

Cherry Tree Primary School, Basildon

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132833
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	316034
Inspection dates	29–30 September 2008
Reporting inspector	John Messer

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.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	379
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
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Steve Burns
Headteacher	Miss Eileen Heaphy
Date of previous school inspection	24 January 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Church Road Basildon Essex SS16 4AG

Age group	3–11
Inspection dates	29–30 September 2008
Inspection number	316034

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Age group 3–11

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This school is larger than average. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and a small and rising proportion are from minority ethnic groups. Several pupils speak English as an additional language. Several arrive at the school speaking no English. An above average proportion of pupils enter and leave the school part-way through this phase of their education. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities is above average and in some year groups it is exceptionally high. A high proportion of pupils have communication, speech and language difficulties. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is above average. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school is very low. The school has the Healthy Schools Award and an Inclusion Award. There is a privately run after school club.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Pupils receive a satisfactory standard of education. This school is battling to overcome the many challenges it faces and is meeting with increasing success. One of the main difficulties is recruiting suitable teaching staff. A large proportion of the teaching force is new and high levels of staff turnover have made it difficult to maintain stability and consistency in the quality of teaching and learning. In partnership with governors, leaders have begun to tackle issues regarding recruitment and greater stability is now being achieved.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory and so pupils make adequate progress. In the best lessons planning is detailed and defines precisely what the teacher expects pupils to learn. Explanations are clear and pupils understand what is expected of them. In the less successful lessons, teachers do not always explain things so clearly and their planning does not define precisely what new skills are to be taught. Teachers modify activities so that all groups can achieve success but sometimes pupils are not sufficiently challenged and become restless when work is either too hard or, as is more often the case, too easy. The more able learners in particular are not always provided with tasks that really extend them or help them to reach the highest possible standards.

Although pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall, it is patchy, especially in Key Stage 2. Data shows that progress is usually much faster in Years 5 and 6 than it has been in Years 3 and 4. This is mainly because teachers' expectations of the amount of progress pupils should make has been too low. Also there is insufficient urgency about helping pupils to catch up and reach the standards expected. Although standards have improved, they are still exceptionally low overall.

Leaders have identified the need to develop the curriculum and are introducing a thematic approach that matches pupils' interests more closely and is more relevant to their needs. Pupils enjoy lessons. Most are eager to please and are keen to prove that they are successful learners. Pupils receive rewards for learning well and are keen to fill up their 'learning passports' with stickers that recognise their achievements.

Pupils receive good pastoral guidance and say that relationships with staff are so good that they would feel comfortable about sharing any worries with them. Academic guidance is less secure and pupils do not always have a clear understanding of what they need to do to reach the next step in their learning. Pupils' personal development is satisfactory. They have a sound understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles. Their positive attitudes to learning and the range of skills they develop gives them a sound platform for transferring to secondary schools. Procedures to secure pupils' safety are robust.

The school makes satisfactory efforts to promote community cohesion. It reaches out to the local community by, for example, facilitating adult literacy classes. There are good links with a school in Uganda which pupils support through fund-raising. They have pen pals in the Ugandan school, which helps them to gain an appreciation of different life styles.

The headteacher and her deputy headteacher share a relentless determination to raise standards. Ambitious targets are set, for the amount of progress that pupils are expected to make each year but data shows that pupils' performance in some year groups, particularly Years 3 and 4, have often fallen well below aspirations. This is largely due to high staff turnover which has impeded progress. The leadership of the headteachers and her deputy is good. They are committed to making sure that everything possible is done to overcome the barriers that impede pupils' learning. All associated with the school are well aware of its strengths and weaknesses.

Its self-evaluation is thorough but over-generous. Satisfactory management has brought about reasonable improvement since the last inspection and the school has sound capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Most children enter the Nursery with very low levels of development. Achievement is satisfactory overall. They make good progress in the Nursery because the good teaching supports children's development well. Teaching is satisfactory in the Reception classes. Children attain standards that are well below average and are especially low in communication, language and literacy and problem solving, reasoning and numeracy. Children's welfare and safety is given top priority. Children feel safe and are encouraged to follow a healthy lifestyle through eating healthy snacks and washing their hands. Children are encouraged to talk about their feelings and share their ideas but many find it difficult to express themselves clearly. Behaviour in the nursery is good and children are engaged in their learning. Behaviour is satisfactory in the Reception classes but here the activities are not so inviting or interesting. Social skills are developing well and children are encouraged to take responsibility for laying the table at snack time, sharing out food and showing good table manners. Children are not always given enough opportunity to do things for themselves, such as finding the right coat. This impedes the development of independence. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) leader has sound knowledge of the children and their needs. Effective systems are in place to record children's development in all areas of learning and these help to identify their next steps in learning. Leaders are committed to helping all children make good progress but they have been frustrated in their attempts to raise standards by high staff turnover.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards by ensuring that the new skills to be taught in each lesson are clearly identified and taught systematically.
- Make sure that all groups of pupils, especially the more able, are appropriately challenged and are fully extended so that they attain higher standards.
- Improve the quality of teaching in order to accelerate pupils' progress in each year group, particularly in Years 3 and 4.

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

All groups of pupils make adequate progress but the starting points are very low so that by Year 2 standards in reading and writing remain exceptionally low. Standards in mathematics have risen and, although below average, are now much closer to national averages. Standards by Year 6 are exceptionally low in mathematics and well below average in English. Although standards are below average in science, an improving trend is evident. Progress in Years 3 to 6 matches the amount of progress that pupils make nationally but it is uneven across the year groups.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Relationships are good. Pupils enjoy what the school provides. Sometimes opportunities are missed for pupils to be actively involved in their learning. Consequently they sometimes show little enthusiasm for lessons. Overall attendance, although improving year-on-year, is still just below the national average. Punctuality is good. Pupils have a sound appreciation of what is needed for a healthy and a safe life. They welcome the opportunities to take part in an appropriate range of sports and games activities, in school and in after-school clubs. Pupils say that they are pleased to represent others on the school council and to help in class and at lunchtimes. They are involved satisfactorily in the local community. Although pupils are acquiring skills at a satisfactory rate, the standards they reach limits their preparation for future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

There is some good teaching in the school and clear evidence that teaching and learning are improving. However, the quality of both is inconsistent. Teachers receive clear guidance. Interactive white boards are often used well to stimulate learning and focus pupils' attention. Behaviour is managed effectively and pupils respond well to the rewards for learning. In some classes, particularly in Key Stage 2, there is still not enough attention to making sure that the new skills to be taught in a lesson are defined precisely. Consequently, some lessons are not sufficiently purposeful and pupils, particularly the more able, do not make as much progress as they should. Lesson time is not always used efficiently and sometimes there is a lack of urgency about helping all groups to make as much progress as possible during the course of a lesson. Teaching assistants make a sound contribution to pupils' learning, especially those pupils who have learning difficulties and/ or disabilities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

A number of interesting visits and visitors to the school help to make learning fun for the pupils. Learning opportunities are extended well through a good number of after-school clubs, which include dance, drama and German, as well as a number of sports activities. There are good links with the local community through work on the local Heritage Project, links with local church groups and visits to the library. A start has been made on the new 'creative curriculum' which is still being extended and modified to strengthen links between different subjects and to integrate the visits that pupils make but this is still work in progress. The curriculum is sensitively modified for pupils who may be vulnerable or in need but it is not yet modified enough to meet the needs of more able pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Thorough safeguarding arrangements are regularly reviewed. Pupils have targets to guide their learning. They are well aware of their individual targets but are sometimes less sure as to what they need to do to achieve them. There is sound provision for slower learners who need extra

support to improve their performance. Learners in need of emotional care are well supported. Gifted or talented pupils do not receive enough guidance to help them to achieve their potential. Discussions with learners show that, although bullying has been an issue in the past, it is now not a problem.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and her deputy headteacher have succeeded in developing a positive ethos and a spirit of optimism about continuing improvement. They have broadcast a clear vision for school improvement and have created a good school improvement plan to guide developments. They have established good systems to motivate pupils to learn effectively. Responsibilities for developing the curriculum and raising standards in specific subjects have been shared out among subject leaders. Many are new to these responsibilities. They have written good action plans to raise standards but the initiatives they are taking have yet to have much impact. However, the school is entering a period of greater stability and, thanks to the persistence of the leadership team, is improving but leaders recognise that there is still much to do. Governors are supportive and have been particularly helpful in reducing staff turnover. The school sets challenging targets for pupils' attainment. Due to the lack of continuity in pupils' learning, particularly in Years 3 and 4, these targets are not always met. The majority of parents are pleased with the education provided for their children. One comment was typical, 'All the staff are very approachable and they are always willing to listen. My children love school.' A small number of parents have some concerns about bullying but pupils report that this is dealt with well.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	3
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	3
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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 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?	3

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	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

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

1 October 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Cherry tree Primary School, Basildon, SS16 4AG

We thoroughly enjoyed the short time we spent with you. Thank you for being so friendly and helpful.

We think that you get a sound start to your education and there are some good things about your school. You like learning new things. You work willingly but also enjoy having fun. Those of you who find it rather difficult to learn new things get support for your learning. You are now making satisfactory progress but standards in literacy and numeracy could be higher. You are good at sport and keep yourselves fit by having plenty of exercise. You know how to stay safe and look after yourselves and others. You told us that one of the best things about the school was the friendships you make. You and your parents also appreciate all the help that the teachers and support staff give you. All the grown ups try hard to help you feel happy and to learn successfully. Miss Heaphy and all the staff are keen to make the school better and to make your lessons even more exciting.

We think that there are three main things that would help to improve your school.

- Teachers should help you to reach higher standards by making sure that you have a clearer understanding of what new skills you are expected to learn in lessons.
- Teachers should give you challenging goals to aim at in your learning, especially for those who find lessons easy.
- We have asked your teachers to make sure that you make good progress in each year group, particularly in Years 3 and 4.

We know that you want to do your best and we think that if you continue to work hard you are capable of attaining higher standards.

We wish you every success in the future.

John Messer

Lead inspector