

Millfields Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115261
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	338549
Inspection dates	21–22 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Selwyn Ward

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	207
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter North
Headteacher	Janet Meacock
Date of previous school inspection	7 October 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Around half of inspectors' time was spent in looking at pupils' learning. Inspectors visited 16 lessons and observed eight teachers. They held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They looked at samples of pupils' work, analysis of the tracking of pupils' progress, school policies and procedures, school leaders' monitoring, the school development plan, risk assessments, the minutes of governors' meetings and the questionnaires received from pupils, staff and 85 parents and carers.

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

- the extent to which current standards and rates of progress have accelerated from that of recent years
- the impact on pupils' learning of the curriculum designed around broad whole-school themes.

Information about the school

There are more boys than girls in this average size school. The large majority of pupils are White British. A very small number of pupils are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average, but it was high in last year's Year 6. The school has been awarded Artsmark Gold. The headteacher was appointed in April 2008.

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

The success of Millfields School is very evident in the enthusiasm of the pupils and the praise voiced by their very satisfied parents. One parent told inspectors, 'My daughter loves her school and has gained so much from being here.' Many others echoed these sentiments, with a parent of a Year 6 child telling inspectors that her daughter enjoyed her time at the school so much that, 'She doesn't want to leave in September!' Another parent summed things up in more mathematical terms, citing their equation: 'happy children = happy parents = Millfields School.'

What stands out at this school is the way in which pupils are enthused and engaged in their learning. Basic skills, especially in literacy, are now taught through imaginative, whole school cross-curricular themes. These enable teachers to fully cover the requirements of the National Curriculum while encouraging children to pursue topics that interest them. The impact of this initiative is very evident in the now above average standards seen in the older classes. The current theme of 'Flights of Fantasy' has, for example, involved much work on owls, in some classes. Activities such as a recent visit, which gave pupils the chance to see these birds at close quarters, have inspired and motivated pupils to learn more and have contributed to a notable acceleration in standards. Year 5 pupils, for example, show a very clear understanding of food chains based on their research into the life of barn owls, with pupils eagerly looking forward to dissecting owl pellets to identify what rodents the owls have eaten. Detailed marking and assessment have also contributed to improved rates of progress because pupils know what they need to do to improve their work. Teachers manage their classes well, resulting in consistently good behaviour throughout the school. In many lessons, there is a careful match of work to pupils' different capabilities, but this is not a consistent feature of teaching in every class. When all pupils are given similar work to do, it is often too easy for more able pupils.

The school takes good care of the pupils, and they feel very safe as a result. They show an excellent appreciation of how to keep safe, for example when using the internet or in learning to safely ride their bicycles. The pupils' understanding of the need for a healthy diet and exercise is evident from the high take-up rate for the healthy school meals that have been recently introduced and the enthusiastic participation in the many sporting activities on offer.

Communication and the partnership with parents, identified as issues in the last inspection, are now among the strengths of the school. Again, it is the leaders' initiative in establishing such a creative curriculum that has given parents increased opportunities for involvement in their children's education, particularly as children return from school eager to share their new learning with their families. As a parent explained, 'At least

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once a week, my child tells me, unprompted, the enjoyable exciting things he has been doing.' School leaders are broadly accurate in their evaluation and monitoring of provision, although their observations of lessons give an overly positive picture of the effectiveness of some lessons because leaders focus on the features of teaching rather than on how much progress all the pupils are making. Leaders' and governors' overview of progress, has not focused with sufficient rigour on ensuring that the same good progress is demonstrated at each key stage. Hitherto, there has been some variation in practice and performance in some year groups and the school's assessments at the end of Key Stage 1 show fewer pupils attaining higher levels than might be expected from their Reception Year assessments. Nevertheless, the now good achievement of the pupils, coupled with what parents describe as, 'So many positive new initiatives introduced in the last year', together show the school's good capacity for continued improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By the end of the summer term 2010, ensure that, in all lessons, work is closely matched to pupils' different abilities so that it fully stretches the most able.
- Increase the rigour of leaders' and governors' monitoring of provision so that, by the start of the autumn term 2010:
 - lesson observations focus on the learning and progress of all pupils
 - the school's ambitious targets are matched by performance data which confirm that pupils make consistently good or better progress in each year group and over each key stage.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

The standard of pupils' current work is above average, which represents an improved picture in comparison with the test results over the past two years. Results were depressed in 2009, in particular, by the very high proportion of boys in that cohort with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including a number who joined the school partway through their primary education. The school's innovative curriculum arrangements have contributed to the rise in both attainment and pupils' rates of progress, so that pupils of all abilities are now achieving well. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those new to learning English, make similar progress to their peers. Throughout the school, the improvement this year is particularly noticeable in writing, where increased opportunities for creative and extended writing, and thorough marking, have had the greatest impact. Although pupils' work shows that attainment is above average in both key stages, teachers' assessments at the end of Year 2 have been what leaders describe as 'cautious'. This means that there have been fewer pupils shown as attaining Level 3, and therefore a lack of evidence that able pupils have in the past built sufficiently on their above average attainment in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Pupils do not just do well in the key subjects of English, mathematics and science. Work

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on display shows the high standards attained in art. For example, pupils in Year 6 have produced their own lively pop art pictures, emulating the style of artist Roy Lichtenstein. Parents comment too on the high standards in music, thanks in part to the African drumming learnt throughout the school, and the school's policy of providing free instrumental lessons for every child in Year 4.

Pupils' enjoyment of school is seen not only in their positive attitudes to learning but also in their eager take-up of opportunities to take responsibility and to support each other. Older pupils, for example, help Reception children with their reading. Pupils also take a keen interest in the wider world, with the school council initiating fundraising activities for several worthy causes.

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	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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?

One of the innovations of the new curriculum at Millfields includes the pupils, themselves deciding how to interpret and what to pursue as part of the termly whole school theme. For example, pupils in Year 6 have incorporated work on Greek myths within this term's 'Flights of Fantasy' theme, looking especially at the story of Icarus and

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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Daedalus. Parents are almost as enthusiastic about the curriculum as the pupils and staff. Many describe the school's 'stimulating learning environment'. Parents also comment that, 'We are delighted with the way that staff offer such a wealth of educational experiences.' The extent of the creative work at Millfields is reflected in the school's success in being awarded Artsmark Gold. Creativity in lessons has not been at the expense of learning the basics; a Key Stage 1 parent explained, 'My son reads one to one at least three times a week.'

Relationships throughout the school are good, and teachers are especially successful in motivating their pupils. Questioning in lessons often helps pupils to develop their own ideas. Along with the many opportunities that pupils have to express their views, this contributes to their confident speaking skills. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively, particularly to support those pupils who need extra help with their learning, but they are not always used to best effect when the teacher is talking to the whole class. Although pupils now make good progress in most classes, their progress is slower in those lessons where work is not sufficiently tailored to individual needs. This is especially so where all are given similar worksheets to complete. Teachers' marking is thorough and gives pupils a clear understanding of how to move their work on. Where teachers pose questions in their marking, however, they do not always ensure that pupils respond. A strong feature of assessment at Millfields is the involvement of pupils in evaluating their own and each other's work. This is particularly evident in the older classes. Arrangements for pupils' welfare are strong, so that pupils feel very safe and even the most vulnerable pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are helped to make good progress. Careful tracking quickly identifies any child who is falling behind, and 'catch up' support is put in place to accelerate their progress.

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	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Although test scores have dipped since the last inspection, effective measures have been taken to arrest and reverse the decline. The headteacher and leadership team have successfully communicated their vision for an imaginative curriculum so that it is shared fully by staff, governors, pupils and parents. Leaders' monitoring of lessons has helped to ensure good teaching, but observations have not always placed enough emphasis on the progress that pupils are making. The school has set itself ambitious

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targets, but leaders and governors acknowledge the need for increased rigour in ensuring that performance measures show consistently good or better progress throughout the school. Although able pupils are not catered for as well as they could be when they are set unchallenging work, leaders are otherwise effective in promoting equality. The school goes the extra mile in welcoming those new to the country. Its good promotion of community cohesion is evident, for example, in the way in which last year's 'Around The World in 60 Days' theme raised pupils' horizons and brought into school parents with overseas backgrounds or connections.

There are thorough arrangements for ensuring pupils' safety and well-being. Safeguarding procedures meet the latest statutory requirements and governors ensured, for example, that prompt action was taken to repair boundary fences.

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	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Attainment on entry to the Reception Year varies, but, in most years, children start school with skills that are above those expected for their ages. In this well-run provision, staff have good knowledge of the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and, as a result, the children make good progress in all aspects of their learning. By the start of Year 1, their standards are above average. The children clearly enjoy all the experiences offered to them and they show good skills of perseverance and concentration. Their speaking and listening skills are very well developed. They demonstrate this in their imaginative play and as they act out stories that they know well, like The Owl Babies.

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There is close liaison with parents and carers, particularly through the 'Home School' link book. Planning in the Reception Year is based on thorough assessment of the children's progress. Activities, both inside and outside, link in with whole school curricular themes, allowing staff to respond to children's expressions of interest. For example, the teacher's original plans for creative activities based on the recent owl visit to school were abandoned as the children were fired with enthusiasm instead to make models of 'birds with wings that moved'.

Relationships are good and children's behaviour is managed very well. As a result, children are happy to make independent choices and have the confidence to select the resources they need for themselves. Sometimes, however, the choice of activities is not as wide as it could be, especially to encourage boys in imaginative play and storytelling.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents express overwhelmingly positive views of the school. They are especially appreciative of the way in which the curriculum is organised. Many wrote to inspectors to describe the school as 'a happy place to be'. Some parents feel that able pupils are not always stretched enough. Inspectors agree that there is scope for challenging able pupils more in some classes. Inspectors also agree with the very many positive views voiced by parents.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Millfields Primary 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 85 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 207 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	50	59	34	40	0	0	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	56	66	28	33	0	0	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	33	39	48	56	4	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	36	42	44	52	4	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	43	51	34	40	3	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	34	40	43	51	4	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	45	53	38	45	0	0	0	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)	39	46	37	44	2	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	40	47	36	42	7	8	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	26	31	49	58	3	4	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	30	35	46	54	6	7	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	49	58	34	40	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	54	64	28	33	3	4	0	0

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.



25 January 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Millfields Primary School, Colchester, CO7 9RD

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful, and welcoming us to your school. Many of you told us that you thought Millfields was a good school. We agree. Staff look after you well and are helping you to make good progress and attain above average standards in Reception and by the time you reach Year 6. We were pleased to see how well behaved you are and how well you all get on. It helps make Millfields such a happy place to be.

Your teachers give you exciting opportunities to learn about interesting topics and themes. These have really fired your imagination and given a boost to your learning and the progress you are making. We were impressed with all the artwork around the school, as well as with the other activities you are currently doing on your 'Flights of Fantasy'. It was good to see, too, that you know how to improve your work. Your writing is certainly much improved this year. You can help to improve this even further by being sure always to read the comments teachers write in your books and doing your very best to respond. Although you are making good progress over your time at Millfields, we could see that, for some of you, some of the tasks in some classes are too easy. We have asked your teachers to make sure that they always set work that challenges you.

Your headteacher and the leadership team are doing a good job. We have asked that, when they visit each other's lessons, staff look especially at the progress you are all making. Leaders have set ambitious targets for your progress, but we have asked them, and governors, to check that you are all making equally good progress as you move up the school. We want to see, for example, that assessments in Key Stage 1 and each year as you move up the school show that you have all built on the high standards seen at the end of the Reception Year.

Thank you again for looking after us on our visit, and our very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Selwyn Ward

Lead inspector

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