

Earls Hall Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114720
Local Authority	Southend-on-Sea
Inspection number	338433
Inspection dates	2–3 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Mary Summers

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	362
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anne Ham
Headteacher	Lynn Morris
Date of previous school inspection	30 January 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Inspectors spent the majority of their time observing learning, visiting 12 teachers and 20 lessons. They met with governors, staff and pupils, looked at a range of school policies and plans, records of pupils' progress, questionnaires returned by pupils and staff and the 228 questionnaires submitted by parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the achievement of more-able pupils in English and mathematics
- the impact of intervention groups on pupils identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- the impact of the new curriculum on boys' achievement and enjoyment.

Information about the school

Pupils come from a wide area to attend this large school of its type, which shares the premises with its partner infant school. The junior school is situated mainly on the first floor of the building although two classrooms, the computer suite and the school offices are on the ground floor. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds, although the proportion from other ethnicities has grown steadily in recent years. Few pupils come from homes where English is not the first language. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is average. Those pupils who are identified, often have moderate learning difficulties. The school has won a number of awards in recent years, including the Activemark and Healthy Schools. The headteacher assumed her position in September 2009, having previously been deputy-headteacher at the school.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Pupils achieve well at Earls Hall Juniors because they are well-taught and receive good levels of individual care and support. They behave themselves in lessons and around the school and develop strong moral and social values, eagerly supporting one another in lessons and helping to resolve potential conflict situations in the playground.

The school works hard to ensure that the curriculum interests and stimulates pupils to learn. These measures are successful, especially in motivating White British boys, who the school's evaluations had highlighted were at risk of underachieving. Partnerships have developed with a wide range of external bodies to support boys' and girls' learning. For example, a team of Year 10 boys from a local secondary school, work with younger pupils to develop reading and writing skills. Links with the Royal Opera House have focused on engaging pupils in creative projects, such as making films about the Blitz during World War Two. Pupils speak highly of these opportunities and how they have helped them move on in their learning. 'It has helped to increase my confidence in talking, working in a team and using video cameras and computers,' commented one pupil.

Teaching is good and, occasionally outstanding. Science teaching is especially strong and contributes greatly to the exceptionally high levels that pupils reach in national tests at the end of Year 6. Attainment in English and mathematics is above average, although not as high as in science. Fewer pupils reach higher level 5 in English and mathematics than do in science. This is because the more-able pupils are occasionally, not challenged sufficiently in lessons and this hinders their progress.

The school has developed rigorous assessment systems since the last inspection. These are used well to track pupils' progress and identify those who are at risk of underachieving. A range of interventions has been implemented to help these pupils catch up. This initiative is working successfully and contributing well to the good progress of pupils identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The new headteacher has implemented useful monitoring and evaluation processes to enable senior staff and middle leaders to gain an accurate overview of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Governors are supportive of the school but lack well-organised systems to monitor its work and evaluate its performance. Since the last inspection, pupils' attainment in writing has improved, assessment procedures have been strengthened, middle managers are performing more effective roles and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are receiving more focused support. These improvements, coupled with the good direction provided by the headteacher and senior staff, mean that the school is well placed to continue to improve in the future.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of pupils who gain level 5 in the 2011 Year 6 national tests and assessments in English and mathematics by:
 - ensuring that the work set by teachers in lessons is at a sufficiently challenging level for more-able pupils
 - encouraging pupils to take more responsibility for setting their own targets and reviewing progress towards them
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to be involved in investigations and research.
- Extend governors' evaluation systems to ensure they gain a full picture of school performance so they can take a more active role in planning for school improvement.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils are very attentive in lessons. They work hard and always try their best. Girls and boys from all ethnic backgrounds, and those from homes where English is not the first language, achieve well and enjoy learning. Work seen in classrooms and in their books shows that pupils are generally making good progress. Attainment in writing, an area for improvement identified at the last inspection, has improved and is now above average. Pupils construct their work well and use a wide variety of stimulating vocabulary, but there is still room for improvement in their handwriting and spelling.

Pupils take an active role in evaluating their own and each other's work, making sensitive comments in their books to help each other improve. Pupils in a Year 4 class were learning to assess their own learning and choose activities at different levels of difficulty to help them improve their understanding. More-able pupils sometimes find the work too easy and mark time, for example, completing worksheets in mathematics, before embarking on more difficult challenges. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities - including those with moderate learning difficulties - make good progress, especially in the small intervention groups organised to help them catch up with different aspects of their learning. Pupils feel very secure working with the learning support assistants who lead these groups. They respond very well to the activities provided, such as computer programmes and games, which help them develop confidence and basic literacy and numeracy skills. In a few cases, especially where additional support in lessons is less successful, their progress is not so rapid.

Pupils know the importance of healthy lifestyles and most adopt them. Many enjoy the nutritious school lunches and a significant proportion participates in after-school sports clubs. Packed lunches occasionally contain chocolate and crisps, even though pupils know that these are not healthy options. Pupils feel safe in school. They have a clear understanding of what to do if bullying occurs and say this rarely happens. Pupils are proud of their school. They eagerly put forward their manifestos for election as school councillors and carry out their roles conscientiously. Attendance is above average as the

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vast majority of pupils enjoy coming to school. Pupils' good behaviour, positive contribution to the school and wider community and good,. High levels of basic literacy and numeracy prepare them well for the future.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The curriculum is effective in engaging pupils in their learning. A strong focus on developing literacy skills through stimulating literature has engaged boys and girls alike. Year 4 pupils explored aspects of ethnicity, for example, by reading 'Journey to Jo'burg,' role-playing and filming different aspects of the story. These curriculum developments have made a good impact so far, but senior leaders are aware that there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to engage in open-ended research and investigations. Pupils enjoy the wide range of lunchtime and after-school activities, for example parachute games and urban-dance clubs. They develop their physical skills during residential visits in Years 4, 5 and 6, as well as learning how to live and work together away from home. The school goes out of its way to ensure that as many pupils as possible attend these visits, including those who are vulnerable and need encouragement to participate. Many

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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exciting events are organised to help pupils develop a strong sense of community, such as cake sales, Mothers' Day sales and the 'shoe box challenge'. There are very good opportunities for pupils to develop their sporting and musical talents to high levels. A concert in the school hall during the inspection gave pupils excellent opportunities to show parents, carers and friends their well developed singing and instrumental skills. Teachers have good relationships with pupils. They maintain pupils' attention well through the use of a wide range of strategies, such as effective questioning and paired discussion. Lessons are well planned and move at a good pace but, occasionally, lack challenge. There are effective systems in place to ensure that pupils are well-cared for and receive good support in and out of lessons. Procedures to support those with special educational needs and/or disabilities have been strengthened recently and are effective in identifying and supporting these pupils. Pupils are guided effectively about how to improve their work through teachers' effective marking, especially in English. Although pupils are competent in evaluating one another's work, they are not involved enough in setting their own targets and reviewing progress towards them. There are good arrangements in place to help transfer from the infant school. Pupils make several visits, enjoy a picnic with older pupils, and parents have a guided tour.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders provide a clear direction for the school's work and share this effectively with staff. Their actions to improve provision have included a review of the curriculum, the development of more rigorous assessment procedures and a more systematic approach to evaluating the school's performance. The recent appointment of new year-group leaders is proving successful in ensuring more consistency of practice across teams. These middle managers are very capable and keen to develop their roles further to enable them to have a more effective impact on pupils' achievement.

Community cohesion is good. There is a strong sense of community within the school, locality and overseas. Effective links with schools in France and Ghana help pupils appreciate what life is like for children outside the immediate area. Members of the governing body make a good contribution towards supporting pupils' understanding of other faiths and communities but have yet to take an active role in evaluating the effectiveness of the school's work in this area. Parents and carers receive good levels of information about school events and their children's progress. Senior leaders are trying

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to improve communication still further by being available in the playground at the start and end of the school day, to answer any queries or concerns.

There are clear procedures to ensure that pupils are safe in school. Safeguarding policies are appropriate, although not reviewed regularly enough to ensure their full effectiveness. Staff are trained effectively in safeguarding and new staff checked carefully to ensure their suitability. Staff promote equality of opportunity well, checking carefully to see that all pupils, whatever their background or needs make good progress. A lift has been installed so that pupils with physical disabilities can attend the school. Racist incidents are rare, but senior staff and governors tackle these promptly if they do occur. Governors are supportive and have a satisfactory understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Several governors visit regularly and have begun to keep a more formal record of their visits, but this is a very recent development. They maintain a close check on the school's finances but do not yet make a strong enough contribution to evaluating school performance and planning for the future.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers are mostly positive about the school's work. They are especially pleased with the way that the school keeps their children safe and healthy and how they are kept informed about their children's progress. A few expressed concerns about the progress of more-able children and inspectors share this view, finding that sometimes these pupils are not challenged enough in lessons. A very small minority were worried about how the school dealt with unacceptable behaviour but inspectors found that there

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were clear procedures in place which were working well. Inspectors did not agree that there were insufficient opportunities for parents to contribute their suggestions and express their concerns as regular questionnaires are issued to seek parents' views.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Earls Hall Junior School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 228 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 362 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	94	41	128	56	5	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	106	47	115	51	3	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	93	41	121	54	12	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	83	37	107	47	34	15	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	79	35	133	59	13	6	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	72	32	127	56	24	11	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	68	30	150	66	8	4	1	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	66	31	134	62	13	6	2	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	68	31	133	60	17	8	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	50	22	138	62	25	11	9	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	47	22	136	62	28	13	5	2
The school is led and managed effectively	61	28	126	57	23	10	8	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	98	43	110	49	13	6	4	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



4 March 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Earls Hall Junior School, Southend-on-Sea, SS0 0QN

Thank you so much for welcoming us to your school recently and telling us your opinions about your school. Thank you also to those pupils who returned questionnaires. Your views, along with everything else that we saw, helped us form a clear view about how well your school works.

This is what we found.

Your school is giving you a good education which is preparing you well for the future.

Your teachers work hard to make sure that lessons are interesting and that you have lots of opportunities to develop your own particular skills and talents.

All the adults take good care of you and help you if you have any problems.

You understand what it means to be healthy, and many of you take part in sports clubs after school. However, packed lunches often contain crisps and chocolate - not a healthy option!

You are happy in your school and support and respect each other well.

Your behaviour is good in lessons and around the school.

You work hard in lessons and always try to do your best.

A few of you who learn quickly find the work too easy in lessons, and we have asked the teachers to make sure that it is pitched at just the right level to help you make more rapid progress.

The school governors need to keep a more careful check on what is happening in school so they can help the headteacher and teachers plan for the future.

You can play your part in helping your school become even better by making sure you continue to work hard, behave well and attend school every day.

Yours sincerely

Mary Summers

Lead inspector

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