

The Robert Drake Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115283
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	326171
Inspection date	20 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Glynis Bradley-Peat

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	321
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Pamela Challis
Headteacher	Ms Christine Redpath
Date of previous school inspection	13 October 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Church Road New Thundersley Thundersley Essex SS7 3HT
Telephone number	01268754124
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

The inspection evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues.

- What impact have leaders and managers had on improving writing across the school?
- Is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) as good as in the rest of the school?
- What are the key factors in teaching and in leadership and management which contribute to the school's success?

Evidence was gathered from the analysis of school documentation, observation of lessons, conversations with pupils and discussions with teachers, a governor and senior staff. Other aspects of the school's work were not inspected in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The school is larger than most primary schools. There is provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is much lower than usually found. Less than 7% of pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds. No pupils are learning English as an additional language. The percentage identified with moderate and behavioural, emotional and social learning difficulties is lower than average, as is the proportion with a statement of special educational needs. The school has attained Healthy School status and is an Investor in People.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The Robert Drake Primary is an outstanding school. The parents are overwhelmingly supportive. Well-earned words of praise were evident in the parental questionnaires received during the inspection. One parent wrote, 'I am extremely happy with the school and feel lucky that my son is able to be part of such a lovely establishment'. Another, 'I believe Miss Redpath and her staff are outstanding.' Inspection evidence agrees with the sentiments of these parents. Leadership and management at all levels are excellent because exceptionally well-developed channels of communication ensure that groups of staff work very well together in teams. Leadership of subjects is exemplary because teachers undertake their responsibilities highly professionally with meticulous attention to detail. Governance is outstanding because governors are very knowledgeable. They question and challenge the headteacher and her team confidently and contribute very well to school self-evaluation. The headteacher, deputy headteacher and other senior leaders ensure that high quality permeates every aspect of their work. One of the key features contributing to the success of the school is a clear and shared vision. The school's values are based on an unrelenting drive for improvement, on raising standards and promoting outstanding personal development amongst pupils. There is a genuine focus on the whole child. On a day-to-day basis, the monitoring of teaching, planning and pupil's exercise books is rigorous and always results in improvements, which lead to higher standards. The school has worked hard to develop exceptionally effective links with the local and wider community. There are links with local secondary schools, businesses and the school has developed an international link with a school in France. The school has an excellent strategy for promoting and assessing the success of pupils' contributions to community cohesion. Opportunities to help pupils to value differences, have a common sense of belonging, challenge prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping arise in all areas of the curriculum. This encourages pupils' understanding of the diversity that surrounds them, not only within the local community but in the United Kingdom, Europe and globally.

Standards are well above average in national assessments and tests. Achievement is excellent and learners meet highly challenging targets. Above average standards reached at the end of Year 2 have been maintained since the last inspection. Provisional results in national tests in Year 6 indicate that standards in English, mathematics and science have risen in 2008. They are higher than at any time since the previous inspection. One reason for this is the improvement made in the proportion of pupils gaining higher than expected standards (level 5). Results were well above the previous year's national averages for level 5 in English and mathematics and science. Most pupils made excellent progress. Those pupils with moderate, behavioural, emotional and social learning difficulties make particularly exemplary progress. The school's performance data for the current Year 6 indicates that standards and achievement are set to rise. This is because throughout the school there has been a concerted effort to raise the standard of pupils' writing. One particularly successful strategy has been a focus on teaching literacy in a visual way. This has led to more creative use of information and communication technology (ICT) using film clips and digital cameras to support learning and teaching in literacy. In addition to this, the use of the 'Vocabulary, Connectives, Openers and Punctuation' approach to teaching has encouraged pupils to take responsibility for improving their own writing. Because of a sustained focus on writing, standards are rising. Outstanding teaching ensures that the impact of the school's actions to raise standards in writing is evident in every classroom.

Teachers plan meticulously and take great pride in their work. They make learning interesting by organising fun activities, such as 'role play' and through their highly effective use of electronic whiteboards. Teachers' high quality questioning skills were seen at work in an outstanding lesson in literacy. As a result, pupils were able to debate and discuss the characteristics of the key players in a Shakespeare play. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and are able to use this strength to link areas of the curriculum together most effectively. There are excellent examples of cross-curricular working on display. Pupils have produced much attractive art work based on Tudor history. There are wedding invitations on show for the marriage of King Henry VIII and a variety of his wives. Pupils' ICT skills are clearly of a high standard. This is because excellent opportunities are provided for pupils to develop their expertise. This is but one feature of a highly creative, outstanding curriculum. Pupils have numerous opportunities to participate in the life of the school through a wide range of extra-curricular clubs. These include gym, football, breakfast/reading club, football, cricket, tennis, netball, athletics, chess, guitars, knitting, choir and French. Themed weeks are arranged in order to enrich the curriculum. An Art Week, which culminated in an exhibition of all pupil's work for parents to view, gave pupils the opportunity to take part in exciting practical activities and gain an increased awareness of many artists and their work. Opportunities to explore the local environment are integrated into the curriculum, for example, visits to the local church and the study of local history. Subject specialists support the curriculum where appropriate, as in music and physical education. All Key Stage 2 pupils are taught a modern foreign language and receive instrumental tuition.

Children enjoy school very much and behave exceptionally well. Behaviour is exemplary both in and out of classrooms and pupils understand and appreciate the behaviour codes, rewards and sanctions. Attendance is now good because the school has recently focused successfully on reducing the high number of parents taking their children on holidays during term time. However, the school is continuing to work to reduce this figure further. Pupils know extremely well what is needed for a healthy and a safe life and enjoy plenty of energetic physical activity. Pupils readily accept responsibility as school councillors and as classroom monitors. The effective school council recently helped to introduce a 'Star of the Week' programme. The children proudly explained that two children in each form are chosen and rewarded for their achievement and good behaviour. Representatives from the school council also attend the 'Children's Forum' which takes place at the Council Chambers. Pupils also act as 'playleaders' and play with others in the playground. They direct children who need a friend to the friendship stop. As a result of all these activities, pupils develop into confident young people who realise the contribution they can make to their school and local community. It is evident that they are effectively developing the knowledge, understanding and attitudes that will enable them to become informed and responsible citizens. Well above average basic skills and excellent personal development equip pupils exceptionally well for the future and the next stage of their education.

The excellent care, guidance and support pupils receive enables each and every one of them to achieve as much as they can. Clear and efficient systems are in place to check the progress of every pupil. Strategies are identified to support pupils to meet targets, particularly those who are making less than expected progress. Those pupils who are in need of extra help are provided for extensively through additional support programmes and in class assistance from well-trained teaching assistants. Targets are realistic and achievable, promoting self-esteem and success. Pupils know their targets and are clear about what they must do to achieve them. This is because teachers' marking and the feedback they give to pupils is outstanding. Marking is regularly carried out and pupils say that comments they receive from teachers help them to

improve their work. Parents are overwhelmingly confident in the school's welfare procedures. Appropriate procedures for child protection and safeguarding are in place.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children start school with knowledge and skills that are expected for their age, although there has been significant variation between different years. At the end of the EYFS, standards have also varied from below to well above average. However, very effective monitoring procedures show that children make consistently very good progress from their different starting points. The great majority reach the goals expected of them and a significant number exceeds them. Achievement is very good. Teaching is excellent. Teachers provide an exceptionally wide range of activities for children to follow. Planning shows very clearly how all the different areas of learning are addressed through interesting topics. Teachers are knowledgeable and the new EYFS Framework has been introduced effectively. Teachers are skilled at developing children's basic literacy skills, through effective teaching of the names of letters and their sounds. Teaching assistants are used effectively, both to support children's learning and to share in the process of assessing what they know and can do. The curriculum is well-planned and provides good opportunities for learning through play in the classrooms and to a lesser extent in the outside activity area. Children do not have easy access to the outside activity area and the resources there are not freely and regularly available. Care and welfare procedures are very effective. The leadership of the EYFS is excellent. The leader is an effective practitioner, provides a very strong link with work in Year 1 and she has an exceptionally clear view of how the EYFS should develop.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the EYFS outside area to ensure that children have free access to a range of interesting and challenging resources.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

21 November 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Robert Drake Primary School, Benfleet, SS7 3HT

Thank you very much indeed for the warm welcome you all gave us when we visited your school recently to inspect it. We enjoyed our time there very much because we saw many excellent things. That is why we think your school is outstanding. This means it is very, very good!

We were pleased to hear that you take an active part in making decisions in your school. 'Star of the Week' is a particularly good idea and rewards good achievement and behaviour. We liked the way that you help others to play agreeably together in the playground. You told us about how to lead a healthy lifestyle, this is highly commendable, well done! We saw lots of your excellent work on display in your school. We were particularly impressed with the wedding invitations you had made for King Henry VIII and his wives. You have some very high level skills in ICT and use the computers well. The standards you achieve are well above many other schools and you make outstanding progress.

Your teachers do an excellent job. They prepare interesting, lively lessons for you to take part in and have helped you to improve your writing particularly well. Your headteacher, her deputy and other senior teachers also do a fantastic job. They work very hard to ensure that you all achieve as well as possible. They are trying to improve attendance at the moment and here's where you can help. It is important that you always come to school whenever you can. If you go on holiday during school time, you miss important learning.

Even though we think your school is outstanding, there are always things to be done. We have asked your headteacher to ensure that the very youngest children are able to play and learn outside with lots of different equipment.

Once again, thank you for making our time in your school so enjoyable.

Yours sincerely

Glynis Bradley-Peat

Lead inspector