

Mersea Island School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115311
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	338560
Inspection dates	30 November –1 December 2009
Reporting inspector	Lynne Blakelock

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	423
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr J Jackson
Headteacher	Mrs S Shenton
Date of previous school inspection	7 May 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 18 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's data about progress, its improvement planning and governing body minutes. Responses from staff and pupils were scrutinised as well as 65 parental questionnaires.

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

- how effectively pupils are challenged in lessons so that pupils of all groupings achieve well and a greater number can achieve higher levels, including in writing
- the aspects of pupils' personal development that the school judge to be outstanding and why this is
- how well the organisation of the curriculum and methods of teaching accelerate pupils' progress and add to their enjoyment of school
- how developed and widespread the school's partnerships are, including those with parents and their impact on the quality of education.

Information about the school

This large school, the only one on the island, is situated on a five acre site. The accommodation is across seven buildings which are being renovated as part of an on-going building programme. Most pupils are White British and speak English as their first language. A below average percentage of pupils has special educational needs and/or disabilities or a statement of special educational needs. The school has achieved the Basic Skills Quality Mark, Active Primary Mark, Activemark Gold and the Healthy Schools Award. In December 2008, it attained the Financial Management in Schools Award and in October 2009 it achieved the International Schools Award.

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 effective school provides a good all-round quality of education. It has a particular strength in the curriculum, which is outstanding. Pupils develop well as learners and as young citizens because of the wide ranging activities and opportunities open to them. Within a culture of support, all groups of pupils achieve well, with standards above average by the end of Year 6. Pupils who have particular needs are supported very appropriately so that they can settle to learning. All pupils know that they are important to the school and this comes through in their good behaviour and respect for others.

The focused leadership of the headteacher and the senior team, and the rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the school's work, mean that they know the school accurately and understand where improvements can be made. Together with middle managers, who evaluate their own subjects robustly and who are increasingly making their mark on the quality of provision, they are systematically moving the school further forward. Governors are committed and involved in many aspects of the school's work but they do not yet know enough about all aspects of what it does to be able to evaluate it fully or to determine confidently its direction. Planning for reviewing and overseeing the school's work is not structured enough.

The outstanding curriculum contributes greatly to pupils' enjoyment and engagement in their learning. In particular, the high importance given to the provision of key skills in all subjects and teaching through themes to deepen and extend pupils' learning are significant in pupils' good progress and personal development.

Teaching is good because teachers know their subjects well and plan lessons carefully. While setting of pupils is promoting learning well, including those capable of reaching higher levels, tasks are not always thought out carefully enough to accelerate progress as much as possible for all pupils. However, through imaginative tasks and effective teaching, standards are rising, as they did in writing in the 2009 national tests, with a higher proportion of pupils achieving higher levels.

Partnerships add to the quality of education in all aspects of the school's work. Whether with other schools or countries, sports links or outside agencies, pupils benefit. Parents are very supportive, as seen in their attendance at school events. The staff respond to this, with teachers making themselves available to parents on a daily basis and providing a growing number of events to inform parents of their child's learning.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards further by ensuring that activities and tasks always provide an

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accurate match to the needs of all pupils' in order to accelerate their progress

- Ensure that governors have a good understanding of the school's work and effectiveness by
- establishing and sustaining clear systems to monitor the school's work and performance on a regular basis
- reviewing all policies and procedures regularly, including site security, so that all of the school's documentation is in place and the school remains safe during future building work.

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

Pupils of all abilities and from all groupings make good progress through the school although standards vary from year to year, depending on the cohort. In 2009, pupils in Year 6 achieved above average standards and met their challenging targets. English results were well above average, due to writing issues being effectively addressed, following a dip in 2008. Through the inspection, pupils with special needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language made good progress in their learning, aided by carefully planned support. Pupils capable of reaching higher levels also achieve well in lessons because tasks more frequently challenge and enthuse them, often through problem-solving and independent learning. Pupils enjoy learning. This was very evident in a Year 5 and Year 6 mathematics lesson. The teacher built up pupils' confidence in the subject through a task about quadrants that used their knowledge about the school to make the task very relevant and also fun.

Pupils grow as people as well as learners through the opportunities provided by the curriculum and daily routines. Responsibilities such as play leaders and peer mediators and pupils' much improved, above average attendance, help them to develop qualities and skills that will help them in the future. Roles capture pupils' imaginations as they function, for example, as the ship's captain. At the same time they develop good workplace skills through running games for charity and the tuck shop, as well as achieving above average skills in literacy and numeracy. Pupils respond to the trust placed in them by behaving well and respecting other, which are examples of their good social and moral development. They told inspectors that they feel safe and know how to stay safe. Their cultural development is good because of regular structured activities, including links with a Chinese school and dance which help them to appreciate the lifestyles of others and encourage their empathy. Their spiritual understanding is a developing aspect. Pupils' increased adoption of healthy eating habits through nutritious cooked lunches and healthy packed lunches, together with their enthusiasm for exercise, are evidence of their good understanding of keeping healthy. Their behaviour around the school and in lessons is sensible.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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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	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?

There is a good sense of purpose in classrooms, strengthened by very positive relationships between staff and pupils. They both make classrooms happy places for learning. Overall, teaching is good through the school and leads to good progress. Common strengths in teaching aid progress. They include the purpose of learning which is made clear to pupils and, in the best lessons, is linked to assessment. Starter activities involve pupils, are interesting and so engage pupils' attention, as seen in a Year 5 and 6 mathematics lesson. Very often, they involve good use of interactive whiteboards. In the best lessons, tasks are chosen carefully to provide accurate challenge and to accelerate progress, including for pupils capable of reaching higher levels. Questioning of pupils is specific to ensure that they achieve the intended outcomes of learning. In satisfactory lessons, tasks are sometimes the same for all pupils or not carefully enough planned, so that progress is slowed down. Marking is usually very helpful to pupils because it tells them how to move forward in their learning. Their knowledge of the targets they have adds to the clear focus on improvement.

The very careful thought given to the planning of learning has resulted in a curriculum that meets pupils' needs, interests and preferred learning styles extremely well. Careful grouping of pupils is enabling them to learn at the optimum pace for them and quickening their progress, including that of pupils capable of reaching higher levels. A further very effective feature is the key skills programme which runs through all lessons

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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and themes and which is enabling pupils to build up a wide variety of competences, including those relating to personal development. Pupils enjoy the fact that the school's approach to the curriculum is creative. The school's building project has involved the whole school in a design project which has incorporated a myriad of personal and inter-personal skills. Despite its relatively isolated location, the school provides a good choice of very popular extra-curricular activities, some of which reflect the island's features.

Pupils' readiness for learning and enjoyment of school has much to do with the effective care, guidance and support that are in place. Problems are handled sensitively and with specialist support if necessary so that pupils can settle to learning. This includes constructive partnerships with outside agencies. All pupils are known as individuals and valued as such and through trusting relationships they learn to manage a variety of learning, social and behavioural issues. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well through effective deployment of teaching assistants. Preparation for transition into, through and out of the school is carefully planned and gives pupils the confidence to face new situations and learning challenges.

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?

The headteacher's great commitment to the school is demonstrated in her drive to move the school forward in every way. Nowhere is this more evident than in her efforts to improve the accommodation. However, the major focus on the quality of provision, in order to accelerate pupils' progress, is always at the forefront of the school's work. Analysis of the school's performance, including the quality of teaching and learning, is structured, rigorous and leads to action. Key issues from the last inspection, for example, have been addressed effectively, with targets becoming a greater focus in lessons. The leadership and management's vision and ambition are embedded in the staff whose starting point is the care and welfare of pupils in a school that promotes equality of opportunity well. It uses the curriculum, its good partnerships and regular school events to bring this about and also to enable pupils to develop a sound understanding of community cohesion in the social, religious and cultural context of the school and island. Parents are respected, and welcomed into the school as important partners in their child's learning. The governing body is committed and involved in school activities but it does not have thorough enough systems in place to evaluate all

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aspects of its work, including the quality of teaching and learning. Governors oversee safeguarding procedures satisfactorily and are aware of the need to put further procedures in place during future building improvements.

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	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	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Most children start school with levels of knowledge and skills that are in line with those expected for their age. They get off to a quick start in all aspects of learning. This is made possible by the accurate knowledge that the staff have about the levels of children's skills before they start school, their positive relationships with parents and a climate of care that promotes their security. Colourful classrooms, full of exciting objects and displays, delight the children and promote their positive attitudes to learning. The accommodation is planned well to provide a wide range of activities, including a small, covered, outdoor area to enable learning outdoors all year long. Children's personal development is good and is structured into activities and into daily routines. Their cultural understanding starts at this stage, with the children learning about the celebrations of a number of religions. Staff model well how we should treat each other and the children respond caringly. They are encouraged to play and learn independently and to cooperate in small groups. Good teaching, which is well planned to match children's needs, leads to good progress so that many children reach standards by the end of the stage that are above those expected for their age. The good leadership and management of the stage are demonstrated in good quality planning with other staff, and careful preparation for their transition into Key Stage 1. However, the daily

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observations of children's learning are not yet efficiently and promptly recorded.

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

The very large majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire are happy with their child's experiences at the school. One parent wrote that, 'The teaching staff and management do everything that they can for the children. Teachers put in way more than 100% in time and effort for classes as a whole and for individual children.' A small minority expressed concern about the groupings of pupils for learning, the impact on their social and emotional well-being and their confidence. However, inspectors saw no evidence of this. Similarly, a few parents were worried about some bullying in the school. Pupils were adamant there is no bullying and would know what to do if there was any. The concerns have been passed on to the headteacher, while remaining anonymous. Parents are very impressed with the ways in which the school helps pupils to have a healthy lifestyle and the way in which it fosters a sense of community and belonging.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Mersea island 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 65 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 423 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	42	56	28	37	5	7	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	37	49	32	43	5	7	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	29	39	41	55	5	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	29	39	30	40	10	13	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	30	40	32	43	6	8	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	21	28	44	59	7	9	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	28	37	41	55	2	3	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)	21	28	32	43	12	16	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	26	35	37	49	9	12	2	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	16	21	43	57	9	12	3	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	16	21	39	52	13	17	6	8
The school is led and managed effectively	21	28	41	55	5	7	6	8
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	36	48	29	39	6	8	1	1

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.



2 December 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Mersea Island School, Colchester, CO5 8QX

I am writing to thank you, on behalf of all the inspectors for welcoming us into your school when we visited you recently. We had an interesting and enjoyable time at your school and watched many of the activities that take place there. You were very busy rehearsing for the Christmas productions which we thought were looking good. You make the most of living near the sea and we liked the sea theme that runs through many aspects, such as having a first lieutenant of the school.

We have judged that your school is a good school. You are all making good progress in lessons and reaching above average standards in national tests by the end of Year 6. The curriculum is outstanding and helps you to learn in interesting ways, very often through themes and by you learning for yourselves. We were delighted to see the project that you have completed on 'Open Spaces,' which has given you lots of new skills. Teaching is good and promotes your good progress. In a lot of lessons, tasks are carefully chosen to help you to make the quickest progress that you can but this is not always so. I have asked your headteacher to help make sure that planning of lessons results in this always happening so that your standards can rise further.

You enjoy school and get on very well with each other. You say that the school cares for you all very well, keeps you safe and gives you help when you need it. The headteacher and the staff all work very hard for you. Governors are also working hard to make the school even better. They are going to plan their work more carefully so that they have all the information that they need to judge how well it is doing and what can be done better. Lots of building work has improved the facilities greatly and the governors are going to make sure that plans are in place to keep the site safe when more improvement work starts.

I hope that you enjoy all of the Christmas activities.

Yours faithfully

Lynne Blakelock

Lead inspector

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