

Whitmore Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114819
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	326069
Inspection dates	17–18 September 2008
Reporting inspector	John Francis

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	177
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Claire Barford
Headteacher	Mrs Iris Cerny
Date of previous school inspection	11 September 2007
School address	Whitmore Way Basildon Essex SS14 2TP
Telephone number	01268 520435
Fax number	01268 289673

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a slightly smaller than average school, serving an area of the town that has a high level of social and economic need. Numbers have fallen over recent years but have now levelled out. Most pupils are of White British origin. Attainment on entry to the school is below average and the proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities, including statements of special educational need, is very high.

The school has achieved 'Healthy Schools' status and has an Active Sports Mark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

The school now provides its pupils with a satisfactory standard of education but there remains much to do to enable pupils to achieve national averages in English, mathematics and science. Nevertheless, there have been significant improvements over the last year. The dedication, drive and vision of the headteacher have ensured good progress in addressing the long-standing underachievement in the school. The rapid improvements on all fronts over the last year demonstrate a good capacity for continued growth and development.

Rigorous monitoring, well-directed staff training and good assessment and tracking systems have led to more consistently satisfactory teaching. While around half of the teaching is now good, this proportion is still not high enough to raise the standards to the levels needed. The most effective teaching, in Years 5 and 6, has led to significant improvements in achievement and progress for these pupils over the last year. However, progress in Years 3 and 4 is too slow and means that pupils come into Year 5 without all of the skills they need. The more recent focus on accurate target-setting is improving teachers' planning. Nevertheless, there remains work to do to ensure that all teachers make better use of the information available to plan lessons that meet the learning needs of all their pupils. While leadership and management overall are good, not all subject leaders yet have the skills or information they need to monitor their subjects and identify and address the gaps in provision.

A great strength of the school is in meeting the social and emotional needs of the pupils. There are secure systems to ensure that pupils are safe and cared for. Good systems for mentoring and supporting pupils have reduced instances of poor attitude and behaviour and helped those who find learning difficult to achieve more. The improvements to the whole culture of the school mean that pupils enjoy their lessons and are beginning to see themselves much more as learners. The take-up of healthy meals and over-subscribed after-school sports clubs reflect pupils' good understanding of how to stay healthy. The peer mentoring and play leader schemes mean that pupils always have someone to turn to if they need help. Along with the work of the school council, all of these initiatives lead to pupils feeling part of a strong school community. However, this is not just within school. Good links with the community beyond the school gate and the opportunities provided for parents ensure good relationships and give pupils a wider perspective on the world at large.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English, mathematics and science through improving the achievement and progress for pupils in Years 3 and 4.
- Ensure that all teachers use the data available to them to plan work that accurately meets the needs of all pupils in their class.
- Improve the skills and knowledge of those teachers with subject responsibilities so that they can monitor, evaluate and offer guidance more effectively.

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

With better teaching, a more engaging curriculum and improved behaviour management, pupils apply themselves well to their learning and are now achieving more than in recent years. The school's tracking records and the most recent assessments at Year 6 show good improvement across all subjects, with notable gains in science. While standards across the school remain below average, pupils' progress has improved, significantly so in Years 5 and 6. However, progress through Years 3 and 4 has been slower and these pupils still have a lot of ground to make up to achieve higher standards. Effective strategies put in place over the last year have closed the gap between girls' and boys' achievement, although there remain differences in their writing skills. Good support systems for those pupils who find learning more difficult, particularly in English, have helped their achievement and they are now progressing at a similar rate to others in school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The greatest improvement seen is in pupils' enjoyment of learning. They welcome the opportunities they have to learn through a more interesting and practical curriculum. This is reflected in the improvements seen in behaviour and attendance. Although still below the national average, attendance is slowly improving as changes to the school's systems begin to have an impact on parents' and pupils' perceptions. Through their commitment to the school council, their roles as playground leaders and peer mentors, older pupils, in particular, make a strong contribution to the school and to the well-being of all the children. Pupils demonstrate good social and moral understanding and are quick to notice any insensitive or unacceptable behaviour and tackle it. As a result, they accept greater responsibility for their actions and their own behaviour and, while behaviour is generally satisfactory, it is, more often than not, good in lessons. This social responsibility is not confined to school but extends beyond this through going out into the community and bringing the community into school. While pupils show skills in leadership and teamwork, more limited skills in literacy and numeracy and too few opportunities for showing enterprise limit aspects of their future development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Effective monitoring by the headteacher has identified areas for improvement and well-targeted training has improved teachers' skills. The strong focus on classroom management and more detailed lesson planning have led to much more consistent teaching across the school. However, differences remain, and where the most effective teaching is seen, in Years 5 and 6, pupils have made the greatest gains in their learning. Here, lessons have a brisk pace and pupils play an active role through discussion and good question and answer sessions. Teachers and teaching assistants apply the agreed behaviour policies consistently and deal quickly with any disturbance to the smooth running of the class. This has led to teachers being much more willing to plan practical and investigative activities. A move to sharper target-setting has helped pupils understand what they need to do to improve but not all teachers use this information as well as they need to when planning for the wide ranges of ability in their classes.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Recent revisions demonstrate that the curriculum has been reviewed to ensure breadth, balance and relevance to pupils' needs. The provision for teaching literacy and numeracy is good but not all teachers are as familiar as they should be with the revised framework for these areas of learning. The development of secure links between subjects and the skills pupils need is still in the process of becoming embedded into classroom practice across the school. The great strength of the curriculum lies in the enrichment and extra-curricular opportunities children have available to them. Instrumental tuition, computer club and homework club all contribute to the wider opportunities available to all pupils. Well-supported sports activities have waiting lists for places and contribute to pupils' personal development and well-being. The curriculum for those pupils who need extra support is well adapted to their needs and, for those with particular talents and skills, there are opportunities for further enrichment.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Robust systems and high levels of staff commitment to all aspects of pupils' health, safety and welfare contribute well to pupils' social, emotional and academic development. Secure safeguarding procedures are in place and regularly reviewed. School staff work well with the children and their families, supporting, mentoring and counselling where needed. The work of the learning mentor and the support from well-qualified teaching assistants have been an important factor in creating a secure environment for the pupils. The well-attended breakfast club gets the day off to a positive start for many pupils. They benefit not only from the opportunity to have a good breakfast in sociable surroundings but also develop their learning skills. Academic guidance is satisfactory. Pupils know about and understand their targets and teachers' marking is helpful in telling them how they can improve their work. However, not all teachers are using this as well as they should to revise and focus their planning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has set a clear direction for the school and shown a strong commitment to improving the lives of the pupils. Her very effective leadership has been instrumental in bringing the positive changes now seen in school, taking pupils, parents and staff along with her vision. She has set high expectations for staff and pupils and, as improvements are embedded, targets are raised to reflect the higher expectations and provide greater challenge. The accurate analysis and understanding of where the school is and what is needed to make further improvements are key elements in the rapid rate of progress seen. This has been followed by rigorous monitoring and well-targeted training for all staff. The effectiveness of those with other management or subject responsibilities is improving. However, they are still developing the skills and knowledge needed to drive even more rapid progress in their areas of responsibility. The active support of the governing body through its monitoring, understanding and willingness to hold the school to account has been an additional factor in improving the school. A national accreditation for financial management in schools recognises the high quality systems that are in place.

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 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/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?	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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
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 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

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	3
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**

19 September 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Whitmore Junior School, Basildon, SS14 2TP

Many of you will remember that Mrs Coles and I visited your school a little while ago. Thank you for making us so welcome. It was lovely meeting you and all of you we talked with were very keen to share your views of the school. This letter is to tell you what we found out about your school.

We agree with you that your school has got much better and can see how much you are all trying to improve your work. We also liked all of the other opportunities you have to learn musical instruments and take part in after-school clubs and sports. All of the adults take good care of you and work hard to make your school an interesting place to come to. All of you make a good contribution to your school. Many of you work very hard to help others and improve your school. Those who are in the school council, or are play leaders or mentors carry out your tasks extremely well. You told us how much you enjoy school, and like the opportunities you have now for practical work and investigations in science. We agree with you that your teachers work hard to make your lessons interesting. You also told us that everyone in school gets on much better and we could see this in the way you worked and played together.

To help you do even better we have asked Mrs Cerny and the teachers to do a number of things. We have asked them to help you improve your results in English, mathematics and science, particularly those of you in Years 3 and 4. To help with this we have asked teachers to use their assessments and your targets more when they plan your work so that it helps you make faster progress. Finally, we have asked those teachers who look after different subjects to find out about what is happening right through the school so that they can help other teachers more.

We wish you well for the future and hope you continue to work hard and get even better.

John Francis

Lead inspector