

Waltham Holy Cross Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115286
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	338554
Inspection dates	8–9 February 2010
Reporting inspector	Rob Crompton

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	299
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Lisher
Headteacher	Deirdre Mooney
Date of previous school inspection	8 September 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors spent about two thirds of their time looking at learning. They observed 11 teachers in 22 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at pupils' work, assessment records, lesson plans, minutes of governors' meetings and the 71 questionnaires returned by 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 pupils have opportunities to practise, develop and consolidate their writing skills across the curriculum
- how successfully senior staff are in accelerating progress through the school.

Information about the school

Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and very few of them speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is average. Most of these pupils need extra support because they are falling behind in literacy and numeracy. The Early Years Foundation Stage comprises a Nursery class and three Reception classes. A pre-school centre, managed by an outside body, uses a building on the school site. The school has received national awards for its work promoting the arts, ecology, healthy lifestyles and participation in physical activities.

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

This good school provides an extremely purposeful environment for learning. Pupils hasten into school eager to learn because teachers make every effort to engage them in activities they enjoy. They behave in an exemplary manner and develop skills that ensure they are well prepared for the challenges and opportunities in their future education and beyond. Typical of the parents' comments was, 'The school has a calm and welcoming atmosphere and is very happy to involve parents. My child loves school'. The school's success is a reflection of the excellent leadership of the headteacher who is very well supported by senior managers, staff and governors, and is popular and valued by pupils and their parents.

Children starting school generally have weak social, language and number skills. They progress well through the school so that, by the time they leave Year 2, standards are above average. All groups achieve well, including those who find learning difficult, and those who are more-able. The sense of security and belonging that is engendered by all staff contributes to pupils' thoughtful support of one another and their enthusiasm to engage positively and with great enjoyment in their learning.

Good teaching is underpinned by excellent relationships and well-established assessment strategies that enable teachers to pitch work at the right level for different ability groups. They mark work well, identifying the next steps for improvement. Their written comments are not always followed up later, however, so opportunities to check on pupils' responses are missed. The skilled and experienced teaching assistants make a valuable contribution in lessons and when taking small groups outside the classroom. During whole class sessions, they frequently make useful observations and note pupils' understanding, but this means they are not fully engaged with pupils during lesson introductions and summaries.

Governors perform their role well in challenging the school and holding it to account. Self-evaluation procedures are well established and involve all stakeholders. This provides a secure base for planning improvements, as seen in the school's success in raising attainment significantly over the last five years. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. Several aspects of the school's work are now outstanding. The school's track record, together with current strengths in leadership and management, indicate a good capacity to improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate the rate of progress made in lessons so that it is consistently good or better by:

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- deploying support staff so that they are engaged with pupils throughout lessons
- providing opportunities for pupils to respond to the improvements suggested by teachers in their marking.

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

The work seen during the inspection showed that pupils make good progress and reach above average standards, reflecting the results of national assessments. A strong focus on teaching letter sounds means pupils' confidence in reading new words and building up their own vocabulary grows quickly. In turn, this provides a secure foundation for developing their writing skills. From the start, teachers emphasise the importance of handwriting in developing fluency in writing for different purposes across the curriculum, such as a description, narrative or poem, and this is evident in pupils' neat and well-presented written work.

A systematic approach to building on pupils' early counting skills means they make good progress in calculating. They gain a good understanding of using different kinds of graphs, such as bar charts and pie-diagrams, to present information. More-able pupils showed very good levels of understanding as they sorted a set of numbers into 'more than 20/not more than 20/multiples of 5/not multiples of five' using a Carroll diagram. Pupils who find learning more difficult also make good progress in literacy and numeracy because they receive well-targeted support.

Pupils' consistently thoughtful behaviour and high levels of enjoyment are outstanding factors in their successful learning. They value opportunities to contribute to their school, such as in the work of the 'eco warriors'. They spoke about how they help newcomers to the school, showing a strong empathy. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves safe and say they always have an adult to turn to if needed. Over lunch, they chatted confidently about healthy foods and showed a good understanding of the importance of exercise. Pupils' understanding of those less fortunate than themselves was clear from their enthusiastic explanation of their sponsorship of a child in Africa and the wide range of charities they supported.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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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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	1
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	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Effective teaching is underpinned by teachers' skills in captivating pupils through activities that engage and challenge them. Teachers' secure subject knowledge enables them to draw on pupils' existing understanding and ask challenging questions that generate a real enthusiasm for learning. The curriculum is another key factor in pupils' enjoyment of school and their achievements. It is based firmly on developing basic skills, with a strong emphasis on speaking and listening. Pupils like the themed approach and were keen to talk about the special weeks where work across the school centres on art, science or literature. The good quality of pupils' art work is evident in the many displays around the school. Work in class is given deeper meaning through a good range of visits, such as those to the local Gunpowder Mills. The wide range of extra-curricular activities, including French and Spanish, and a wide range of physical activities, also contributes to pupils' enjoyment and participation rates are high. The curriculum is currently under review, as staff acknowledge that links across subjects are not fully exploited.

Pupils benefit from good feedback through detailed marking or discussion. Prompts for learning, prominently displayed in classrooms, such as key vocabulary, provide clear on-going guidance. Pupils take pride in moving their names to their next level towards meeting their target on the well-designed target boards. Teachers mark pupils' work conscientiously and include praise for their achievements and where they could improve. These helpful comments are not always followed up, so their impact on promoting further progress is reduced. Teaching assistants, who make a strong contribution to pupils' learning, also help in assessing how well pupils are getting on, but this is often at

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the expense of their direct involvement with them.

The positive and caring ethos of the school is built on a foundation of trust and respect for oneself and others, and this culture is embedded at all levels. High levels of care are evident across all aspects of the school's work. Adults know pupils extremely well. Pupils needing support are identified early and, through excellent partnerships with parents and support agencies, staff ensure that they thrive in a supportive and caring environment. Pupils and their parents praised the outstanding work that the teaching assistant designated to promote home/school links does in ensuring that all pupils have opportunities to discuss their individual concerns in a supportive and trusting manner. She supports better attendance and punctuality by signposting parents to a 'home start' group, where volunteers provide practical help in the mornings for those parents who find it difficult to ensure their children are on time.

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	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders at all levels share a determination to ensure pupils have the best possible start to their education. All staff are aware of their individual roles in sustaining improvement and moving further forward because this drive is embedded in the schools' ethos. Through frequent informal class visits and a sequence of planned observations, senior staff identify good practice and share this with colleagues. This aspect of subject leaders' work is at an early stage as most have taken up their roles relatively recently. Governors play an important part in self-evaluation using assessment information to gauge the school's overall performance. In addition, they visit regularly to gather first hand information and regularly receive reports from subject managers and other leaders. Several governors are newly appointed. They are fully committed to the school and are playing an increasing role in holding the school to account.

The school's commitment to equal opportunities is clearly evident in its day-to-day life. An adult is on hand at every turn to encourage pupils' belief in themselves and make the best of school life. Any discrepancy in the achievement of different groups is quickly spotted. That said, in recent years these have been rare because of the good support all pupils receive. Where individual pupils need specialist help, staff work in tandem with appropriate agencies and professionals.

All staff are clear about their responsibilities regarding child protection. Health and safety audits are carried out regularly and all statutory requirements are met. One

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governor recently visited proposed sites for educational visits, undertook risk assessments and fed back to the governing body. This enabled governors to make well-informed decisions when sanctioning proposed outings. Staff training is kept up-to-date and anything new is immediately shared with colleagues. The site is generally very secure, although the main gate shared with the junior school allows pedestrian access. Plans are well in hand to replace this with an electronic system controlled internally.

Positive relationships with parents and carers have been established. They were keen to tell inspectors about the schools' open door policy and how they appreciate being consulted on matters such as the 'walking bus' and developing the outdoor areas. Staff and governors also make continuous efforts to engage with the wider community and audit the outcomes. A thriving and well-managed breakfast club is much appreciated by parents and contributes to pupils' social development. The school runs classes for parents, including first-aid and computer training and a 'mathematics through cookery' course. These help parents gain a greater understanding of how their children learn. Close contact with the local children's centre, where the manager is a school governor, help the school to gain insights into the needs of the local community. Developing links with schools in Wales and Australia are helping pupils gain insights into other communities.

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	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
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

Children make good progress in all areas of learning through the Nursery and Reception classes. They make particularly good headway in gaining key literacy and numeracy

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skills. They behave well and mix happily together within the secure and warm environment. The broad range of activities meets the needs of all children including those who need additional individual support. There is a good balance of indoor and outdoor activities, although work outside is somewhat limited during inclement weather due to a lack of shelter. Plans are in hand to address this. The mix of adult-led and child-initiated work offers good opportunities for structured teaching and for children to develop their independence. Teachers use creative approaches which stimulate children's interest. For example, Reception children delighted in fishing in the 'witch's cauldron' for words starting with w. Children's welfare is given a high priority. Productive links with parents help them to support their children's learning at home. Adults across the Nursery and Reception classes work well together as a whole team. The temporary leader of the Early Years Foundation Stage monitors carefully the provision and assessment information to help ensure a consistent approach and rate of progress through the year groups.

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

All parents and carers who returned the questionnaire were happy with their children's overall experience. Within these positive views, a small minority raised individual concerns, almost all of which were relatively minor and not borne out by the inspection. Concerns about the easy access through the main gate was followed up and found to be justified. The school had this issue well in hand and tenders were being considered for the installation of an electronic entry system while the inspection was underway.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Waltham Holy Cross Infant 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 71 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 299 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	54	76	15	21	2	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	43	61	27	38	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	24	34	43	61	3	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	41	58	28	39	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	46	65	25	35	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	37	52	33	46	1	1	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	37	52	33	46	1	1	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)	25	35	38	54	2	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	38	54	32	45	1	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	34	48	31	44	1	1	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	32	45	33	46	4	6	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	51	72	20	28	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	47	66	23	32	0	0	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.



10th February 2010

Dear Children,

Inspection of Waltham Holy Cross Infant School, Waltham Abbey, EN9 1LG

Thank you for making my colleagues and me welcome when we visited your school. We agree with you that it is a good school and saw for ourselves how much you enjoy life at Waltham Holy Cross. You are all making good progress because your teachers are really good at finding exciting ways for you to learn. We were really pleased to see how well you behave and how everyone gets on so well together.

Many of you benefit from the extra support you receive in class and from working outside the classroom with the teaching assistants. They do a great job. We have suggested that they could work more often with small groups from the start of lessons, so that you all get a good chance to ask questions; and at the end of lessons, so that more of you can report back on what you have learned. It was good to see how well teachers mark your work. They often point out what you need to concentrate on next. When you start a new piece of work, we think it would be a good idea for you to look back at these comments so you can think about them as you work. See if you can remember to do this.

You told us how much you enjoyed the special events, like the art, science and book weeks and you obviously have a great time and learn a lot during trips to places like the Museum of Childhood.

You are really well looked after by all the adults. Not only that, but you take good care of one another too. It was interesting to find out how much the school council and the eco-warriors contribute and we know the adults appreciate the many other ways that children help the school to run smoothly. Small things, like tidying up after messy work show how much you care about your school.

We are sure you will keep enjoying school and trying hard. We wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Rob Crompton

Lead inspector

A Carroll diagram is used for grouping things in a yes/no fashion.

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