

River Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118393
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	326821
Inspection dates	12–13 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Selwyn Ward

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)	395
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	Margo Wynne
Headteacher	Claire Eggleston
Date of previous school inspection	11 January 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Lewisham Road River Dover CT17 0PP
Telephone number	01304 822516
Fax number	01304 829212

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This school is larger than average. Almost all of the pupils are of White British heritage. An average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties. Of these pupils, the largest groups are pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and those with delayed speech, language and communication skills. The school provides an extended school day through its breakfast and after-school clubs. The headteacher was appointed in April 2008.

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 good school. It sets out a very full statement of its aims in its prospectus: 'We aim for our children to develop lifelong learning skills, showing the ability to take responsibility for their own learning so that they can face future challenges with confidence. We aim to ensure each day presents exciting challenges so creating a joy and thirst for knowledge in each individual child. We celebrate diversity and respect all children regardless of ability, gender, ethnicity or religion. We encourage children to recognise and build on their strengths, extending and developing their potential. We provide a happy, caring, supportive and positive learning atmosphere in our school where each child can achieve success.' The considerable success that River Primary has had in achieving these aims shows the school's outstanding capacity for continued improvement.

Good leadership and management have been at the heart of the school's success. Thorough monitoring of teaching and of pupils' progress in their learning have given the headteacher and leadership team a crystal clear picture of how well the school is doing and of where improvements can be made. It is this analysis that has helped to drive up standards, reversing, for example, previous underachievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage. As a result, teaching and learning throughout the school are now good. Teachers have high expectations of what their pupils can do and they push them to do their best. Lessons are mostly well paced so that pupils get a lot done, although sometimes teachers' introductions go on for too long, with pupils expected to listen passively when they are keen to get on with a more active task. Nonetheless, the good teaching means that pupils of all abilities achieve well. This is true for those with learning difficulties, who benefit from well-tailored support, and for the many higher attaining pupils who are helped to reach higher levels in the national tests. As a consequence, standards are above average in the key subjects of English, mathematics and science. Results in English are especially high. In part, this is because the school has focused its attention on further elevating standards in writing, but it is also due to the many opportunities the pupils have to apply their writing and literacy skills in other subjects across the curriculum. Pupils have had fewer similar opportunities in numeracy, which is why progress in mathematics, though good, has not been as fast as in English. The reason that results in science have been good rather than better is because pupils have not, in some classes, had enough regular opportunities to carry out science investigations.

Pupils' personal development is good because of the good care, guidance and support arrangements to ensure their well-being, and because pupils respond with such enthusiasm to the stimulating curriculum that the school provides. The range of clubs on offer is impressive. Parents strongly appreciate this, and point also to the shared values of 'honesty, enjoyment, friendship, contribution, respect, endeavour and responsibility' which are prominently displayed around the school. These permeate all that the school does and are enthusiastically taken on board by the pupils. As a parent explained, 'My daughter looks forward to school. She is encouraged in her work and repeats lots of positive messages at home.'

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

'My daughter has made great progress since starting in September. She has become quite independent and confident.' This comment from a parent sums up the views of many. Children join the Reception Year with skills that are in line with those expected for their age. They make

good progress and are now attaining above average standards by the start of Year 1. This represents a sharp improvement on previous years. In this now well-run provision, improvement has been achieved through a mostly well-planned curriculum with a good balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities. This includes investigations, role-play and early writing, although children have not had as many opportunities to develop their mathematical skills. This is reflected in the fact that the improvement in children's mathematical development is less marked than that seen over the past two years in the other areas of learning. Children make especially good progress in their personal development and communication, literacy and language skills. Improved links with pre-schools and with parents enable staff to help children to settle quickly and there are good arrangements for children's welfare. Children are increasingly benefiting from the opportunities they have to become independent learners. They enjoy the freedom and space of the recently renovated and re-equipped outdoor area and, with the guidance of staff, they make good use of the new resources to extend their learning. A pleased parent told of how her daughter had been so well motivated to learn that 'even during the holidays she wants to read and write'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Pace all lessons so that pupils are not expected to listen passively to overly long introductions before getting started on practical activities.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to carry out science investigations and to practise and apply their numeracy skills across subjects other than mathematics.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils are prepared well for the next stage of their education and later life because they achieve well and attain above average standards in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 6. In doing so, their national test scores exceed the already challenging targets set for them by school leaders. Pupils do exceptionally well in English because of the many opportunities that they have to practise and apply their writing and literacy skills across a range of different subjects. The average standards attained in the Year 2 assessments in the past two years represent good progress in relation to those pupils' below average starting points when they joined Year 1.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils really enjoy coming to school and taking part in the wide variety of activities on offer. This is reflected in their above average attendance. All feel safe, and they learn how to keep safe, for example when using the internet. Children of different ages play together well. Older ones help the younger children and enjoy acting as role models. Behaviour is good in lessons and around the school, so that even where there are pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, there is no disruption to learning. In lessons, pupils are keen to join in. They listen well to their teachers, although pupils do not always listen quite so carefully to each other's contributions. They have a good understanding of the need for regular exercise and a healthy diet, and they take a keen interest in improving the environment. Moral development is outstanding because of the emphasis, throughout the school, on its shared values. Pupils' spiritual, social and cultural development is good. Pupils learn to be responsible members of the school and local communities, and learn about communities different from their own. As

a parent explained, 'Pupils discuss many topics that are relevant to world, local and social issues. As a result, my son is well-rounded at school in his personal development, emotionally, socially and educationally.'

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Staff get on well with their pupils. These good relationships help motivate pupils to try hard in lessons. Older pupils, in particular, make good progress in becoming independent learners because teachers emphasise how to learn, not just the facts. For example, in a Year 6 mathematics lesson, pupils were helped to make outstanding progress because they were pressed to take a systematic approach to solving a problem and explain their thinking. Pupils are also encouraged to boost their learning at home. School leaders have responded well to parental concerns so that now homework routinely builds on what pupils have learnt at school. However, the homework for younger pupils is not always explained in accessible language. Pupils are actively involved in assessing how well they are learning because every lesson starts off with a generally well-focused objective that explains what is expected of them. Often pupils are involved in the process of agreeing appropriate criteria for evaluating the success of the lesson. Teachers make good use of assessment information to plan work that is matched to pupils' different abilities. This, and the good support provided to pupils with learning difficulties, helps ensure that pupils of all abilities make good progress. In some lessons, however, teachers' introductions go on for too long and pupils have to sit listening passively when they are keen to get on with more active tasks.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is planned well to ensure pupils' steady progression as they move up the school. Visits to places of worship, and dance and drama from visiting artists have all helped to extend pupils' awareness of their own and others' cultures. The imaginative way in which the school has linked subjects together through topics and themes has brought learning to life for many pupils. It has also helped to develop pupils' independence as learners through the research they do, for example on computers at school and as part of homework assignments. The many opportunities for extended writing in different subjects have contributed to pupils' high standards in English, but opportunities are sometimes missed to develop and apply numeracy skills in other subjects. School leaders have identified that standards in science could be further boosted through increasing the emphasis on learning through scientific investigation, but there remain some classes where pupils do not have enough regular opportunities for practical science activities. French is well established at River Primary, and some pupils are also being introduced to German. The recent residential trip to France proved to be an exciting focus for pupils' work in languages. Pupils are also enthused by the extensive range of clubs on offer.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Safeguarding requirements are fully met. As a result of these, and the good arrangements for their welfare, pupils feel secure in school and are confident that problems will be dealt with promptly. Pastoral care is very good because the adults and children get on so well and because

of the close links between staff and parents. The provision for pupils with learning difficulties is good, especially now that pupils with additional needs are identified earlier. All pupils have frequently reviewed targets and even the younger pupils can explain what those are and how they can improve their work. While there are examples of marking that offers similarly good guidance on how work can be improved, this is inconsistent. In several classes, teachers use their marking to pose potentially useful questions to pupils to prompt them to think more about their work. However, it is only in a minority of classes that pupils are expected to respond with answers to these questions, and so enter into a helpful dialogue with the teacher.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The inspiring leadership of the headteacher has made River Primary a vibrant community where pupils take responsibility and become independent learners. Leaders have an extremely accurate view of the school due to their rigorous monitoring and self-evaluation. This takes into account pupils' and parents' views. The leadership team are committed, confident and work together well with a shared vision for continuing improvement. In a relatively short time, they have together driven through significant changes, but they are well aware that some of these are too recent to have shown through in further raised standards. Parents recognise the recent improvements and especially appreciate the accessibility of the headteacher, leaders and staff, which they say 'builds relationships, trust and a sense of community'. School leaders and governors have strengthened the school's links with the local area, including via participation in village events. Through the improved curriculum, pupils have developed opportunities to prepare them for life in multicultural Britain as well as understanding life in the wider world. Whether through making croissants in a bakery during their trip to France or video-conferencing with a school in Brisbane, pupils are being helped to think beyond their ordinary everyday experiences. Governors are very supportive of the school. They draw on a wealth of experience and expertise which they are increasingly using to challenge the school to build further on its evident success.

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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?	2
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?	2
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?	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	1
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?	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	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
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

February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of River Primary School, Dover CT17 0PP

Thank you for making us so welcome when we came to visit your school. River Primary is a good school, and we were delighted to see how well you all live up to the school's shared values of honesty, enjoyment, friendship, contribution, respect, endeavour and responsibility. You behave well and get on well with each other and you greatly enjoy school and all the interesting and exciting things you get to do. You feel safe at school because staff take good care of you.

The school is well-run. Your headteacher, staff and governors do a great job in checking that you all learn as well as you can, and this is helping to make your good school even better. Because the teaching is good, you make good progress all through the school, from the start of Reception to the end of Year 6, and standards are above average. You do especially well in English because you get lots of opportunities to develop your writing and literacy skills in other subjects. We have asked the school to give you more such opportunities to practise and apply your numeracy skills in different subjects. We have also asked your teachers to make sure that you all have the chance to carry out science investigations regularly.

We have also suggested that teachers organise their lessons so that introductions are shorter and you have the chance to get on with activities sooner. In lessons, you listen carefully to your teachers, but not always quite so closely to each other's contributions. Briefer introductions should mean that you have more chances to listen to each other, and this improved listening is one way in which you could help to make your lessons even better.

Our very best wishes for the future.

Yours faithfully Selwyn Ward

Lead Inspector