

Brightlingsea Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114755
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	326061
Inspection date	13 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Helen Ranger

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	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	219
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 Gerry Pulford
Headteacher	Mrs Julia Hunt
Date of previous school inspection	27 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Eastern Road Brightlingsea Colchester Essex CO7 0HU
Telephone number	01206 302719
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Age group	4–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated:

- how well the oldest pupils achieve
- the main features of care, guidance and support and their impact on pupils' personal development and well-being
- how the school evaluates the impact of its leadership and management.

The inspectors gathered evidence from records of pupils' progress, observations of lessons and breaktime activities, examples of pupils' work, discussions with pupils, staff and governors, and questionnaires and letters from parents. The main documents used by the school in its monitoring were examined. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but 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 this report.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average infant school catering for children in the immediate area. Pupils are mostly from White British backgrounds and almost all speak English as their first language. The percentage receiving free school meals is below average. A lower than average proportion of the pupils has learning difficulties and/or disabilities; these pupils often need extra help with speech and language. The school has a high proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs, including some with quite severe physical disabilities. When children join the Early Years Foundation Stage in the Reception year, their attainment varies but, overall, is below the levels expected nationally for four-year-olds.

The school also offers the community a wide range of extended services, including a breakfast club, after-school club and holiday club, all managed by the governing body.

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 school that has gone from strength to strength over recent years. It is a good school with important aspects of its work that are now outstanding. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the education their children receive. Their views are summed up by the parent who described the school as 'A welcoming, safe and stimulating environment in which to learn and grow'. The driving force behind the improvements is the outstanding headteacher. Staff speak of her inspirational leadership and the systematic professional development arrangements. These have enabled all staff to contribute to rigorous school self-evaluation and to deliver significant improvements in many areas.

Pupils achieve well academically. Their starting points in Reception are often quite low, especially in aspects of their language ability and their knowledge and understanding of the world. They make good progress throughout the school and standards are typically above the national average in the Year 2 assessments in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils in Year 2 this year are on course to continue the rising trend of attainment and to reach well above average standards, higher than in 2008. School records also show pupils' good performance in key science and computer skills. High standards are equally reflected in the very good progress made by pupils who need extra adult help with learning, including the exceptionally effective care given to pupils with statements of special educational needs.

Pupils' good achievement is the result of effective teaching and learning and an outstanding curriculum. Staff have achieved a national Basic Skills award and give an appropriate focus to teaching basic skills. They also ensure that all subjects are planned in an interesting and creative way. The topic-based curriculum is purposeful and highly imaginative. It is delivered well by the staff. The best lessons create a tangible 'buzz' of excitement and a real zest for learning in the pupils. Such teaching also makes crystal clear to the pupils what they are intended to learn and enables them to reflect on their achievements. In this way, pupils are aware of their progress and what they need to focus on next. Lessons increasingly reach this standard, but not yet equally well across all classes. The headteacher is determined to improve teaching and learning further. She has set ambitious goals to reduce the proportion of lessons that are no better than satisfactory and to achieve more good or outstanding teaching.

Pupils' individual needs and achievements are identified and progress is assessed regularly in both academic and personal development. A substantial programme of intervention activities is available for pupils who need extra help or challenge. The main curriculum is strongly enhanced by an excellent range of clubs, visits and visitors to the school. An example of the quality of these took place on the day of the inspection. Pupils worked avidly with a mosaic artist on panels to decorate the new area of the building currently under construction. The school also offers the community a wide range of extended services, including a well managed breakfast club, after-school club and holiday club. These provide a valuable resource for parents and enable pupils to mix well with older children from the junior school.

Pupils' personal development and well-being have improved further since the last inspection and the standards reached by the oldest pupils are now outstanding. Alongside the improved academic standards, these qualities stand them in good stead for the next stage of education. They show enormous enjoyment of school and have very good attitudes to learning. This is reflected in better attendance which has risen to be above the national average. Overall spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Staff ensure that the curriculum broadens

pupils' horizons and establishes a good understanding of contrasting cultures and beliefs. In such ways, staff enable pupils to contribute extremely well to the school and wider community. An example of this is their involvement in the current improvements to the site to include a multi-use games area as a school and community facility. Pupils make exceptionally good progress in their behaviour, relationships and capacity for independence compared with their standards when they start school. Behaviour in class and in the playground is consistently good. The school's strong promotion of healthy lifestyles has been recognised by Healthy School and Activemark awards. Pupils show an extremely good understanding for their age of the importance of good health and how to achieve it.

Pupils work and play safely. Levels of adult care and support are excellent. Staff take the occasional incidents of bullying or unkind behaviour very seriously and parents are extremely pleased with the levels of pastoral care. The school meets the requirements to safeguard pupils and attends very well to their health and safety. Highly effective links exist with external agencies, such as those that give specialist help to individuals with learning or health needs. The school also enjoys close links with the neighbouring junior school, so that transfer at the end of Year 2 is smooth.

Pupils receive high quality academic guidance which includes frequent oral feedback from adults. Written feedback, such as marking in books, is mostly good and sometimes outstanding. Where practice is best, teachers expect that pupils will regularly consider how well they are learning in lessons and provide opportunities for this to happen. Alongside the setting of suitably challenging small-step targets for learning, this results in pupils having a good understanding of how they are getting on. The school is rightly focusing on ensuring that such practice becomes consistently good in all classes.

Leadership and management have continued to develop well since the school was last inspected and are outstanding. The momentum for change has been maintained and there is no complacency. The school sets challenging targets for itself in all areas. The headteacher has made sure that senior and middle managers are equipped with the skills needed to evaluate and improve provision. Governors are active and questioning, involved very well in discussions at all levels and led by a highly committed, well-informed chairperson. They hold the school to account and manage finances well. Their long-term planning is good, for example in minimising the impact on the budget of a falling birth rate locally and fewer admissions. A core of experienced governors provides stability and new governors are inducted well. There are currently several new governors undergoing training. The school is rightly determined to ensure that this group develops good evaluation skills as rapidly as possible so that they can contribute fully to initiatives. To this end, there are appropriate plans to ensure that the written development planning documents include even clearer monitoring criteria for governors to check that their work is successful in improving pupils' learning.

There has been considerable refurbishment of the building that has improved facilities for pupils and staff. The outdoor site is designed as a stimulating environment to meet the needs of young children, with extensive play space, wildlife and allotment areas. Together with the care clubs, this is helping the school to act as a community hub and open its facilities more widely to local people. There is a clear commitment to community cohesion which is high on the governors' agenda. The school's determination to raise standards further in all aspects of its work, and the success so far, indicate an excellent capacity for the future.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The leadership and management of this age group are good. Very good liaison with pre-school settings and a comprehensive induction programme ensure that children settle happily in Reception classes. The excellent partnerships with parents and external professionals, such as the local health visitor, help to ensure that children's welfare is promoted exceptionally well. Staff have very good relationships with the children and manage their learning well. This results in very good progress in behaviour and attitudes and children moving safely and sensibly between activities. In spite of being lower than expected in many cases when starting school, standards of children's personal development soon rise to at least expected levels, and often better.

The classrooms are well resourced, as is the outside area, so that the environment promotes interest and enquiry. Children are enthusiastic about their learning and play happily together. This ensures that all children are made to feel very welcome, including those with additional learning needs and/or disabilities, who have a positive experience of school. Planning for future learning is based on careful assessments of children's progress, which are shared with parents. There are good links with the after-school club so that learning which takes place in that environment can be taken into account in school. Teaching is good overall and this, combined with careful tracking of children's progress and support from effective learning support assistants, ensures that children achieve well. As a result, most reach, and some exceed, expected levels by the end of the year in all areas of learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure more lessons reflect the best practice in engaging pupils' imagination and creativity, and in encouraging pupils to identify their own achievements and next steps in learning.
- Develop the monitoring skills of new governors by including in development plans explicit criteria and methods for judging the success of initiatives, firmly rooted in the outcomes expected in pupils' learning.

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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?	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?	2
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 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/or disabilities make progress	2

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?	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	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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

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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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	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**

14 May 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Brightlingsea Infant School, Brightlingsea CO7 0HU

I am writing to thank you all for your very friendly welcome and help during our recent visit to your school. It was a pleasure to meet you all.

You and your parents told us that you go to a very good school and we agree. The school is a lively, busy place to be and it welcomes all of you and your families. You all get on with each other extremely well and make good progress. You told us how much you enjoy school and we saw that for ourselves on our visit. We were impressed with the outdoor space and how well you use it. You certainly know that fresh air and exercise help you to be healthy.

The adults in your school care for you extremely well. They provide really interesting activities for you and teach you well. You told us that you like the staff and enjoy your work. Attendance has improved and it was good to see that so many of you come to school whenever possible, unless you are ill. The staff want to continue making lessons even more exciting for you and we have asked them to keep doing this. We saw many of you using the lesson objectives and your learning targets to check your learning. Well done for this. Keep up the good work!

The staff help you share your ideas to make your school even better and to work in your local community. We enjoyed seeing you working on the mosaics for the new building. The staff and governors work as an excellent team to make sure that your school keeps on getting better. There have been many improvements in the last few years and the staff told us about their ambitious plans for the future.

The school has some new governors at present. We have asked the staff and the rest of the governors to make sure that these people quickly become part of the team. In this way they will learn the skills they need to help run your school and check that you all make as much progress as possible.

We are sure you will carry on enjoying all that your school does for you.

Best wishes

Helen Ranger

Lead inspector