

Earl Spencer Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121912
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	327595
Inspection dates	22–23 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Paul Canham

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)	194
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	Roger Conroy
Headteacher	Anne Partridge
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Streatfield Road Spencer Estate Northampton NN5 7DE
Telephone number	01604 751130
Fax number	01604

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors

Description of the school

Most of the pupils at Earl Spencer are from families of White British heritage or Asian British-Bangladeshi backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with English as an additional language is high, as is the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, a small minority are at the early stages of learning English as an additional language. Children of Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) age are taught in a Reception class.

A private contractor manages after school club and a play scheme on the school site.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school's overall effectiveness is satisfactory. Through intensive support from the local authority during a period in which it was found to need improvement, the school has turned a corner and the pace of improvement is accelerating. The collective leadership of the school has been strengthened with staff who have clear roles and responsibilities. The leadership team, which includes the Chair of governors, has successfully raised expectations and given the school a sense of purpose and clarity about what it can achieve. For example, subject leaders have a much improved understanding of their roles and are fully involved in helping to identify and prioritise key areas for the school's development. Subject leaders are, for example, giving teachers more guidance on how different subjects relate to each other and are paying close attention to the progress made by pupils in all classes. A number of initiatives have been introduced in literacy, numeracy and science, although the full impact of these has yet to be seen in the progress made by pupils.

Pupils have positive attitudes to school and say that 'teachers are supportive and give you praise'. They talk fondly of their achievements and say that they enjoy coming to school because of the supportive environment and interesting activities. These factors make an important contribution to their progress, particularly in lively and well-taught lessons.

Achievement is satisfactory overall although there are inconsistencies in progress across the school and between subjects. Standards are below average. Children start the Reception Year with a much narrower range of knowledge and skills than is usual for their age, especially in language development, aspects of mathematics, and in their knowledge and understanding of the world. They make good progress and reach below average standards by the end of Reception. In Key Stages 1 and 2, the school has been more successful in promoting achievement in reading, and to a lesser extent in writing, than it has in mathematics and science. The over-reliance on worksheets in science limits the opportunities for extended writing in this subject. Progress in lessons is satisfactory and good in several classes. This picture of progress reflects the variation in the quality of teaching, which is also satisfactory with good elements. The reason why teaching is not good overall is that assessment is not always used well enough to plan activities that match the capabilities of all pupils. On occasion, activities do not ask enough of all pupils, particularly those who are more able. However, pupils who are at the early stages of learning English as an additional language and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of the close support they receive.

The good care, support and guidance provided for all pupils underpin the school's warm and welcoming environment. These strong features have a positive influence on pupils' good personal development and well-being. The outcomes are seen in their good behaviour, enthusiasm for school and willingness to talk about their work. Parents also report that their children are happy at school.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Good leadership and management ensure that assessment information is used well to identify individual needs in the Reception Year. Close monitoring of how children are learning ensures that activities build positively on what they already know and can do. Children make a good start to their learning in Reception because of the secure and supportive learning environment.

From low starting points, they achieve well and make good progress in all areas of learning, reaching below average standards by the end of the year. Parents are increasingly involved in their children's learning through morning sessions which are lively and harmonious. These outstanding sessions in which parents take part are characterised by teaching which successfully captures the children's imagination.

The tightly planned curriculum includes a good mixture of teacher-led tasks alongside opportunities for children to explore and investigate for themselves. For example, children who had a wonderful time acting out their 'trip to the moon' thrived on the opportunity to talk and write about their experiences using imaginative language. Such learning opportunities promote children's personal and social development by encouraging group work, sharing resources and ideas. As a consequence, children's attitudes to school and relationships are good. There is also a strong focus on communicating with children and in using everyday words in a variety of ways when working in different groups. Children take care of each other, as well as themselves, as they develop an interest in learning about themselves and the world around them.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and increase rates of progress, particularly in writing, mathematics and science.
- Make better use of assessment to match teaching to all pupils' needs and increase challenge for the more able.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to develop writing skills in science.

A small proportion of 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

The school exceeded its targets in English in 2008, although standards are below average, particularly in mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 2. The majority of pupils are making at least satisfactory progress as they move up from the start of Year 1 to the end of Year 6. They are on track to meet their expected targets, which include a lifting of expectations for more able pupils. The gap between what the pupils should be achieving for their age and what they are currently attaining is narrowing at a more rapid rate than in the past. The progress made by pupils who are at the early stages of learning English as an additional language and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good.

During lessons, progress is sometimes good, but not often enough to raise achievement further. The school recognises the need to ensure that all pupils reach at least their expected levels in mathematics and science. While progress in these subjects is satisfactory, it has not improved as well as in English, and particularly reading.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils say that they like coming to school because they feel safe, want to learn, and enjoy participating in school activities. Pupils also feel confident in a caring environment where they are known and supported. One parent commented, for example, 'My daughter enjoys school and she cried on the first day of the summer holidays because she was going to miss it.' Pupils

are friendly, polite and welcoming to visitors. They have positive attitudes, are attentive and work sensibly in pairs and independently. Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. The pupils' enjoyment of school is clear in their willingness to contribute to class discussions, and in their supportive approach towards each other. Attendance has improved substantially and is now average.

The school council provides pupils with opportunities to represent the views of others. Pupils also contribute willingly to the wider community through raising funds for local and national charities. Older pupils are particularly keen to carry out duties and are helpful towards the younger pupils during break times. Pupils are aware of the benefits of being active and eating healthily, although they do not always follow their own advice. They have a satisfactory understanding of how to stay safe in school and outside. Pupils value the good range of school clubs and visits to places of interest. Pupils' strong personal skills are beneficial qualities for the future, and improving skills in literacy and numeracy provide a satisfactory basis for later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory overall, but there is good teaching in some classes. The school is determined to overcome inconsistencies and to improve teaching to ensure that pupils make good progress in all lessons. The use of learning targets in lessons is beginning to extend pupils' knowledge and skills. In many lessons, pupils can explain what they are learning and how they are going to improve. Teachers and their assistants work well as a team and provide well-focused support for small groups. Where teaching is rapidly paced and materials are interesting, pupils forge ahead in their learning. For example, pupils were challenged by the stimulating activities during a numeracy lesson and were keen to develop their skills of prediction using examples found in every day life. While teaching meets most pupils' needs satisfactorily, on occasions, not enough is expected of pupils. For example, teachers' questions do not take sufficient account of the pupils' different starting points, particularly for the more able during lesson introductions.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum provides a sound balance between subjects. There is a strong focus on literacy, numeracy and science skills, and on the development of pupils' performance skills in subjects such as physical education and music. The teaching of French adds a further dimension. The school knows it still has more to do to boost pupils' writing, mathematics and scientific skills with the help of revised curriculum planning. The school is providing a greater focus on learning experiences that will motivate boys and lift their aspirations. Information and communication technology is used well to support learning.

The school makes good use of visits and visitors to enrich the pupils' experiences and extend their learning. Pupils think that the range of extra-curricular activities is good and name sporting activities among those they most enjoy. The provision is good for pupils who are at the early stages of learning English as an additional language and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Staff make effective use of comprehensive planning to match activities to these pupils' needs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The caring environment underpins the school's work and gives rise to good relationships between pupils and staff, and amongst the pupils. Arrangements to safeguard and protect pupils are robust and firmly established. With the help of staff who liaise between school and families, the school has been resolute in introducing different strategies to raise attendance, which include the awarding of certificates and trophies.

Staff know pupils well and academic guidance is much improved. Comprehensive assessment procedures provide the school with detailed information on each pupil's stage of learning. However, the information has yet to be used fully by all teachers in their lesson planning. Marking is supportive but does not always tell pupils how to reach the targets that they have been given.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school's collective leadership and management are secure and satisfactory. With focused support from the local authority, the school is overcoming a legacy of underachievement and paying close attention to raising standards in all aspects of its work. Strategic planning is good and self-evaluation is becoming more rigorous and robust. The headteacher and the senior management team are developing a clear and increasingly accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. This view is appropriately based on observations of teaching and learning, a scrutiny of the quality and range of pupils' work, and a thorough review of school procedures. As a consequence, the school is securely placed to bring about improvement and the capacity for moving the school forward is satisfactory.

The Chair of governors is supportive and dedicated, and determined that the school builds on its achievements. Overall, the governing body is making a satisfactory contribution to the school's improvement. Governors continue to develop their role in holding the school to account for the standards achieved by the pupils. Community cohesion is satisfactory. With the Chair of governors' very good knowledge of the community, the school has extended its work with, for example, the development of a family room. The school has also developed good links with local schools and has become involved with international schools.

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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

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?	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	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	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
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	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?	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?	3
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	3
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**

26 January 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Earl Spencer Primary School, Northampton, NN5 7DE

We very much enjoyed our visit to your school and thank you for making us feel so welcome. This letter is to tell you about some of the things we found while we were with you. Importantly, yours is a satisfactory school, where staff are working hard to make it better. We were pleased to hear that you like your school. Almost all of your parents are happy with the school, too. You behave well and get on with each other. Here are some important things about your school.

- You make good progress in lessons that are lively and interesting.
- You feel safe and secure in school and enjoy being there.
- The headteacher and other staff are continuing to make improvements and these are helping you to make faster progress.
- All staff take good care of you, and make sure that you know what to do to keep safe.
- You have a good understanding of what makes for a healthy lifestyle although you do not always follow your own advice about eating healthily. This is what your school has been asked to do to make things even better.
- Help you to make more progress and improve your work in writing, mathematics and science in particular.
- Make sure that teaching always challenges you to do your very best, so that you always make good progress.
- Give you more opportunities to improve your writing skills in science.

You can help your school to improve by continuing to participate actively in your lessons. We wish each one of you every success in your future education.

Yours faithfully

Paul Canham

Lead inspector