

# Richard Whittington Primary School

## Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Unique Reference Number</b> | 117346           |
| <b>Local Authority</b>         | Hertfordshire    |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 312578           |
| <b>Inspection date</b>         | 19 November 2008 |
| <b>Reporting inspector</b>     | Roger Brown      |

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

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| <b>Type of school</b>  | Primary  |
| <b>School category</b>   | Community  |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>   | 3–11   |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>  | Mixed  |
| <b>Number on roll</b>  |  |
| School (total)   | 328  |
| Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS | 0  |
| Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years                                     | 0  |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>   | The governing body   |
| <b>Chair</b>   | Mr John Yates  |
| <b>Headteacher</b>   | Mr C G Jones   |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b>  | 2 November 2004  |
| <b>Date of previous funded early education inspection</b>                              | Not previously inspected   |
| <b>Date of previous childcare inspection</b>   | Not previously inspected   |
| <b>School address</b>  | Thornbera Gardens<br>Bishop's Stortford<br>Hertfordshire<br>CM23 3NP |
| <b>Telephone number</b>  | 01279657778  |
| <b>Fax number</b>  | 01279461485  |

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards, the quality of teaching and learning, and the quality of the curriculum with a focus on the provision for information and communication technology (ICT). Evidence was gathered from observing work in classrooms, scrutinising school documentation and pupils' work; there were discussions with governors, staff at the school and pupils. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

## Description of the school

This larger than average sized primary school serves an urban area on the outskirts of Bishop's Stortford. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds, with around 11% from a range of other cultures. The proportion of pupils who have English as an additional language is lower than that found nationally. There is a below average proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals, and the number who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also below that found nationally. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) with levels of attainment that are broadly typical of children of this age. A breakfast and after school club is held at the site, but this is not managed by the governing body.

The school has received a number of awards including the Basic Skills Quality mark, the ICT mark, the Healthy Schools award, the ECO Schools Bronze award and it has Investor in People status.

## 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. Pupils, staff and the great majority of parents wholeheartedly support this view. 'I am very proud to send my children to such a fantastic, caring school', was a comment typical of many sent in by the parents. The excellent leadership of the school is very strongly praised by many parents. The leadership have not only succeeded in improving on the previous good quality provision, but have raised standards in difficult areas such as writing so that it is outstanding. This work is not yet fully embedded, but with the full support of the staff, the drive, determination and creativity of the leadership ensures that the school's capacity to improve even further is outstanding. Aspects of the school's work, notably the personal development of the pupils and the care, guidance and support they receive are outstanding.

Standards at the school have been consistently maintained above the national average in all subjects and at all key stages for a number of years. Children start school by making good progress in the EYFS and then continue to consolidate their achievements throughout Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Some aspects of pupils' attainment, in particular science, are already very strong and by the end of Key Stage 2, pupils reach standards in this subject that are above those expected nationally. The school's leadership recognises that this high level of success can be replicated in other subject areas and a number of recent initiatives are now showing results. For example, staff believed that pupils' standards in writing were lower than they should be. Following professional development for teachers, the 'Big Writing' programme was introduced. This proved particularly successful for last year's Year 6 pupils who achieved results in this aspect of their end of key stage assessments that were much higher than those attained nationally. Evidence from the current pupils' work indicates that this success is now spreading down through other year groups. The school's dynamic and innovative leadership has established very ambitious and challenging targets for the pupils to attain in the next two years and on the current evidence, looks well on the way to achieving these.

The quality of teaching and learning is good and as with other aspects of the school's work, some elements of the teaching are outstanding. For instance, the quality of relationships between the pupils and adults is excellent and promotes high levels of pupil engagement in their learning. High quality relationships are especially evident where teaching assistants support groups and individuals who are struggling and need extra support. Teachers make good use of a wide range of data to identify these pupils. They use the information to target their particular needs and identify where support can be most effective. However, the overall effectiveness of the assessment system is somewhat hampered by the rather cumbersome tracking system. It works well in some respects, but it is not effective enough to quickly provide teachers with all they want.

The highly effective leadership has ensured that the curriculum has developed well over the last four years. At the time of the last inspection, this was the weakest aspect of the school's work. The quality of the curriculum is now good and improving. Pupils and staff are very enthusiastic about the flexibility that has been introduced by breaking away from strict subject divisions and a move towards more topics that link a number of subjects. ICT is used very effectively to provide support and development across the whole curriculum and pupils are using it with increased levels of sophistication. Such is the impact of the school's 'creative curriculum' that a number of parents commented on how much their children enjoy 'the challenge and variety' it gives them. The school's website is effective and well used, but staff recognise that it has limitations and now want to develop a more innovative system including a web

based learning area to help take pupils' learning and skills to an even higher level. The extra-curricular opportunities provided by the school are especially effective. In addition to a wide range of clubs and activities, visits and visitors, all the pupils get many opportunities to experience an excellent range of sports, music and drama. The teaching of French has been extended to all pupils in Key Stage 2.

The older pupils relish the opportunities they have to take responsibility. They demonstrate admirable levels of independence, initiative and commitment to the school community. They use the adults thoughtfully to facilitate their ideas and show genuine care and commitment to include everyone in the life of the school. Pupils have a genuine say in what happens at the school through a number of committees such as the school council and ECO committee. This commitment and involvement is reflected in the good levels of attendance at the school. The pupils really enjoy school and get excited when talking about their achievements and the opportunities it offers them. They have an excellent understanding about what they need to do to stay safe and are very positive about their commitment to lessening the damaging impact of the school on the wider environment. Their behaviour in class and around school is excellent. Good manners, and their care and consideration for others and the school environment, are always evident. Pupils not only have an excellent understanding of what they need to do to stay healthy, but put it into practice. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent.

Staff ensure that all statutory requirements for safeguarding pupils are met in full. The excellent levels of care, guidance and support provided for the pupils ensures they are very positive about the academic guidance they receive. They understand not only when they have been successful, but also get good guidance about the next steps they should take to improve their work. A small number of parents believe that the school requires their children to do too much homework, but others who have older children who have moved on to secondary education, said that this was one of the factors that gave their children a head start at high school. They also, accurately, listed factors such as the caring attitudes and the confidence the school succeeds in instilling in pupils as great assets for their next educational steps.

The leadership of the school is highly innovative, strong and united. This can be seen in the excellent levels of teamwork across and within all phases of the school. The thoughtful reorganisation of the school into phase teams is now starting to produce excellent outcomes for all pupils. Staff are supporting each other very effectively in raising the standard of the pupils' attainment. This approach is producing a cohesive and coherent drive to continually raise standards at all levels in the school. Staff understand fully the links between the monitoring and evaluation that takes place and the planned strategies for improvement that are being implemented. They understand how their own professional development supports this and hold themselves fully accountable for the success of their pupils. The headteacher and the governors lead this strong commitment and determination for continuous school improvement that is impacting greatly on how well pupils achieve and attain. They have evaluated the developments at the school well, but at times have been a little premature in judging that the improvements are securely established.

## **Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 2**

Children make a good start to their education in the EYFS. The induction arrangements are very effective, enabling the children to settle quickly and happily into the school routines. By the time the children reach the end of the EYFS, they have a level of skills that are at least in

line with those expected nationally and in most respects above them. The curriculum provides good coverage of all the required areas and is both developmental and good fun for the children to experience, both indoors and outside. This, with the good teaching and leadership, enables the pupils to make good progress and develop good basic skills in the key academic areas of literacy and numeracy. The personal, social and emotional development and the care and welfare of children are outstanding, and children quickly develop confidence and learn to interact and play with each other in an effective way. Ongoing assessment is thorough, accurate and supported by the careful tracking of children's progress. Staff make good use of the information to plan the children's next steps in learning. The children are really involved in their tasks and play. They show high levels of concentration, and as they progress through the year, they are increasingly encouraged to attempt more difficult and challenging work.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Refine and develop the tracking system to enable teachers to accelerate the rate of pupils' progress.
- Build on the good practice now established in ICT by developing a web-based learning area to extend the support already provided for the curriculum.

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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 |
|---|----------------|

**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?   | 1   |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements   | 1   |

**Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

|   |   |
|---|---|
| How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?              | 2 |
| How well do children in the EYFS achieve?   | 2 |
| How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS? | 1 |
| How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?                     | 2 |
| How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?                          | 1 |
| How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?                                 | 2 |

**Achievement and standards**

|  |   |
|--|---|
| How well do learners achieve?  | 2 |
| The standards <sup>1</sup> 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/or disabilities make progress                           | 2 |

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<sup>1</sup>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.

## Personal development and well-being

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>                          | 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 |
| The extent to which 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 | 2 |

## The quality of provision

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>       | 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?   | 1 |

## Leadership and management

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>                                       | 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  | 2   |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated   | 1   |
| How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?   | 1   |
| 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  | 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  |

## Annex B

### **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

20 November 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Richard Whittington Primary School, Bishop's Stortford, CM23 3NP

Thank you for your warm welcome when we visited your school. I would like to share with you what we found out.

We had a very enjoyable day in your school. We were very impressed with how polite, thoughtful and caring you are. We think that the way you look after each other, and use your initiative to care for the school and others is splendid. We were also delighted to hear from you how much you enjoy coming to school.

We think that yours is a good school and that it is continuing to get better. Practically all of your parents agree with us about this. They had almost as much to tell me about it as you did. The high standards you achieve are a strong reflection of all the hard work that you and your teachers put in. The improvements to the quality of your writing are very impressive. Well done, keep it up.

When we watched your lessons and looked at your work, we could see that your teachers and teaching assistants have some really great ideas to help you. However, we would like your teachers to re-examine the system they have in place to track your work and progress. At present, it is rather unwieldy and does not always give them quick and accurate answers about what they need to do to help you all to improve your standards.

One of the other things that impressed us was the improvement your teachers have made to the subjects you study. We could see why you, your parents and the teachers are pleased by this more challenging, creative approach to learning. However, even though you already make good use of the school's website and ICT equipment, we want Mr Jones to work with your teachers to introduce an even more effective system. That way we believe ICT will become even more successful in supporting your learning across all subjects.

Thank you once again for your warm welcome.

All the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Roger Brown

Lead inspector