

Richard de Clare Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114765
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	326063
Inspection dates	19–20 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Nick Butt

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	417
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	4
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Simon Green
Headteacher	Mr David Iles
Date of previous school inspection	30 January 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Parsonage Street Halstead Essex CO9 2JT
Telephone number	01787 472153

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	19–20 January 2009
Inspection number	326063

Fax number

01787 475143

Age group	4-11
Inspection dates	19-20 January 2009
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This large school has Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision in two Reception classes. Children start school with skills and abilities that are below those usually found, especially in personal and social development and in language and literacy. The vast majority of pupils come from White British backgrounds and very few speak English as an additional language. A smaller than average proportion of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Over a quarter of pupils have learning difficulties and/ or disabilities, which is above average. Many of these have moderate learning difficulties. Members of the leadership team have undertaken school-based research projects, including how pupils learn, improving writing and developing support staff. The school has the Advanced Healthy Schools Award. The school also manages a before-and-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: 2

Richard de Clare is a good school. Aspects of its work are outstanding. These include pupils' personal development and well-being, and the care, guidance and support that they receive. The long-serving headteacher has outstanding passion and vision that makes a considerable impact on the whole school and wider community. This is reflected in the overwhelmingly positive view that parents hold of the school's work. One, speaking for many, said: 'The head and all the staff are very in touch with all of the pupils and the atmosphere at the school is a very friendly, homely one.'

Pupils achieve well from starting points below those usually expected because teaching is mainly good and the curriculum is lively and engaging. They love coming to school. One said, 'I wouldn't want to be anywhere else, I really enjoy it here.' Consequently, the majority of pupils attend well and the school deals effectively with the very few who are absent persistently. Standards have fluctuated over time, partly because of variations in the performance of boys and summer-born pupils. However, as a result of work done by the school, in the past two years standards have stabilised and in 2008 were broadly average. Although more pupils attain the nationally expected levels than is usually found, a smaller proportion attain the higher levels. This is because, while most of the more able pupils fulfil their potential, there is a small group of pupils who are capable of doing better than average who just miss their targets. These are the ones that the school has identified as needing greater challenge in their work.

The great emphasis placed on consulting pupils and involving them in their own learning has led to them becoming increasingly confident and independent. There are excellent relationships throughout the school, and pupils and staff like and respect one another. As one pupil said, 'We're all friends here.' The opportunities pupils have to support one another as peer mediators and play leaders contribute very well to their outstanding personal development.

The good curriculum interests and appeals to pupils. A recent project on the mediaeval castle saw the school entrance transformed back in time, with a dragon to 'eat and greet' visitors. There are plenty of clubs for pupils to enjoy, and they benefit from a range of visits. Pupils are given good guidance as to how to improve their work, especially in lessons. There is excellent pastoral care contributing to the school's very positive ethos. Staff know the pupils very well and make every effort to meet their needs. Everything that happens is geared to be in the best interests of pupils, such as the formation of a nurture group, which is proving very successful in helping vulnerable pupils.

The impact of leadership and management on raising standards and achievement is good, with an upward trend at the end of Year 2. The challenge to consolidate gains at the end of Year 6 is being won through careful analysis of data and intervening early to support pupils who need additional support. The headteacher has nurtured budding leadership within the staff well, and there is a strong team of senior leaders who embrace his vision for improvement. The school has made effective progress since its last inspection and its capacity to improve further is good.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make good progress because they settle quickly into the Reception classes and are happy. They enjoy the rich diet of learning they receive, with carefully planned activities tailored to their individual needs and aptitudes. Staff provide a good range of opportunities to extend

children's personal and social skills and to develop their early literacy skills, as these are two areas where many children struggle at first. While attainment is still not in line with national expectations by the end of the Reception year, children have made good strides towards them. The topic-based approach, that takes its lead from children's own interests, means that the curriculum is imaginative and dynamic. Children enjoy hunting for treasure as part of their project on 'Pirates and the Sea' and have inspired by the arrival of a sea captain to regale them with tales on the ocean wave. The awkward accommodation, however, means that one class does not have free access to the outside area, and this limits the opportunities for children to play and explore when it suits them. The classrooms themselves are too small for 30 children, which causes congestion and makes the learning environment rather cramped.

Children's personal development and well-being are outstanding because of their enthusiasm for learning and because of the excellent care and welfare provided for them by all staff. The EYFS is led and managed well, with a strong team of teaching and support staff working closely together. They make careful observations of children and are beginning to link these to the new EYFS developmental criteria.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide greater challenge for those pupils capable of attaining the higher levels in English and mathematics to ensure that they all reach them.
- Develop the EYFS accommodation to enlarge the classrooms and to provide free access for all children to the outside area.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Most pupils make good progress in each year group in reading, writing and mathematics. From starting points below national expectations, pupils reach broadly average standards by the end of Year 6. Standards at the end of Year 2 are rising, with a strong cohort in 2008 reaching above average levels. Throughout the school, many of the pupils who are capable of attaining higher levels in English and mathematics do so, but there is a borderline group who are not given the additional challenge that they need to achieve their potential. Pupils with moderate learning difficulties receive effective support and achieve well, so that they meet their individual targets successfully. The few pupils who speak English as an additional language also progress well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. This is reflected in their very sensitive awareness of others within the school, supporting each other well in lessons, and providing help in the playground. They have an excellent understanding of their own and others' cultures, visiting inner city Manchester every year to appreciate life in an urban environment, and undertaking special projects on Africa and India. Pupils' excellent pursuit of healthy lifestyles is borne out by their Advanced Healthy Schools Award. They run a healthy tuck shop and respond enthusiastically to the many opportunities for sport. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is exemplary, something that all parents who returned questionnaires endorsed. Pupils say they feel safe at school and that bullying is not a problem. They have extremely positive attitudes towards school and learning. They develop into mature, responsible young people who make an excellent contribution to the school and its wider community. They took part in the town's remembrance parade, and the choir performs with the Halstead Choral

Society, as well as entertaining the elderly. The school council is influential in making decisions, for example, about which charities to support. Pupils' good progress in developing basic literacy and numeracy skills, as well as outstanding social skills, ensures they feel ready for the next stage of education and beyond. Through business enterprise activities, they have a good understanding of the challenges of running a company, especially in the current economic climate. Children behave well in the before-and-after-school club and take a full part in the good range of activities provided for them.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Well structured teaching and learning are underpinned by excellent relationships between adults and pupils and good teamwork with teaching assistants, who make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subjects and approach lessons confidently. They build on earlier learning to ensure that pupils develop their skills systematically and question pupils skilfully to check understanding as the lesson progresses. Encouraging feedback is given promptly. Activities are planned thoughtfully to capture pupils' imagination. One pupil said, 'Teachers always make lessons interesting with lots of variety.' Teaching is not always consistently good across the school, although aspects are outstanding. Sometimes the work does not challenge all the pupils who can do so to attain the higher levels in English and mathematics.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Teachers use their educational research to reflect carefully on the curriculum, and to adapt it to suit pupils' evolving needs. Pupils are enthusiastic about their learning and take part wholeheartedly, partly due to the introduction of a more active approach to learning. There is a wealth of enrichment that adds colour and enjoyment for pupils, and contributes significantly to their outstanding personal development and well-being. For example, all pupils have the opportunity to learn African drumming. Year 6 pupils take part in outdoor adventure activities on Mersea Island, and Year 5 pupils visit the Peak District. The school involves families very well in its activities, arranging weekend events that are highly popular, such as a family picnic. All pupils benefit from the good curriculum, including those who are vulnerable or who have moderate learning difficulties. There is good provision for literacy and numeracy that enables pupils to achieve well. The school has a computer suite and some additional computers in the library area, but pupils do not have regular access to computers in their classrooms. For those in mobile classrooms, this creates practical problems in practising their skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school takes excellent care of its pupils, ensuring they are safe and content. Staff are highly committed to meeting the needs of all pupils, whatever they are, and this has given the school a well-deserved renown in its locality. All safeguarding arrangements are fully in place. There is also outstanding provision for children's welfare in the before-and-after-school club, with all requirements met, and staff undergoing thorough training. The school works very successfully with other agencies to ensure that pupils with moderate learning difficulties receive effective

support so that they can make good progress. Pupils are guided well in their learning, with many opportunities to reflect on their own and others' progress in lessons. Booster classes give additional help to pupils preparing for tests.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher sets an outstanding example to pupils, staff and parents through his enthusiasm and dedication. As one of many parents commented: 'The headteacher is very involved in all school events and has the respect of the teachers and pupils alike.' Over the years, he has moulded a thriving community of learners and built a committed staff team. Young leaders are taking on increasing responsibilities, and all teachers are involved in monitoring teaching through peer observations. This gives staff a wider perspective on how well things are going, and encourages innovation. It is a reflective school that digs deeply to understand the keys to why pupils perform as they do, and what can be done to improve this. The impact of leadership and management is thus good, as the school holds on to previous gains in attainment and systematically builds upon them. Monitoring is robust and self-evaluation generally accurate, if optimistic at times. The governing body supports the school well, holding it to account effectively. In recent times, there have been few opportunities for governors and staff to plan or train together. The school is at the heart of its community and reaches out well to promote cohesion. There is good leadership of the before-and-after-school club, which runs smoothly and is greatly appreciated by pupils and their parents.

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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	2

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 ¹ reached by learners	3
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	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

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?	2
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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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**

21 January 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Richard de Clare Community Primary School, Halstead, Essex, CO9 2JT

Thank you for making us so welcome at your school. We enjoyed meeting you and agree that yours is a good school. These are some of its strengths.

- You are! Your behaviour is excellent and you go out of your way to help one another.
- Children in the EYFS get off to a good start.
- You make good progress in your learning and enjoy your lessons.
- The teaching is good and involves you well.
- There is plenty for you to do including clubs and visits.
- You know all about keeping healthy and take plenty of exercise.
- You are very well involved in working with and helping your local community.
- The school cares for you extremely well.
- Mr. Iles is one of a kind! He has made sure the school is a special place for you to learn.

While all of you do well at school, not all of you who can reach the higher levels in your tests. We have asked your teachers to focus on really challenging those pupils to do their best. The youngest of you love coming to school, but it is not easy for some of you to get outside to play and your classrooms are too small. We have asked staff and governors to think of ways of improving this situation. Perhaps you could help to come up with a solution.

Thank you once again for your help. Our very best wishes for the future.

Yours faithfully

Mr N Butt

Lead inspector