

East Borough Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118298
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	312874
Inspection dates	20–21 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Carole Skinner

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	424
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michael Palmby
Headteacher	Jennie King
Date of previous school inspection	17 March 2003
School address	Vinters Road Maidstone ME14 5DX
Telephone number	01622 754633
Fax number	01622 672017

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school's catchment area has changed since its last inspection and more pupils now come from areas of social disadvantage. Attainment on entry has fallen to just below expectations for age. A significant minority of pupils start school with weak communication, language and literacy skills. The proportion of pupils who are learning to speak English as an additional language has risen from 5% to 16%. Twenty five different languages are spoken by pupils at home. Just under a quarter of the pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, which is a higher proportion than that seen in most schools. The school is heavily oversubscribed with almost two applicants for every available place. There has been a very high turnover of staff since the last inspection, including the appointment of a new headteacher and deputy headteacher in 2005.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is an improving school that gives its pupils a satisfactory standard of education. Standards are broadly in line with national averages and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Progress is accelerating in response to improvements in teaching and more rigorous checking of how well pupils are doing each term. Nevertheless, the school is still working to overcome a legacy of underachievement amongst older pupils. The school has successfully raised standards in reading over the last two years and is now working to narrow the gap between reading and writing, especially for boys. Pupils achieve less well in mathematics and science than in English because of weaknesses in problem solving in mathematics and conducting investigations in science.

The school has a number of good features, most notably the way it nurtures pupils' personal development through good quality care and support. One parent described the school's 'warm and friendly ethos', while another commented, 'It is wonderful for me to know that my child is so well nurtured during her school day.' Pupils grow in confidence and self-esteem in response to the many opportunities that the school offers them to take responsibility and show initiative. Good foundations are laid in the Reception classes where children make good progress in all areas of learning, especially in developing independence.

Although satisfactory in terms of its impact on pupils' progress, teaching has a number of good features, not least the way teachers make learning fun for the pupils. As a result, pupils really enjoy lessons and are well-motivated learners. High expectations of pupils' behaviour ensure that all are attentive and work hard. What stops teaching from being consistently good is that the rate of progress pupils make in some lessons is slowed when they listen to teachers for too long, leaving too little time for them to practise skills. The assessment and tracking of pupils' academic progress have improved considerably following the introduction of new systems. These are being used well to identify pupils who may be falling behind so that they can be given additional support. Pupils are not yet sufficiently involved in assessing their own progress and do not always have a clear idea of what they need to do to reach the targets set for them.

The school is taking steps to improve the curriculum and has already developed some good links between subjects. Provision in English, mathematics and science is satisfactory but improving as teachers adapt existing planning to meet pupils' needs more effectively. The provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also improving as new programmes and strategies begin to take effect. The curriculum is enriched by a very good range of additional activities. Art, music, physical education (PE) and information and communication technology (ICT) are strengths of the school.

Numerous staff changes have interrupted the pace of improvement in recent years but stability has been re-established. Senior leaders have successfully created a team approach to leadership and management that bodes well for the future. Many teachers are new to their management roles and are not yet fully involved in evaluating the impact of teaching and the curriculum on pupils' learning in their areas of responsibility. Nevertheless, accurate self-evaluation provides everyone with a clear picture of where improvement is needed. The progress that has already been made in raising standards in reading provides positive evidence that the school has good capacity to succeed in its aim to drive up standards across the board.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make good progress in the Reception classes, especially in their personal and social development and in communication, language and literacy. Most reach the standards expected by the end of Reception. Learning is planned effectively to include a good balance of activities that are led by adults and those that children choose for themselves. Sometimes, the activities that children do without adult support do not have a clear enough purpose. As a result, they do not always advance children's learning sufficiently. Good teaching of phonics gives children the building blocks for developing sound reading and writing skills as the year progresses. Children make good progress in learning to count and recognise numbers through a wide variety of well-planned practical activities. Effective assessments of children's knowledge and understanding through daily observations are used well to ensure that activities are planned to build on previous learning. The school has rightly identified the need to use the outdoor space more effectively to develop learning in all areas of the curriculum.

What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate pupils' progress in order to raise standards, with a particular emphasis on boys' writing, problem solving in mathematics and investigative work in science.
- Develop the roles of teachers with management responsibilities in checking and evaluating pupils' progress and the quality of learning in order to drive up standards.
- Give pupils clearer guidance on their next steps in learning and involve them more effectively in checking on their own progress.

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

Achievement is now satisfactory and pupils are reaching expected standards. Standards dipped significantly in 2006 to well below average levels and there was underachievement in Year 6. This was due to a combination of some inadequate teaching for these pupils in past years and a high number of late entrants to the year group who spent a relatively short time at the school. There was a marked improvement in the national tests in 2007, especially in English, but standards in mathematics and science, although average, have not improved so much. Standards in reading have risen because of better resources, more effective teaching strategies and involving parents more actively in supporting their children at home. The school is already taking steps to motivate boys to write and this is particularly effective in the booster groups in Years 5 and 6. There are also signs that teaching pupils in ability groups in mathematics is beginning to have an impact in raising standards. Records show that pupils are now making satisfactory progress overall and good progress in reading. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities progress at the same rate as their peers. The growing number of pupils who are learning to speak English make good progress in acquiring the language because of the good support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are happy at school and enjoy all that it has to offer, especially the wide variety of extra-curricular activities. 'There are lots of after-school sports clubs ... so that keeps us healthy', said one boy. Others are keen to show how they maintain a healthy diet. Pupils' spiritual and cultural development is greatly enhanced by music and art and the colourful and well-presented displays around the school. The pupils' good behaviour contributes much to the school's calm and orderly atmosphere. Their enjoyment of school is reflected in their good attendance. Pupils take their responsibilities seriously, for example as members of the school council. Their contributions to school improvement include choosing new playground equipment and setting up a healthy tuckshop. Pupils say that they feel safe at school and that bullying is rare and dealt with promptly if it occurs. Peer mediators play an important role in settling minor disputes and arguments in a friendly manner. There is a commendable degree of racial harmony amongst the pupils and the school makes every effort to celebrate the broad mix of cultures represented. This makes an effective contribution to preparing pupils for their future lives in society, as do their good computer skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching has a number of good qualities, but these are not yet consistent enough throughout the school to guarantee that all pupils are making good progress. Good relationships and high expectations of pupils' behaviour ensure that learning can take place in a calm, well-ordered environment. Lessons are generally lively and interesting, often enhanced by teachers' effective use of interactive whiteboards. One pupil said, 'The teachers are really special and make lessons fun and not boring', and this is typical of the views of many. Sometimes, teachers spend too long talking to the whole class and this leaves insufficient time for pupils to practise new skills or tackle the activities that are set for them. Consequently, they make only satisfactory progress in the given time. Although teachers usually explain clearly to pupils what they are expected to learn, they do not always reinforce this enough during or at the end of the lesson to ensure that pupils have achieved the intended learning outcomes.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum has some significant strengths. Displays of high quality art work, specialist provision in music and French and a wide variety of sports activities testify to the school's commitment to provide pupils with a varied and interesting curriculum. ICT is used effectively to enhance learning in a number of subjects. Links with specialist schools widen pupils' experiences and enrich their learning in several subjects. Good personal and social education prepares pupils well for their future role in society. Provision in English, mathematics and science is satisfactory although opportunities for pupils to practise their writing in other subjects are not exploited to the full. Problem solving in mathematics and investigative work in science are relatively weaker aspects of the curriculum in those subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Rigorous arrangements for ensuring pupils' health, safety and welfare ensure they are well cared for. Pupils feel confident that adults will help them if they have problems. One parent commented, 'I feel my daughter is really listened to.' There are good systems for managing pupils' behaviour and improving attendance. Pupils' confidence and self-esteem are boosted by recognition of their achievements through certificates and awards. There are effective systems for checking and recording how well pupils are doing and for tracking their progress throughout each year. These are used well to identify any pupils who may be falling behind so that extra help and support can be put in place. Progress is already improving as a result of these systems. Teachers set individual and group targets for all pupils. Pupils know these but are not sufficiently involved in assessing their own progress towards them.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and deputy headteacher have forged a strong partnership with a clear focus on raising standards and achievement. They provide good support for colleagues and have successfully seen the school through a period of considerable staff turnover over the past two years. Rigorous analysis of assessment data and regular observations of teaching and learning have enabled accurate identification of the most important priorities for improvement. The strategic improvement plan clearly shows how these priorities will be addressed and how success will be measured. Many initiatives are in the early stages of implementation, but the impact of actions to improve reading shows that the school is well placed to bring about improvement in other areas.

Teachers' management responsibilities are being restructured on the basis of shared leadership and teamwork, which they have embraced with enthusiasm. These new roles are still evolving and many are at an early stage of development. Subject leaders, for example, do not yet play a central role in checking the impact of teaching on learning and progress, for example when examining pupils' work. Much of the work to drive up standards still rests with senior leaders. Governors' involvement in strategic planning and evaluating the school's performance is growing as they develop increasingly effective systems for gathering information.

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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?	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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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 disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is 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
How well 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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
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?	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 tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
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?	Yes
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

22 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of East Borough Primary School, Maidstone, ME14 5DX

Thank you for making us welcome and talking to us about your work during our recent visit. Your school is improving and is giving you a satisfactory education. Some of you have not made enough progress in the past, but now you are making steady progress. Many of you are making good progress in reading. We have asked the school to help you to make faster progress in writing, mathematics and science. Those of you who are in the Reception classes are doing well because the teachers plan lots of interesting ways for you to learn new things.

We were pleased to see you working hard and enjoying lessons. You behave well in class and around the school and take your responsibilities seriously. The adults look after you well and help you to feel safe and secure. We like the way they give you certificates for good attendance and for reading five times a week at home. This all helps you to make better progress. You told us that the teachers make lessons fun for you and we could see what you mean. They explain new ideas well but sometimes you spend too long sitting listening and not enough time doing your own work. The teachers check on your progress regularly. Some of them show you what you have to do to improve your work and reach higher levels but this is not always the case. We have asked the school to make sure this happens in every class and to involve you more in checking your own progress. You can help by remembering your targets and checking how well you are doing in lessons.

The adults who run the school want to give you the best education possible and are working hard to help you reach higher standards. Many of the teachers have taken on new responsibilities recently, for example in different subjects. We have asked the school to make sure that they keep a close eye on the progress you are making, for example by checking your books, to make sure you are learning as well as you should be.

We are sure you will continue to enjoy your time at East Borough and wish you success when you move on to other schools.

With best wishes,

Carole Skinner Lead inspector

22 November 2007



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Lead inspector