

The Cathedral Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Chelmsford

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115289
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	326172
Inspection date	20 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Mary Summers

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	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	301
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	Mrs Anne Whelpdale
Headteacher	Mrs Marian Emuss
Date of previous school inspection	6 July 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Victoria Road Chelmsford Essex CM1 1PA
Telephone number	01245 354459
Fax number	01245 348991

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

They evaluated the effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage, how well the school has addressed falling standards in science in Year 6 and how well the school caters for more able pupils. Evidence was gathered from discussions with pupils, staff and governors and analysis of school documentation and pupils' work. 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 average sized primary school, linked closely with the Cathedral, is situated in the heart of Chelmsford. It is popular and oversubscribed, especially since its admission criteria changed a few years ago. Now pupils attend from a wide area, including Chelmsford and surrounding towns and villages. Most pupils come from White British backgrounds but there is a significant and increasing number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. Very few speak English as an additional language. Fewer pupils than in most schools have learning difficulties. Their needs are mainly associated with speech and language or moderate learning difficulties.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage start in the Reception classes in the September of the academic year in which they reach their fifth birthday. Their attainment on entry varies considerably but overall is a little above the levels expected for children of their age.

There have been significant changes in staffing, including the headteacher who started in September 2007, since the last inspection. The school achieved the Healthy Schools award in 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school's evaluation that it is a good school. The headteacher brings a very clear direction to its work through her thoughtful and sensitive leadership. Despite considerable changes in staff over the past few years, the school has continued to make good improvement and this confirms its good capacity to improve further in the future. Developments in the buildings have been carefully overseen by the headteacher and school governors so that it has not disrupted children's education. New assessment systems, introduced this year, are beginning to provide extremely useful information to help senior leaders judge the effectiveness of their work by its impact on pupils' progress.

Standards have been consistently above average in English and mathematics in the national tests and assessments in Years 2 and 6 for many years. There have been no significant differences between the achievement of boys and girls or between pupils of different ethnicities. The standard of writing has improved significantly since the last inspection, when it was identified as a key area for improvement. In the previous two years, however, there was a noticeable dip in science standards in Year 6. In 2008, they fell to below average. School leaders analysed the reasons for this very carefully and implemented a number of strategies to address the problem. These include changing the organisation of classes to make sure that pupils receive an appropriate level of challenge for their ages and abilities, widening the range of investigative opportunities offered to pupils and focusing closely on developing their scientific language. Pupils have responded very positively to these changes, one saying, 'Science lessons really make me think now!' The impact of these changes are seen in pupils' improved progress, with pupils on track to reach above average standards this year.

Pupils' good achievement is due to good teaching and learning, a relevant and interesting curriculum, excellent support from their parents, and pupils' own diligence and commitment to their learning. Pupils are very keen and determined to do well. They relish challenges such as homework projects to research different habitats, presenting their work attractively in books and diagrams. Year 5 and 6 pupils designed and made models of 'The Island' after studying 'The Tempest' by Shakespeare. They worked extremely well together, sharing ideas and responsibilities and coming up with a well thought out finished product.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Their behaviour is excellent in lessons and around the school. Girls and boys, older and younger, work and play together happily. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Close links with the Cathedral bring a myriad of opportunities for pupils to learn from members of the clergy, perform in services and concerts, and undertake visits to appreciate the beauty and splendour of the building. Teachers organise visits to other places of worship, such as the local mosque, so that pupils develop a thorough understanding of other faiths and beliefs. Pupils develop good attitudes to healthy lifestyles, having achieved the Healthy Schools award in 2007. School meals are of excellent quality, being organic and locally sourced. However, packed lunch boxes often contain less healthy options, and the school is endeavouring to persuade pupils to make more appropriate choices.

Pupils have a very good awareness of personal safety, describing for example, the correct way to cross the road and the possible dangers of using the internet. They have excellent opportunities to develop initiative and take responsibility through, for example the Junior Management Team and the School Council, as well as through their day-to-day support for

each other and for children in the Reception classes. Pupils, teachers, parents and other adults form an extremely strong community in which each individual is respected and nurtured. 'The school creates a family feeling where children feel valued and safe,' wrote one parent, representing the views of many. Pastoral care is very strong and the school's safeguarding procedures meet government requirements. The school has extremely effective links with outside agencies, which provide additional advice, particularly to support work with pupils who have moderate learning difficulties and speech and language problems.

There is a deep knowledge and understanding of the school's local context, and it reaches out very well to its community. A thriving parent-teacher association raises large sums each year to enrich pupils' educational experiences and improve the grounds and premises. The school enjoys strong links with other schools, including local secondary and grammar schools, which provide a range of expertise and support that contributes to pupils' progress and well-being. Links with schools in Uganda and Ghana help pupils understand what life is like in very different communities. Pupils appreciate modern-day life in Holland during the Year 6 annual residential trip, as well as gaining an insight into life during World War II through discussions with local residents. These activities contribute to the school's good promotion of community cohesion, and very productively to pupils' cultural understanding and their personal development. Pupils show great empathy for others by organising sponsored events themselves to raise funds, for example to support cancer charities. With their excellent personal qualities and good academic standards, pupils are very well prepared for their future education and beyond.

Attendance rates are very high because pupils really like school. They enjoy their lessons, the social opportunities at play and lunchtimes, and the wide range of enrichment activities such as clubs, visits and visitors to the school. A strong emphasis on sport and music benefits all pupils, but especially those who are particularly gifted or talented. About a quarter of pupils are learning to play a music instrument, and the school choir and rock band provide other opportunities for pupils to perform together. The cups and awards on display in the entrance hall are testament to the success of various sports teams.

Teachers plan interesting lessons and use many different strategies to involve pupils practically in their learning. The school places a very strong emphasis on inclusion and in ensuring every pupil has an equal opportunity to succeed. Pupils with learning difficulties receive good support, which enables them to take a full part in lessons and make good progress. More able pupils benefit from the high levels of challenge presented, especially in English, mathematics and science. Teachers are using assessments well to help them plan the next steps in pupils' learning. However, pupils are not yet given individual targets for improvement to encourage them to take even more responsibility and to build on their already positive attitudes to learning. Marking, an area identified at the last inspection as requiring improvement, is better but is still not consistently good across the school in terms of advising pupils how to improve their work.

Leadership and management are good. An excellent working partnership between the headteacher and assistant headteacher means that developments are carefully planned and implemented at the right pace. Teachers have time to come to terms with changes and understand them properly. New phase leaders and subject coordinators are beginning to understand and extend their roles but are not yet fully involved in monitoring their teams and subjects or planning alongside senior leaders to improve provision.

Governors play an important part in school management, through their work on committees and through a very rigorous system of school visits. They bring a useful range of skills to support the school in for example, finance and personnel issues. The school has improved well since its

last inspection and its work is appreciated greatly by parents. One comment summed up the huge number of positive responses to the questionnaire: 'A superb school where my children have received an amazing education in a very kind, caring environment.'

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children receive a good start to their formal education in the Reception classes. Very effective induction procedures mean that parents have confidence in school staff and that children quickly settle into school life. The classrooms and well-organised outdoor area are bright and full of exciting activities which the children clearly enjoy. One group built a 'pirate ship' from large blocks, while their friends 'wrote' instructions for the voyage. A poor unfortunate 'prisoner' was made to walk the plank as others watched on with glee. Others 'fished' for magnetic fish in a pond, counting and comparing their catches. A stimulating and well-planned curriculum means that children make good progress over the year. Most meet and a significant number exceed the goals expected of them by the time they transfer to Year 1.

Leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage are good. Adults know the children well and make sure that all receive the right sort of experiences so they can take the next steps in their learning. They organise specific activities so that children learn the basics of literacy and numeracy to prepare them for more demanding work in Year 1. Excellent levels of care mean that children are safe, secure and happy. Parents thoroughly appreciate the care taken to ensure their children have a positive start to school. One, speaking for many, wrote, 'The school's approach has been carefully thought through, and is caring and appropriate, especially for the youngest children.'

Staff are developing their skills in assessment, especially in matching progress more closely to the milestones towards the early learning goals, so they can assess children's achievement more accurately.

What the school should do to improve further

- Embed assessment procedures more fully throughout the school and involve pupils more effectively in their learning by setting individual targets for improvement.
- Develop the roles of middle managers to allow them to take a more strategic role in school self-evaluation and improvement.

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

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?	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	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	1
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

21 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Cathedral Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Chelmsford,
CM1 1PA

Thank you all very much for welcoming us to your school recently. It was good to watch you working in lessons and chat with you in the playground and around the school.

You go to a good school. All the adults look after you really well. It was great to hear your views about the school and about how much you enjoy learning. The quality of the work in your books and the contributions you make in lessons show that you are making good progress. You work very hard and this, along with good teaching, helps you to achieve well. Your behaviour is excellent and you all work together extremely well to make Cathedral School a real centre of the community. You know the importance of keeping fit and healthy, many of you taking part in regular sport in and out of school. You are really lucky to have such nutritious and healthy school lunches.

The people in charge of your school are doing a good job. They are always looking for ways to make school even better for you, the pupils. We have asked them to continue checking regularly to ensure you are making enough progress and to set you individual targets for improvement in different subjects. We have also asked some of the teachers to do more to help your headteacher and assistant headteacher run and manage the school. They will continue to value your suggestions about how to improve it even more.

Thank you once again for your help. Best wishes for the future.

Yours faithfully

Mrs M Summers

Lead inspector