected levels in all the areas of learning by the end of the Reception year.

What the school should do to improve further

- Share the excellent practice and the development of current initiatives more widely with other schools to celebrate the school's successes and to give it opportunities to learn from others to improve provision still further.

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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?	1
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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

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	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

11 March 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Barnes Farm Infant School, Chelmsford, CM2 6QH

Thank you for helping me when I visited your school. I enjoyed talking to you and watching you learn. I would like to tell you what I found out.

You told me that you go to an excellent school where you have very helpful staff and I agree with you. You make excellent progress because the teachers give you work that is just right for you and they are always looking to make things better and more enjoyable for you. I enjoyed seeing all the work you did during problem solving week. It was good to hear how much you like the interesting theme weeks that you have. You enjoy all the opportunities that you have, especially being a 'friendly owl' or sharing your ideas in class and school council. You all work very hard and your behaviour is excellent. I was impressed by how sensible you were going to the outside classrooms when the weather was so bad! All the grown-ups look after you extremely well and help you do well. Mrs Horsted and the governors work very hard to make sure that your school is a lovely place to be. Your families know that you go to one of the best schools there is.

I think you know that sometimes teachers from other schools come to see how you do so well in writing. I have asked Mrs Horsted and the teachers to meet with teachers from some other schools so they can all talk about what they are doing in their schools and share ideas to make things even better for you.

I hope you carry on enjoying your time at Barnes Farm Infant School and do well in your next school.

Best wishes

Alison Pangbourne

Lead inspector