

The Alderton Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114861
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	326077
Inspection dates	20–21 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Norma Ball

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)	237
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Miss Julie Rhyan
Headteacher	Mrs Judith Lunn
Date of previous school inspection	10 October 2005
School address	Alderton Hall Lane Loughton Essex IG10 3HE
Telephone number	02085082521
Fax number	02085 025698

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Alderton Junior School is larger than average. Pupils enter the school with standards that are average. Most pupils are White British. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals and those from minority ethnic backgrounds are both lower than found in schools nationally. The number of pupils who are at an early stage of learning English has increased annually in recent years and is above average. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than found nationally and encompasses a range of needs including moderate learning difficulties and behavioural, emotional and social needs. The school holds the Active Mark award.

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 a satisfactory school. The headteacher, staff and governors are establishing a strong community atmosphere and sense of purpose. Most parents are pleased with the school and especially like the fact that their children are happy and settled. One parent summed up the view of many by saying, 'My daughter enjoys school and is always enthusiastic to attend.' Links with parents are fostered carefully and families value staff who are 'very supportive'.

All staff share the commitment of the headteacher to raise achievement and improve teaching. The school has a sound understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and the headteacher has led the school well through a phase that has resulted in a reduction in the number of pupils. The senior leadership team have focused suitably on improving teaching and learning but this is yet to have a significant impact on pupils' standards and achievement. The leadership roles of other staff are satisfactory, as is their monitoring and evaluation skills, and these are developing effectively.

Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory, but the provision for the most able pupils has not improved significantly and they do not attain the higher levels of which they are capable. Governance is effective. The governing body has a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses as they are becoming more involved in evaluating the success of its work. As a result, they provide good support and challenge. Leaders and managers are aware that there is still much to do before achievement and teaching are consistently good. Areas identified for improvement are clear and some strategies such as those to raise standards in mathematics are beginning to be effective. The school has a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

During the last two years, standards by the end of Year 6 have fluctuated up and down but have been broadly average and achievement is satisfactory. Weaknesses in assessment and teaching in the past have caused the underachievement of some pupils, especially those of higher ability. A start has been made to tackle this although there is still a considerable amount to do to strengthen teaching and learning in particular. Teaching is satisfactory. It is monitored regularly and development points for staff are clearly identified. However, good practice amongst teachers is not yet shared consistently and their expectations of what pupils can do are not high enough. Most lessons have a good pace so pupils remain involved and attentive. Occasionally, lessons are planned which do not fully interest or stretch all groups of pupils. Teaching assistants contribute well to pupils' learning. Teachers have begun using learning targets but these are often not effective in increasing the challenge of pupils' work or in raising their rates of progress. While in the marking of pupils' work teachers provide praise, they do not often offer clear advice to help them improve.

Pupils are cared for well, develop good personal skills and are well equipped for later life. The good curriculum provides effective learning opportunities for pupils and contributes well to their personal development. Good pastoral care and guidance enables pupils to feel safe and to trust teachers and other staff. Their enjoyment of school is shown in their enthusiastic participation in activities. Attendance is good because the school works hard to promote good attendance and punctuality. Most pupils behave well and the few who can be challenging are well managed and supported. They adopt healthy lifestyle and understand how to keep themselves safe. They make good contributions to their school and wider community and act maturely when they are given responsibilities.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve achievement, particularly for the more able pupils ensuring work challenges them successfully.
- Ensure pupils know how they can improve their work by teachers using effective marking and targets.
- Improve the quality of teaching ensuring teachers raise expectations and plan work that interests and engages all pupils.

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

Pupils make steady progress and their achievement is satisfactory. In 2007, Year 6 test results were an improvement on the year before. The trend over time, despite small year on year fluctuations, has been one of overall steady increase especially in English and science. Results were highest in science and lowest in mathematics, where fewer pupils reached the nationally expected level. Able pupils did not do so well in mathematics and their attainment in English and science was satisfactory. The school has worked diligently to raise standards in mathematics, focusing particularly on improving calculation skills. Data provided by the school for 2008 showed that, although overall progress in mathematics remained satisfactory, there were clear signs of improvement both in the progress and the increase in the number of more able pupils reaching the higher level expected. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those at an early stage of learning English also make satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils clearly enjoy school, have positive attitudes and they respond well because of the good relationships adults have built with them. They feel safe in school because as one said 'People here are kind and want to help you'. Pupils' behaviour is good both in and out of lessons. This is especially true of the older pupils. All learners have a clear understanding of healthy life style and are proud of the work of the School Council in developing healthier school lunches. The pupils carry out responsibilities in school with pride and efficiency, which adds greatly to the community atmosphere of the school. Attendance is good overall, although the school works hard at this and has halved the number of holidays taken during term time. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Their learning about other cultures and ways of life and their involvement in charity work, such as providing books for schools in Uganda, has a positive impact on the good work done to develop community cohesion.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Pupils make satisfactory progress because teaching promotes basic skills suitably. Effective teaching methods are used and so pupils know how to use simple strategies to solve challenges. Teachers' planning has been improved to a satisfactory level and now the purpose of their

lessons is shared with pupils and they know what they will be learning. As a result, pupils are often keen to learn and most work well alone or in small groups. However, there is some teaching that does not capture pupils' interest and their attention wanders. While teachers are becoming more confident in their use of assessment information, some lessons lack the detailed planning that would ensure activities are sufficiently challenging and engaging for all pupils, more able pupils in particular. The school's marking policy is not followed consistently and, as a result, pupils do not have a clear understanding of how they can improve their work and make better progress. Teaching support assistants provide good support for pupils who find learning difficult.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Recent changes to the literacy and numeracy strategies have been incorporated successfully into the overall curriculum, although they are yet to have a significant impact on standards. The school has improved the music provision and all pupils enjoy the opportunity to learn to play the violin. The improved and consistent application of information and communication technology (ICT) across the whole range of subjects has been well planned and adds relevance to lessons. Themed days and weeks enhance learning well and provide good opportunities for greater exploration of subjects. For example, a science theme based on water included good creative links to music, as well as opportunities to raise money and awareness of others' needs through a charity. The curriculum is enriched well by a broad range of visits out of school and guest speakers which help to bring learning alive.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Relationships between staff and pupils are good and pupils are confident to share their problems and seek help. Safeguarding procedures are secure. The school works well with a wide range of agencies to extend the care of pupils. Academic guidance is satisfactory. Pupils are given the academic support and guidance to enable them to achieve broadly average standards. However, there is not enough guidance for them to increase their rates of progress and raise standards. Regular tracking of pupils' progress is used to set targets in literacy and numeracy but the quality and effectiveness of these targets is variable. They are not related well enough to each pupil's capabilities to increase their rates of progress. Therefore, pupils are not always challenged effectively. The involvement of pupils in their learning is also inconsistent as they do not always evaluate whether they have achieved learning objectives or discuss with teachers how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and deputy headteacher have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have prepared appropriate plans for further improvement. Appropriate monitoring of the school's work has led to a range of different initiatives and it has highlighted where inconsistencies remain. However, the impact of these initiatives is, so far, rather limited, as they have not led to consistently good practice. For example, the school's marking policy is comprehensive and provides well for pupils to be involved with assessing their work, but the policy is not consistently applied in all classes. Subject leadership has not been fully effective in the past and is beginning to spread good practice around the school. Adding to its own drive

for improvement, the school looks beyond its walls for ideas and support, evident in its good participation with a local authority project to raise standards in mathematics, which is beginning to show some success. Governors hold the school to account well with searching questions about progress and test results and their knowledge and understanding of how well the school is performing is helped by regular focused visits and observations.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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	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	2

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?	2
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?	2
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	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**

22 October 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Alderton Junior School, Debden, Essex IG10 3HE

I am writing to let you know how much my colleagues and I enjoyed visiting your school. You were all so friendly, polite and welcoming. Thank you for talking to us about your work and telling us so much about your school. It was especially enjoyable to hear your lovely singing in assembly and to see your delight at the letters from the Ugandan children thanking you for the books you sent.

Your school is doing a satisfactory job in providing you with an education and you are making sound progress. You enjoy school, work hard and carry out your responsibilities in the school very sensibly. You get on well together and behave well in lessons and around the school. We thought you knew a lot about how to stay healthy and safe. You are confident and have good personal skills so you are well prepared for your next school. We think that everyone in your school looks after you well.

Your headteacher, teachers and governors want to make sure that your school improves. There are three things we think can help them to do this and so we have asked your teachers to:

- always give you work that is at the right level and challenging for you to help you to achieve more, especially those of you who find learning easy
- use targets and marking more effectively to help you understand the next steps to take in your learning
- make sure that all your lessons are as good as the best ones.

You can help by continuing to work hard. Thank you again for your help. We wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Norma Ball

Lead inspector