

Wickford Church of England Voluntary Controlled Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115089
Local Authority	ESSEX LA
Inspection number	311825
Inspection date	19 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Nichola Perry

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	92
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Father Philip Kearns
Headteacher	Mrs Debbie Rogan
Date of previous school inspection	2 December 2002
School address	Mount Road Wickford Essex SS11 8HE
Telephone number	01268733297
Fax number	01268571765

Age group	4–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a very popular, small infant school. Most of the pupils come from the local area which has been identified as an area of considerable social and economic disadvantage. When pupils start in Reception, their attainment is below the level expected nationally for their age in all areas of learning and well below in some important areas. The proportion of pupils receiving free school meals is well below average and very few pupils come from minority ethnic groups or have English as a second language. Close to average numbers of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, although slightly higher numbers have statements of special educational need or need social or emotional support. The headteacher joined the school shortly after the previous inspection. The school has Healthy Schools, Sports Mark, Arts Mark, Basic Skills Quality Mark, Investors in People and Essex 'best dinner' awards.

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. The strong Christian ethos and excellent relationships are at the heart of the school's work. It is a close and caring community which reaches out to all, no matter what their background or ability. The quality of education is rarely less than good in any class and is often outstanding. This is the reason why pupils make such good progress in all aspects of their learning. One parent summed up the views of many '...having a child at this school was the best thing that could have happened. I can see my child growing in confidence and thriving academically... they are really pushing my child's strong points and helping her 100%.'

The overwhelmingly positive and enthusiastic comments made by all parents accurately reflect the school's strengths. They rightly praise the headteacher for her outstanding leadership. She has, with able support from her leadership team and the governing body, brought about significant improvements; the school's capacity to improve further is outstanding. She has developed excellent systems for reviewing the school's performance and has fostered teamwork throughout the school so that all share the same vision, commitment and high expectations. Rigorous monitoring of the school's work has identified where teaching has been less strong and well-planned professional development, often provided by the school itself, has succeeded in significantly improving provision and raising standards. The challenge now is to continue to raise standards further by improving the consistency of the teaching across the school to raise it to outstanding overall.

Pupils achieve well and sometimes very well. By the end of Year 2, pupils now reach standards above the average nationally in writing and mathematics and well above average in reading. Personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Behaviour is good overall and often exemplary, because teachers manage their classes well and provide pupils with interesting and stimulating activities. This motivates pupils highly so that they show outstanding levels of enjoyment, reflected in the high attendance levels. Pupils learn to be very safe and understand what they have to do to lead healthy lifestyles. Their preparation for the future is excellent because they are taught from the Reception class to work together and develop all the skills necessary to continue their learning. Teaching is good overall and there is some outstanding practice. Planning is thorough and ensures that pupils' individual needs are met. The school has effective systems for tracking the progress pupils make over time but some of those used day to day by class teachers are too variable and unsophisticated for ongoing monitoring to be fully effective. The curriculum is excellent and particularly well enriched by a wide range of visits, extra activities and clubs. There are some excellent links between subjects and the school is always looking for ways to extend this further. The care, guidance and support of pupils are outstanding. All statutory safeguarding requirements and procedures are firmly in place and rigorously monitored. There is exemplary practice in identifying, supporting and monitoring all aspects of progress for vulnerable pupils and their families. The very good academic guidance keeps pupils and their parents well informed as to how they are performing and how to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Foundation Stage is good and well managed by the new leader. It provides pupils with a good start to their education and ensures that they develop secure basic skills. Relationships are excellent and pupils settle quickly and happily, including those who are

initially, less enthusiastic about starting school. Parents are delighted and full of praise for the provision and care their children receive. There is good emphasis on encouraging pupils to become independent thinkers and learners and a strong focus on teaching language, communication, personal and social skills so that pupils achieve well. Procedures for assessing and checking the progress pupils are making are accurate and thorough. The school has good plans to improve the outdoor learning area to further enhance the already good provision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to share best practice amongst all staff to raise the standards of teaching even further.
- Refine and standardise class teachers' procedures for checking the day to day progress of pupils so as to maximise their impact on learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

In the Foundation Stage, pupils enjoy learning and quickly acquire the skills they need. Most have reached the early learning goals by the end of their time in Reception. By the end of Year 2, most pupils have a secure mastery of literacy and numeracy skills. Attainment is above average. Standards have been rising year on year. In the 2007 national assessments, pupils in Year 2 reached standards that were above average in writing and mathematics and well above average in reading. The school is not complacent and has continued to focus on raising standards by helping more pupils to achieve at the higher levels, particularly in writing and mathematics. Achievement across the school is now good and pupils are on track to achieve challenging targets set for 2008.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They have an exceptionally good appreciation of being part of the school community and a mature understanding of the need for rules. They know the consequences of not keeping them. Pupils behave well and show good attitudes to their work, to their teachers and other adults. Pupils mostly settle to their work quickly and are keen to do their best. They concentrate well and work hard. They have good ideas about aspects of the school which they would like to see improved, such as more interesting playground markings. They say that they particularly like the challenging work and the kindness of their teachers. They have an excellent understanding of how to keep safe and healthy. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and attendance is high. They are prepared exceptionally well for the next stage in their education and beyond.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The very good progress pupils make in their learning is the result of good, and some outstanding, teaching. In most lessons, learning is lively, exciting and planned with great care to meet a wide range of needs. Teachers focus successfully on problem solving, collaborative working, team work, developing thinking and questioning so that learning comes alive for pupils and lessons buzz with enjoyment. Support staff contribute well to pupils' good learning by helping them

to gain confidence, give of their best and achieve well. Assessment is strong and provides the basis for future targets and learning. Teachers know how well pupils are progressing but the day to day systems they use to check progress are still individual and too variable. Teachers increasingly and successfully encourage and expect pupils from the Reception class upwards to share in assessing their own progress. This results in pupils becoming more aware of how well they are doing and how they can improve their work. The school has worked hard to improve teaching since the previous inspection and is aware of the need to continue to share and embed good practice amongst all staff so as to raise the quality of teaching even further.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Improvement in the curriculum since the last inspection has been outstanding. The curriculum is very securely focused on the provision of basic literacy and numeracy skills and procedures for supporting pupils who might need extra help are very effective. Learning is made interesting and relevant by an exceptionally varied and well-planned series of visits and visitors. Pupils say how much they were in awe of the visit they made to the Whispering Gallery in St Paul's Cathedral. An outstanding range of additional activities and clubs further enhances the curriculum. Pupils are rightly very pleased with these opportunities. Overall planning shows clearly where links are made between different subjects. This was seen during the inspection where classes were using skills in literacy, geography and information and communication technology (ICT) in their study of the island of Struay. Other aspects of the curriculum, particularly music and art, are also promoted well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Procedures to ensure that all pupils are well cared for and looked after are exceptionally strong. All staff know pupils and their families well and they work together very effectively. Pupils' needs are quickly assessed and a range of support and intervention procedures is introduced. This is sometimes with the support of outside agencies, when appropriate, but often using the school's own resources and expertise. Parents are very appreciative of this caring approach. Child protection procedures are clear and appropriate risk assessments are undertaken. The school collects and uses information on how well pupils are doing very effectively. Detailed records are maintained of the standards reached in reading, writing and mathematics. Information about the progress that pupils are making is used effectively by school leaders to further refine and adapt overall provision. Good procedures are introduced to help pupils who might be falling behind to catch up. Pupils know their learning targets and say that they are helping them to know what to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The leadership skills of the headteacher are outstanding and this is the reason the school has improved so significantly since the last inspection. Her enthusiasm, commitment and 'hands-on' approach drives the pursuit of excellence. She has raised standards, improved teaching, the curriculum, leadership, governance and above all the expectations of pupils and staff. She is very well supported by her leadership team and all adults in the school, who share her focused approach and commitment. Managers monitor and lead their areas of responsibility extremely

well. There is strong support and challenge from the governing body. There are excellent systems for reviewing and improving the school's work which include, and take account of, the views of all pupils. Parents cannot praise enough the school, the leadership of the headteacher and dedication of the staff. As a result of its excellent leadership, the school gives excellent value for money and is exceptionally well placed to continue its improvement.

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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

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	1
The behaviour of learners	2
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?	2
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	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

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

20 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Wickford C of E VC Infant School, Wickford, SS11 8HE

I want to thank you all for making our recent visit to your school so enjoyable. You made us feel very welcome and we can see why you love coming to school so much. My special thanks go to those pupils who gave up some of their lunchtime to talk to Mr Missin about what it's like to be a pupil in your school. He was very impressed by your thoughtful answers and what you said was very helpful. I'd like to share with you what we think of your school.

We think you go to an excellent school which has improved a lot. The children in the Foundation Stage get off to a super start to their time in school. We saw how well you behave in lessons and around the school and we were very impressed by the way in which you all care about each other and about other people who are less fortunate than yourselves and need help. You told us that you really enjoy coming to school, feel very safe and very well cared for and that you know who to go to if you have any worries or problems. We were also very impressed by how you all help your headteacher and teachers to improve your school through the 'talk times' - this is a very important and helpful thing to do.

We think you have a super headteacher who has worked very hard with all the teachers to find out a lot about how well you are doing - and you are doing very well. We have asked your headteacher to make sure that all your teachers are using the same system for checking how well you are doing to help you learn even better. All the adults work very hard as a big team and have good plans to keep on improving how well you do at school. In all the lessons we saw, you were making good progress in your learning and we have asked your teachers to keep on working at this in all classes by learning from each other so that you do even better in reading, writing and maths. You can help your teachers by trying your very best at all times.

Once again thank you for your help. Keep working hard at all the things you enjoy doing so much at your lovely school.

Best wishes

Nichola Perry

Lead inspector