

Essendon C of E VC Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117393
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	338998
Inspection dates	12–13 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Judi Bedawi

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	99
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Spragg
Headteacher	Rod Woodhouse
Date of previous school inspection	4 April 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited nine lessons and held meetings with governors, staff, groups of pupils and the Traveller education attendance worker. They observed the school's work, and looked at pupils' books, displays, a range of school documentation and policies, monitoring records and data on pupils' achievement. Inspectors received and analysed 26 parental questionnaires.

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

- Strategies to improve attendance and reduce persistent absences
- Use of assessment and target setting to meet pupils' diverse needs
- Provision for pupils with a travelling heritage
- The impact of teaching and learning on pupils' progress.

Information about the school

Essendon is smaller than most other rural primary schools. Pupils come from the local area and from further afield. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds with nearly 20 percent from the travelling community and a further eight percent from other minority ethnic groups, with very few at an early stage of learning English. Although there are no pupils with a statement of special educational need, there is an above average proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupil mobility is above average. When the village playgroup closed, the school started to admit 'pre-nursery' children into the Early Years Foundation Stage, after their third birthday. The school has the Healthy Schools and Activemark awards and Green Eco status.

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

Essendon is a good school. It provides pupils with a good quality education within a warm and very caring family style environment. Pupils arrive with huge smiles, happily looking forward to the day ahead. One pupil encapsulated the views of most pupils and parents by saying, 'My school is safe and loving'.

Children join the school with levels of skills development that can vary considerably, year on year. A significant proportion of them arrive with lower levels than would be expected for their age. Children thrive from their arrival in the Nursery as a result of the good focus on developing language and number skills. Most, but not all, start in the pre-nursery part-time sessions so they know routines, make good gains in their confidence and build friendships. However, Traveller children often start school much later, even into Year 1, missing the good preparation for more formal learning. Nonetheless, the school works well to enable this group of children to catch up with their peers. Attainment through the school and by the end of Year 6 is broadly average, but with good teaching and well focussed individual support, including phonic work, progress is good. The end of Year 6 results in 2009 show good improvement in attainment from 2008. Although the use of assessment information is satisfactory and pupils are set targets, they are not always sure about them or about how well they are doing. They mostly think that they work quite hard and enjoy learning. They say that they particularly like history, science and using computers.

Attention to the personal needs of individual pupils is a key to the good pastoral care. It includes support for more vulnerable pupils and their families through the good teamwork and understanding that staff have of their pupils' needs and circumstances. The school is good at removing, as far as possible, any barriers to learning, so that pupils flourish academically and personally. Parents value the good quality of care provided, typically saying, 'We are extremely pleased with the way our child has progressed and is happy'.

Pupils' personal development is good and attendance has improved. Close work with Traveller families has successfully reduced persistent absence. However, there are still a few other families whose children do not attend as often as they should. Pupils' behaviour is good. They relish responsibility and care about each other and the adults who look after them so well. The school enriches pupils' personal development through its work with parents and its partnerships within the parish and with other schools.

The school's capacity to improve is good. The headteacher and the leadership team have successfully addressed issues from the previous inspection and know the school's strengths and areas for development. Attendance is now satisfactory. Teamwork at all

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levels, including that of middle managers, is good and well focussed on embedding ambition with a resultant good impact on the school's work. The leadership team and other staff have good complementary skills to move the school on. The governors are strongly supportive of the school and of the local community but they do not challenge senior leaders rigorously enough. Additionally, they do not always monitor and evaluate their work or minute important decisions and actions to improve the quality of their formal procedures and practice. Provision for safeguarding is good. The school's evaluation of its own effectiveness is accurate.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop the role of governors by:
 - being more proactive and rigorous in challenging the work of senior leaders to further embed ambition and drive.
 - strengthening the impact of monitoring by always recording decisions, identifying responsibility for follow-up and setting a sharp timescale for required actions.
 - Further develop assessment and target setting to:
 - ensure that all pupils know precisely what they need to do to improve their work
 - enable pupils to understand how well they are doing so that they can work towards their targets more independently.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils love their school and say that learning is fun. They work hard in lessons and are well motivated. Their excitement about discovering new facts sparks their imagination and desire to learn. The attendance of Travellers continues to improve because their families increasingly value the importance of their children's education. Pupils make good progress as they move through the school, from generally broadly average attainment on entry, although there is some variation linked to the small size of year groups and late entry of Traveller pupils. Attainment has been broadly average in recent years. However, the 2009 results improved across the board, particularly in science and for higher attainers. Additionally, the introduction of work to aid spelling, reading and writing across the school is impacting well on pupils' good current attainment. Written work seen shows good extended writing although more use of ink rather than pencil would further aid older pupils' presentation skills. Intervention, group and one-to-one support is effective in helping pupils to fill any gaps in their learning. This enables all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, Travellers and those with English as an additional language, to make good progress. Gifted and talented and higher attaining pupils are clearly identified and the school works well to meet their needs by linking with other schools and partnerships. Pupils meet with considerable success in sport, including more unusual sports such as lacrosse and

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squash.

Pupils' personal development is good. They say they feel really safe. Incidents of bullying are rare and dealt with well. Pupils readily ask for help if needed. The work of school-trained pupil playleaders, who organise games and sports, leads to healthy and happy breaktimes. Understanding of healthy lifestyles is outstanding and pupils say they want to stay fit. They enjoy healthy school meals. Behaviour is good and pupils mix easily. Pupils make a good contribution to the school and their local community, for example, the school council secured a new road grit container for the village following the snow earlier in the year. Pupils often raise funds for charity, particularly their linked school in Zambia. Pupils' acquisition of skills to foster their future economic well-being is good. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and firmly embedded. Diverse cultures are celebrated and pupils' relationships show that they respect others with different backgrounds. They are supportive of one another and take a huge pride in their lively school community.

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

How effective is the provision?

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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There are many good aspects of teaching, including seamless teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants, teachers' good subject knowledge and the high quality relationships between pupils and staff. In lessons, there is a lively pace and questions challenge pupils' thinking, based on high expectations of what pupils can and will achieve. Pupils listen intently and settle to work with real purpose, no matter what their ability. Daily planning, although mostly good, does not always provide activities matched to the needs of different groups of pupils. Assessment is satisfactory. Staff are still developing the way they inform pupils about how well they are doing, and the way they set targets to allow pupils to know the next steps in their learning and to work independently towards them.

The curriculum offers pupils a good range of practical and academic activities. It is particularly well adapted to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the very few who are still learning the English language. It is very good at developing the basic learning skills of pupils from the travelling community and for lower achievers, aiding their good progress in reading and writing through one-to-one support in phonics. The curriculum is enriched strongly by additional learning opportunities, including lacrosse. There are good pupil-led lunchtime games with enthusiastic participation. Regular local community visits and visitors enhance pupils' experiences and enjoyment and the oldest pupils look forward to their residential week, this year to the Isle of Wight. Pupils enjoy using computers, writing and mathematics. British and multicultural heritages are well reflected in displays around the school. Staff cherish all pupils and their families. They use their detailed knowledge to build pupils' self-esteem and enjoyment of learning. Pupils' welfare is monitored well. The very productive communications with Traveller families is bringing about real change in perceptions of learning, evident in the increased attendance aided by support from the Traveller education service. Families from all backgrounds comment positively about their children's well-being and the good impact this has on their learning and personal development.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
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?

The headteacher is very visible and leads by example so that the school moves forward well, inspiring pupils to do their best and allowing staff the opportunity to develop their professional skills and to share in the ongoing development of the school. Teamwork at

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all levels is strong and staff share the desire to provide pupils with positive and stimulating learning and life experiences.

Senior leaders have set the right sort of priorities to embed ambition and to continue to raise pupils' progress and attainment. The schools' knowledge of itself is based on good analysis of data and monitoring, providing an accurate overview of strengths and areas for development. In this small school, senior leaders work closely with all staff to ensure sustainability. The governing body is valued by the school and works well to promote it within the local community. Governors have the best interests of the pupils at heart. However, they do not challenge and question the work of senior leaders as well as they should. Additionally, governance procedures and practices are largely informal and not always recorded. For example, there is no formal development planning to monitor, update and review policies or to check that decisions made are always minuted, with clear lines of responsibility identified. Currently systems for ensuring there is accountability for actions within a tight timeframe, so that decisions taken are followed up, lacks rigour. Governors' fulfilment of statutory duties is satisfactory. Safeguarding procedures, policies and practice are good and meet current government requirements. Partnerships with local schools, multi-agency support and the Traveller education support services are good. Wide ranging sporting and business links provided funding for the Japanese Garden and there are established links with a well-known football club, all of which enhance pupils' outcomes. Parents are supportive of the school and feel well involved, although a very few would like more information about their children's progress.

Equality of opportunity is good, with racial harmony amongst pupils and celebration and recognition of diversity in school policies and practice. There are good intervention and nurture groups for those pupils needing learning or emotional support. The promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory. The school acknowledges that there is more to do to meet the objectives for wider and global community awareness, outlined in its own evaluation.

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

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The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
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

Children get off to a stimulating start to learning from the pre-Nursery onwards. Promotion of personal, social and emotional development is given a high priority. Children settle happily to purposeful, well-planned learning through play that successfully develops their social, speaking and listening skills. Children's language and communication skills are mostly broadly in line with age-related expectations when they arrive in the school. However, a significant number of Traveller and other children arrive towards the end of the Reception year. They often have no pre-school experience to develop their quite limited basic skills. The learning environment is lively and colourful with good outdoor provision for children to discover and explore. They love the good challenges set by their enthusiastic and skilled teachers, and are entranced by new experiences. The adults ensure that the children have fun and they are diligent in looking after their welfare. Behaviour is good and children make good progress relative to their varying starting points. Attainment is broadly average as they move into Year 1. Provision is good and enriches children's learning and well-being. Ongoing assessment is good and the development of individual children's profiles highlights the next steps in their learning. Additionally, weekly planning meetings make good use of information from observations. Relationships with parents are valued and there are good mutual lines of communication. Safeguarding practice and procedures are robust. Leadership and management is well-focussed on making improvements to benefit the children.

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 the parents who responded to the questionnaire are happy with their children's education. Inspection findings are mostly in agreement with parents' views. Parents think that their children are safe and well looked after and have a good understanding of staying healthy. Inspectors judge pupils' understanding of

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healthy lifestyles as outstanding. Most parents think that teaching and the progress that children make are good and the inspectors agree with them. A few parents would like more attention paid to their comments and suggestions and feel that leadership and management could be better. Inspectors judged leadership to be good. Evidence to support partnership with parents is good.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Essendon CofE VC 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 26 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 99 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	14	54	11	42	1	4	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	15	58	11	42	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	12	46	10	38	2	8	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	11	42	11	42	0	0	1	4
The teaching is good at this school	18	69	6	23	1	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	17	65	7	27	1	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	11	42	12	46	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)	11	42	12	46	0	0	1	4
The school meets my child's particular needs	13	50	10	38	0	0	1	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	14	54	10	38	1	4	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	10	38	12	46	1	4	1	4
The school is led and managed effectively	15	58	8	31	3	12	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	18	69	7	27	1	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.



14 October 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Essendon C of E VC Primary School, Essendon, AL9 6HD

We want to say thank you for making us so welcome and being so polite and helpful when we visited your very friendly school recently. You told us a lot about what you like doing, particularly sport, learning new things and writing to the parish councillors. It is clear that you enjoy school and think that your teachers make learning fun.

You make good progress in learning from your various starting points because teaching is good. Your school does a good job in helping you to learn. Your behaviour and the way that you make friends are good. We were impressed by your excellent enthusiasm for adopting healthy lifestyles and the way that some of you organise lunchtime activities. You make good progress with your work, and your attendance is satisfactory and getting better - keep it up.

There are two areas where the school needs to get even better. The first is to make sure that you all know how well you are doing, and you can help with this by asking your teachers to set learning targets that you can work on with less adult help. The second is for governors to ask the headteacher harder questions about how well your school is doing.

We are sure that you will enjoy working with your teachers to achieve these goals.

Yours sincerely

Judi Bedawi

Lead Inspector

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