

Roebuck Primary School and Nursery

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133263
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	341364
Inspection dates	8–9 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Christopher Gray

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	231
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Monika Cherney-Craw
Headteacher	Mrs Jenn Phelps
Date of previous school inspection	3 January 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 11 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and pupils. Inspectors observed the school's work, conducted a scrutiny of pupils' past work and looked at data about pupils' progress in all classes, school records, curriculum plans and the school improvement plan, and analysed 19 parental questionnaires.

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

- the progress made by pupils in every class, especially higher attaining pupils
- the extent to which teachers meet the needs of all pupils
- the impact which leaders and managers at all levels have on raising pupils' standards of attainment
- the effect on pupils' personal development of the school's provision.

Information about the school

The school is similar in size to most primary schools. The proportion of pupils in receipt of free school meals is a little below what is usually found. A below average proportion of pupils come from minority ethnic groups and the proportion who speak English as an additional language is low. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need is below average, though the percentage who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Roebuck Primary School and Nursery provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. There are good features of the provision, notably in the Early Years Foundation Stage, where children make good progress. The school provides good care, guidance and support for pupils so that they feel safe and relaxed in school. Behaviour is good and sometimes even better among older pupils, who set good examples of sensible and considerate conduct. Older pupils have a mature approach to looking after younger children. This was seen on National Poetry Day, when pupils went to a classroom of their own choice to hear the teacher read a selection of poems. Pupils of all ages went to the Nursery; older children sat with their younger brothers and sisters and helped them listen to and enjoy stories about octopuses. Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of keeping healthy. The good curriculum is broad and appeals to pupils' interests, helping them to take pleasure in their learning. Most pupils make good progress in reading and satisfactory progress in writing and mathematics. Standards overall are broadly average. However, standards in mathematics in the Year 6 national tests have fallen in recent years. The current Year 6 pupils are in line to reach higher standards in mathematics this year, but the school does not expect this to be repeated in the following year.

The school has a satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement. Recent initiatives to raise standards in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in writing throughout the school have been successful, as is shown by the improved approach to the teaching of letter sounds from Nursery upwards. The school has not yet ironed out the variations in pupils' attainment in mathematics from year to year, and inconsistencies remain in the teaching of this subject. All members of staff are involved in self-evaluation. Pupils' progress is regularly and systematically reviewed, but the targets set for pupils are not always sufficiently challenging. This has led the school to make an over-generous evaluation of the progress pupils make. The more able pupils are not reaching their potential because teachers' expectations are not always high enough.

Senior leaders have worked hard to ensure that any barriers to learning are quickly broken down. An example of their success is the speed with which pupils learn English who came to the school with little or none. The school makes good use of partnerships with outside agencies to provide well for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Parents and carers appreciate the good care that all adults take over their children's well-being. One wrote to say, 'I find the open policy giving parents a chance to speak to the class teacher or head really helpful.'

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About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all pupils, especially higher attainers, reach their full potential by:
 - building greater challenge during the course of this school year into target setting
 - raising teachers' expectations of the levels pupils will reach
 - reviewing the targets frequently so that further challenge may be offered more quickly.
- Raise standards in mathematics by
 - achieving greater consistency in the teaching of mathematics across the school
 - ensuring that pupils make more even progress in acquiring skills and knowledge.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Pupils reach average standards by the time they leave in Year 6. National measures of progress over the last three years show that pupils' progress is satisfactory overall, and this is corroborated by the school's own tracking data for the last two years. Reading is the strongest subject and most pupils make good progress. Standards in writing and mathematics have not been as strong, especially at the higher levels. Standards in mathematics fluctuate from year to year, as can be seen from the differing standards of pupils currently in Years 5 and 6. Progress in mathematics is best for the oldest pupils, as the lessons observed and pupils' work so far this term show. In a Year 6 mathematics lesson, pupils made models of complex three-dimensional shapes from drinking straws. The teacher had high expectations for accuracy of measurement and use of technical vocabulary, which pupils met successfully. A group of higher attaining pupils confidently described the properties of an octagonal prism, taking great care in constructing one. In this lesson, pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning were outstanding.

Throughout the school, boys and girls achieve at broadly similar rates, as do pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The few pupils with English as an additional language make good progress in their speaking. Higher attaining pupils do not always make as much progress in lessons as they could. These pupils' books show that, while their work might be different, it is not always pitched at a sufficiently challenging level.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils' good behaviour and consideration for others make the school a calm and pleasant place to work in for adults and pupils alike. This enhances pupils' enjoyment of their learning. Pupils reflect on the important values that they will take into later life, such as 'How to make better friends' or 'Help people even if you don't know them'. They are aware that people have

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different or even no religious beliefs, and that all have an equal right to believe what they want, though they are not so confident in discussing the details of what different religions teach.

The school council is proud of its work and helps to make sure that pupils' voices are listened to. All pupils are contributing to the evolution of plans for the new school. They emphasise the features of the current building that they would like to maintain. Pupils see the school as secure. They say that bullying is not a big problem. If it happens, they are confident that it will be dealt with. Pupils' personal qualities, such as their friendliness to others and care for younger or weaker children, show that they are developing good skills for the future.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
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	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is satisfactory overall because of its satisfactory impact on pupils' progress. However, there are examples of good teaching in all parts of the school. For instance, pupils in Year 1 were observed learning to choose suitable words to describe how substances felt. In groups, they dipped their hands into buckets of porridge, trays of soil

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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or containers of bubble-bath solution. They wrote down the words as they thought of them, for example, 'gooey', 'gluey', 'slimy'. Tasks were clearly thrilling but were very well supervised so that the pupils approached them sensibly and with an enquiring mind. Pupils are set targets in English and mathematics and, in some classes, these are displayed inside the covers of pupils' exercise books. Pupils' recent work shows that, sometimes, the targets have been achieved, yet a pupil continues to repeat similar or even easier work. Teachers' marking is thorough and used to encourage and indicate areas for improvement.

The curriculum is enriched with a good range of visits and activities which effectively bring pupils' learning to life. A good example is the visit that Year 4 pupils make to a nearby village to learn about how schools were conducted in Tudor times and the types of houses people lived in. There is a good take up by all groups of pupils of the large range of extra-curricular activities. Before and after school care is offered in safe and bright surroundings, where children enjoy a good range of activities and are offered healthy snacks. The good resources for information and communication technology were among the things pupils indicated that they would like to see transferred to the new school. The school is working to extend the opportunities for pupils to use their numeracy skills in other subjects.

The good care, guidance and support offered by the school are reflected in the comments of a parent: 'I think the school has excellent support staff and strategies in place to give extra help to those that need it.' Recent actions to improve attendance have brought absence figures down to average levels. Pupils speak highly of the work done in personal, social and health education lessons that help to keep bullying a rarity.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
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 has a clear vision for the school which is shared by all staff, as is apparent from the very positive response to the staff questionnaire. She and her deputy headteacher carry out systematic and frequent analyses of pupils' progress, which involve detailed discussion of individual pupils with each class teacher and their assistants. This is a good process but its effectiveness is reduced because the targets that are set for each pupil do not always represent great enough challenge. The use of external data sometimes results in targets which, when achieved, represent only average progress. There are good arrangements for directing extra support to pupils

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who need it, but not enough focus is given to evaluating the effectiveness of this support through questions such as, 'Is the resulting progress good enough?'

Governors give good support to the school and visit frequently to assess its provision. However, the challenge they offer is less well developed. Statutory requirements are met, though some required policies have yet to be ratified. One of these is for community cohesion. This is strong on the local aspects of provision but weaker on the national and global strands. The school has been at pains to remove barriers to learning and to give equal opportunities to all groups of pupils. In this, it has been largely successful, though higher attaining pupils do not always progress as quickly as they could. Safeguarding procedures meet requirements and governors ensure that procedures are up to date and complete.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enter the Nursery with skills that are a little below expectations for their age, especially in speaking and listening and aspects of personal development. They make good progress through the Nursery and Reception to enter Year 1 with skills that are above what is usually found in some areas of learning. This is a recent improvement and should have a positive impact on the standards pupils reach by the end of Year 2 in future years. Teaching is good; routines are well established, enabling children to settle in quickly each morning on arrival. Activities are interesting, well planned and carefully laid out, allowing a good balance between free and directed choice. A thorough and systematic approach to the teaching of sounds and letters has led to rapid progress in

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this aspect of literacy. Children are happy in school and benefit from the good care and welfare which adults and older children afford them. There are good relationships with parents and carers which further develop children's good attitudes to learning. Leadership and management are good and have made a strong contribution to the rising standards. Assessment opportunities are used well and form the basis of good planning and learning.

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 response to the questionnaire was lower than is normally found in inspections. The school thinks this may be because parents had recently replied to the school's own questionnaire, when a response rate of 31% was recorded. Parents' and carers' views are very positive and reflect the good engagement with parents that the school's staff have established. The views of one parent sum up many of the comments received: 'My children enjoy school very much. The teachers, head and office staff are very approachable and always willing to help.'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Roebuck Primary School and Nursery 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 19 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 231 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	11	58	8	42	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	13	68	6	32	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	6	32	12	63	1	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	7	37	12	63	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	9	47	10	53	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	7	37	12	63	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	7	37	12	63	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)	7	37	10	53	2	11	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	7	37	11	58	1	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	6	32	13	68	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	5	26	14	74	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	9	47	10	53	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	8	42	11	58	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 pupils' 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.



12 October 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Roebuck Primary School and Nursery, Stevenage, SG2 8RG

Thank you for the welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. You were very friendly and polite and helped us with the inspection by telling us your views about your school. You clearly enjoy your learning. We could tell from how hard most of you work and how well you behave. You told us that you feel safe in school and that all adults help you if you have a problem. You take plenty of exercise and know how to eat healthily, though you might not always do so.

Your school is giving you a satisfactory education with good care, guidance and support. Your headteacher and all adults look after you carefully and plan plenty of interesting lessons for you. You told us how important you think it is to be friendly and considerate to others and we could see that in the way older children treated the younger ones during the poetry readings.

Children in Nursery and Reception make good progress in most of their work, especially in learning about sounds and letters. Many of you in the rest of the school make good progress in reading and are beginning to make better progress in writing. In mathematics, some of you make slower progress. We have asked the school to help you speed up by giving you more challenging work, especially those of you who learn quickly. Teachers set you targets and measure your progress towards them. We have asked them to make some of them harder; you can help by referring often to your targets to see if you have reached them yet.

Yours faithfully

Christopher Gray

Lead inspector

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