

Writtle Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115047
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	311802
Inspection dates	4–5 December 2008
Reporting inspector	John Mason

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)	167
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ralf Bray
Headteacher	Miss Gwyneth Williams
Date of previous school inspection	7 June 2004
School address	Margaretting Road Writtle Chelmsford Essex CM1 3HG
Telephone number	01245420592
Fax number	01245422561

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Writtle Junior School is smaller than most schools in the primary sector and draws pupils from a mainly White British background from the village of Writtle and communities to the west of Chelmsford. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has grown in recent years and is now above average. Most pupils begin school in Year 3 with standards which are above average. This term the school has provision for before- and after-school childcare under the auspices of the Young Men's Christian Association. The school holds Active Mark and Eco (bronze) awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Writtle Junior School provides a satisfactory education. With the establishment of an energetic new senior leadership team, it has made significant strides in the past fifteen months to turn round a period of time which left many pupils falling behind. Staff morale is now high. Teachers and other adults share a clear vision of the direction the school must take and are uniting well around initiatives to bring greater cohesion and consistency to their work. This is already resulting in a good topic-based curriculum which motivates pupils, encourages them to learn and contributes positively to their personal development. Good care, guidance and support ensure that pupils feel safe at school in an environment which promotes friendship, trust and shared values. Teaching and learning, while improving well, are satisfactory as many pupils are still in the catching-up phase, not yet achieving as well as their predictions indicate they are able.

Unvalidated data from the 2008 national tests in Year 6 show that standards were broadly average. This represents average achievement, given the starting points of this cohort when they entered the school in Year 3. The school is now focusing well on the areas of writing and mathematics where pupils, especially boys, made slowest progress in recent years. Tracking and observations of the current Year 6 shows improvement in pupils' progress in these areas and the under-achievement of boys is beginning to be well addressed. Although extra provision for pupils identified as gifted and talented is developing well, improving the attainment of the more able pupils is not yet consistent enough to have had an impact on standards in all classes.

Pupils make good progress in their personal development and have a good awareness of what is needed to follow a healthy lifestyle and manage risks in their lives. They show considerable respect for one another, appreciating well each others' individual concerns and circumstances. Behaviour is good and contributes well to pupils' learning and enjoyment of school. Attendance is above average. The school works well in partnership with others to promote pupils' wellbeing. Parents feel very well involved with the school, particularly in the way the curriculum encourages them to participate in activities linked to their children's learning and welfare. The care provided for pupils with learning difficulties is good, linking well with appropriate support agencies, and the school has successfully taken on new pupils with learning needs at times other than the normal time of admission.

Overall, leadership and management are satisfactory. The senior team has now established clear tracking of pupils' progress and teachers can identify where pupils need extra support. However, many subject leaders are new to their roles and have not yet developed a rigorous analysis based on tracking data to inform planning or sharing good teaching practice in order to further accelerate the pace of learning. Pupils' achievement is currently not as good as it was at the time of the previous inspection in 2004. For a time achievement was markedly lower, but during the past two years the more focused approach to school improvement is pushing standards up again. Though effective steps to promote improvement are now being taken, the school's capacity to improve is satisfactory, as its track record since the previous inspection has been variable. Parents express a high degree of satisfaction with the school's current direction.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and progress in mathematics and writing, so that all pupils make at least two levels of progress during their time at school

- Improve the quality of teaching, with a particular view to providing greater and more consistent challenge for the more able pupils and by sharing more widely the best teaching practice in the school
- Develop the role of subject leaders in order to further accelerate the rate at which the school is improving.

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

Unvalidated data showed that the proportion of pupils attaining Level 4 or higher in national tests at the end of Year 6 in 2008 was average in mathematics and science, but below average in English. This was due to weaker results in writing than in reading. Standards in reading have improved steadily over the past three years. Standards and achievement in mathematics have been low, but improved in 2008. While the school almost met its agreed targets for pupils attaining Level 4, it did not reach them for pupils' attaining Level 5. Standards attained by boys were not as high as those attained by girls, with below average proportions of boys attaining Level 4 in writing and Level 5 in mathematics and science. Given their starting points, this nonetheless represents broadly average overall achievement. Tracking data and inspection findings indicate that these weaknesses are being well addressed and pupils in the current Year 6 are catching up lost ground. Many more boys are on course to make the expected progress in writing and they are improving in mathematics too. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They treat one another with kindness and respect and are courteous to visitors. Pupils enjoy school and are positive about all aspects of it. As one pupil put it, stating the school's motto, 'Together we achieve more.' They become tolerant and caring individuals because of their good understanding of the range of cultures in society. They reflect well on each others achievements in both lessons and assemblies. Pupils willingly take on a good range of responsibilities and school councillors take their roles seriously. They are proud of the improvements they have made to the dining room. They demonstrate a good understanding about keeping healthy and safe, both by eating a balanced diet, including vegetables that they have grown themselves, and by taking part in the many opportunities to keep fit. Older pupils happily support younger ones at lunchtime. A small number of pupils who find it more difficult to manage their behaviour are supported well. Pupils demonstrate good care for others by raising funds for a range of charities. They are building a good foundation for later life and the next stage of their education, adding good computer literacy and financial awareness to their improving literacy and numeracy skills. A particular strength is the way that they collect and count money to support charities and in the running of their tuck shop.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Though some teaching is of an outstanding and quite dynamic quality, teaching overall is satisfactory. Where teaching is satisfactory it does not elicit sufficient feedback from pupils on how well they grasp tasks, causing some pupils to make slower progress. Some teaching lacks pace, diminishing the effectiveness of planning and while most tasks that are set are well matched to the differing abilities of the pupils, there are times when there is insufficient challenge for the more able. Teachers generally share very good relationships with their pupils. Plenty of opportunity for pupils to work in groups and learn from one another promotes good collaborative learning. Clear and precise short term targets to encourage pupils to reflect on what they understand and what they need to do next to improve are bedding down well. Teachers use information and communications technology (ICT) well to enliven learning. Teaching assistants are skilled in assisting identified pupils in need of closer support. New teachers are being well supported to become effective classroom practitioners.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The topic-based curriculum meets pupils' needs well and is matched to their interests and brings learning to life. For example, the recent studies of World War 2 culminated in a 'sleep over' in school where pupils experienced what it would have been like for a child in Wartime. The school is working to ensure that this thematic curriculum is firmly embedded across the school and always provides enough challenge for the faster learners. Provision for literacy, numeracy and ICT is now good. Pupils particularly enjoy computer programmes which stretch their reckoning skills. French is well established and pupils gain insights into other European cultures through the developing overseas links of the Comenius project. A well planned programme for social and health education encourages pupils to stay safe and healthy and to show mature attitudes to each other. A wide range of activities such as gardening, chess and athletics give opportunities to learn new skills. Pupils are encouraged to investigate their own local area and look beyond it to learn about cultures and beliefs different to their own. The 'Bollywood' topic, including tasting Indian foods, develops an awareness of how other people live.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

All staff work closely to ensure that pupils are well cared for and kept safe. All procedures for safeguarding pupils and for child protection are in place. Very effective transition programmes when pupils join or leave the school help them settle well. These are of particular benefit to vulnerable pupils. Strong links with secondary schools underpin the growing provision for gifted and talented pupils. Pupils who need extra help to learn are quickly identified and programmes to improve their progress are put in place to support them. Initiatives such as the 'teach your parent science' afternoon help parents to support their children at home. The tracking systems help enable teachers to identify pupils who are not making enough progress and put in measures to help them, but this system has not been in place for long enough to have the best possible impact on standards and achievement. Pupils have their own targets and these are shared with parents. This gives them a good understanding of what they need to do to improve. Pupils are

beginning to assess their own work and that of others but this is not yet firmly established across the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The experienced headteacher and enthusiastic senior leadership team are steering the school forward with clear purpose. A more rigorous approach to the tracking of pupils' progress has been adopted, but its impact is still at an early stage. Strategies to identify and support those who under-achieve are growing in effectiveness. Targets are both challenging and achievable, beginning to move beyond redressing the historic underachievement. Effective monitoring has eradicated any unsatisfactory teaching and is continuing to raise the proportion of good teaching. With the exception of English and mathematics, most subject coordinators are new to their roles and their initiatives have yet to have a significant impact on the pace of school improvement. The school has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. It has identified appropriate areas to improve and develop, and staff are united in addressing these. The school promotes community cohesion, racial equality and disability equality well through the new curriculum. Parents are being engaged more as partners in learning. Governors take their duties seriously and fulfil their role as a critical friend satisfactorily. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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?	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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
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 learners' needs?	3
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

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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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**

8 December 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Writtle Junior School, Chelmsford, CM1 3HG

Thank for making Mrs Pangbourne and me so welcome in your school when we visited recently. We enjoyed talking to you and seeing how much you enjoy school. We were pleased too that so many of your parents cooperated in the inspection by returning the questionnaires, often with comments which supported their very positive views about the school. Please thank them as well.

One of you told us that at Writtle Junior 'everyone helps each other' and we were pleased to note that you really do this well. Adults in the school care well for you. This helps you to develop well socially, making the school a friendly, safe place to be and one where all pupils feel well respected. You learn well how to lead healthy lives and enjoy participating in the many interesting activities on offer and knowing about how other other people lead very different lives elsewhere.

We agreed with the school that at the moment you are making satisfactory progress and that teaching too is satisfactory. The school has pulled together much better in the last year or two. You are improving well in writing and mathematics, which have been weaknesses in previous years. Teaching has improved, but some of you are still catching up lost ground. We like the way that you now get involved in thinking about how well you are doing and whether you can do better still through your targets. We have seen some outstanding teaching, too, where all of the class is challenged to use their thinking skills all the time.

We have asked Miss Williams to do three things to help you learn better. These are:

- Improve further your standards in writing and mathematics
- Improve all teaching so that it has the outstanding features of the teaching that really stretches those of you who are capable of achieving high levels
- Support the teachers who have responsibility for the different subjects in improving your progress in them.

You can play your part in the continued improvement of your education by keeping up your good attendance and by maintaining your good concentration and behaviour in class. We wish you well in your learning.

Yours faithfully,

John Mason

Lead inspector