

Highover Junior Mixed and Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117115
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	358085
Inspection dates	12–13 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Susan Thomas-Pounce

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	238
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nigel Pollard
Headteacher	Lisa Hayes
Date of previous school inspection	21 February 2008
School address	Cambridge Road Hitchin SG4 0JP
Telephone number	01462 622333
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Age group	3–11
Inspection date(s)	12–13 May 2011
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed a total of 13 lessons and eight teachers. They analysed the school's work, including samples of pupils' work, documents such as the school improvement plan, curriculum and lesson planning, and tracking of pupils' progress. Inspectors also looked at records of the school's monitoring of teaching and learning, minutes of governing body meetings and a range of policies which relate to the safety, care and well-being of pupils. They analysed the responses from 85 parent and carer questionnaires as well as those from staff and pupils. Inspectors met with the Chair of the Governing Body and all staff with key roles of responsibility. In addition to informal conversations in lessons, they held meetings with the school council and a group of pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The extent to which the school's approaches to supporting pupils' individual needs and abilities are improving their progress and achievement.
- How well teachers use assessment information to plan effectively to meet the wide range of pupils' abilities.
- Whether the impact of the work of senior and middle leaders has improved provision and pupil outcomes.

Information about the school

Highover is an average-sized school and draws its pupils from the local area. Pupils are from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, with the largest group being those of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who are learning English as an additional language is just above that found nationally. Very few, however, are at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average. Most of these pupils have moderate learning difficulty or speech, language and communication needs. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The Early Years Foundation Stage comprises a Nursery and a Reception class. The school has achieved a number of nationally recognised awards including recognition of its work to promote healthy lifestyles.

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

In this good school, many things are done outstandingly well. At the core of the school's success is the outstanding level of care, guidance and support provided for pupils. This contributes significantly to pupils' positive attitudes to learning, their outstanding behaviour and excellent understanding of how to keep fit and healthy. Pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development ensures positive relationships, effective collaboration and contributes to a friendly, happy environment. The school benefits from the confidence of its parents and carers and works effectively to build and maintain very constructive relationships with them. The partnerships with other schools and a range of outside agencies have extremely positive benefits for pupils' personal development. The Early Years Foundation Stage prepares children outstandingly well as learners. Pupils are proud of their school and their enjoyment is shown by their above-average attendance. Staff know pupils well as individuals and ensure all pupils are included as much as possible in activities which enhance and support their enjoyment. The school is especially successful in providing a wide range of enrichment activities such as sports, the arts and educational visits. Good, and sometimes outstanding, teaching and the well-planned curriculum are significant factors in ensuring most pupils, including those who find learning difficult, make good progress overall. Assessment information is being used rigorously to inform lessons, monitor progress and hold teachers to account.

Learning and progress are good at each key stage. While the majority of pupils make good progress, there remains some unevenness across subjects and year groups. The school is aware of this and has already made a positive start to make the necessary improvements through a comprehensive programme of staff training and detailed monitoring. The success of the initiatives to improve teaching and learning, effectively implemented by school leaders, has meant that pupil progress has accelerated, particularly over the last year, and academic achievement is now good and rising. Although pupils' attainment at the end of Year 6 is broadly average, it is higher in reading and mathematics than in writing. Pupils' skills in writing are improving, but there are not enough planned opportunities for them to consolidate and extend their writing skills in all their subjects.

Pupils achieve well because of the good teaching they receive. The school has made good use of the expertise of its own staff to develop a number of strengths in teaching. For example, good-quality questioning and the use of talk-partners helps pupils develop their ideas and take an active role in their learning. Even so, there are variations in its quality and in its impact on pupils' learning. Strong leadership

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ensures that the school is on the right path of continuous improvement based on an accurate evaluation of strengths and weaknesses. The curriculum teams are influential and play an increasingly important role in motivating staff and improving provision in their areas. The shared vision of leaders and managers and their high ambition and success in implementing effective changes to raise achievement and improve many aspects of the school's work since the last inspection, demonstrate good capacity for further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Iron out inconsistencies in progress by:
 - ensuring the identified good features in teaching are fully established across all year groups and subjects.

- Raise attainment in writing to above average by:
 - providing pupils with regular opportunities to consolidate and extend their skills in writing in different subjects.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils' work in books and the school's own assessment information confirm that progress is good and accelerating. Pupils told inspectors they really enjoy school. This was evident in most lessons seen, where they were keen to learn and cooperating well in pairs and groups. A particular example of this was observed in a 'thinking skills' session. Here pupils worked well in groups to design an indoor game. They responded extremely well to the challenges they were presented with and most made outstanding progress. The buzz and level of interest was exciting and infectious. This creative style of teaching and the absorbing opportunities provided by the cross-curricular themes is one reason why progress is accelerating in the school. When they join the school, children's skills and understanding are often below the expectations for their age. Rates of learning and progress, and pupils' overall achievement are good and rising. Higher-attaining pupils are now achieving equally well as demonstrated by the increasing proportions of pupils who reach the higher levels at the end of each key stage. The school's continued focus on writing, at all stages, is beginning to bring about considerable improvement as seen in work in some lessons, displays around the school and pupils' books. The next step is for pupils to use these skills much more across the curriculum.

Pupils with moderate learning difficulties are supported well in class and in small groups. This gives them confidence and enables them to make as much progress as their peers. There are no significant differences in attainment between boys and girls, and pupils who speak English as an additional language are given suitable focused language support to ensure they can keep up with their classmates.

The wider personal development and well-being of pupils are equally strong. Pupils

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have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They make a good contribution to school life and the wider community by taking on a range of responsibilities. They act as buddies looking after younger pupils and as members of the school council. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to live a healthy lifestyle, enjoying the wide range of activities to help them keep and stay fit, which is reflected in their many national awards. Their above-average attendance helps pupils acquire good skills for the future.

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

How effective is the provision?

Pupils receive excellent care, guidance and support throughout the school day. This is evident in pupils' excellent standards of behaviour and good social skills. Leaders are very aware of those pupils who may be vulnerable because of their circumstances. They follow up concerns quickly and ensure actions taken are well-targeted to support individual children. Pupils are confident in expressing their views openly; they know they will be valued and respected.

The school's investment in training can be seen in teachers' good command of subject knowledge and the improving trend of achievement. The school has made good use of the individual expertise of its staff. In most lessons, explanations are short and focused questioning moves learning on at a brisk pace. A notable feature of the best lessons is effective use of assessment and teaching which engages pupils well, encouraging them to be resourceful and independent learners. Consequently, the high level of challenge in these lessons ensures all pupils make good and

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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sometimes better progress and learning is challenging and memorable. This is, however, inconsistent across the school and progress is noticeably slower in a minority of lessons where these features are missing.

The school has developed an engaging curriculum that is making a stronger contribution to pupils' learning. There are increasing opportunities for pupils to apply basic skills in other subjects. The curriculum is enhanced well by a wide range of popular clubs and by visitors and visits, all of which effectively broaden pupils' experience, interest and self-esteem. Effective curriculum initiatives have been developed that are helping to improve writing. Although much improved, pupils' writing skills are not reinforced enough through the creative curriculum.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account:	
The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher's dynamic leadership enthuses others to have the highest possible aspirations for all areas of school life. With good support from other senior leaders, weaknesses have been tackled with determination, including those identified at the previous inspection report. Plans for further improvement address the right priorities. The school has been successful in sustaining improvements in teaching and recognises that more needs to be done to share the excellent practice that exists in the school. In this inclusive environment, equality of opportunity and diversity are promoted well. Within and outside classrooms, pupils are treated with respect and there is careful tracking of pupils' needs. The school ensures all pupils have full access to all aspects of the school's curriculum. Well-developed support systems are complemented by an excellent range of partnerships with outside specialists who provide effective support for vulnerable pupils. Parents and carers are strongly engaged with the life of the school. The governing body is influential in shaping the direction of the school, making good use of governors' wide experience to benefit the school. They ask searching questions about the school's provision and pupils' outcomes. There are good-quality and robust systems for safeguarding. There is a strong focus on training staff to be alert to potential issues. Also record keeping is of good quality and risk assessments are thorough. The school is a harmonious place and leaders promote community cohesion well. The school has begun to implement plans to extend this at national and global levels.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

The outstanding quality of the Nursery and Reception classes ensures that children get off to a flying start, especially in the development of their personal, social and emotional skills and creative development. This has not yet had time to have a marked impact on pupils’ attainment at the end of Year 6. Nevertheless, it provides a strong basis for future development. The Early Years Foundation Stage is highly effective in promoting children’s positive attitudes towards school and their excellent behaviour. Children work and play in a stimulating environment which is both warm and welcoming. Teaching is good, with some that is outstanding. Children’s learning is well-planned and pitched to their understanding. Assessment of their work is very thorough and progress is tracked meticulously and reported regularly to parents and carers. There is a very good balance between activities initiated by children and those instigated by adults. The high levels of pastoral support found throughout the school are also evident in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Links with parents and carers are close and effective. Parents and carers are very supportive. The experienced Early Years Foundation Stage practitioner provides strong leadership and management. Her highly effective management of the children’s learning ensures that all make outstanding progress.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account: Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

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The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
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Views of parents and carers

The response rate from parents and carers to the questionnaire was broadly in line with that found nationally. The vast majority of parents and carers who returned the questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive about the school and its impact on their children’s learning and well-being. These responses reflect the school’s very positive relationship with most groups of parents and carers. A very small number of parents and carers expressed concerns about the proposed expansion of the school by the local authority. Overall, parents’ and carers’ views reflect the inspection findings that this is a good school which does many things outstandingly well.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Highover Junior Mixed and Infant school to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 85 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 238 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	61	72	23	27	0	0	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	59	69	25	29	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	33	39	43	51	8	9	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	39	46	40	47	5	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	41	48	39	46	5	6	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	31	36	50	59	3	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	35	41	49	58	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)	41	48	35	41	4	5	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	38	45	42	49	4	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	33	39	37	44	6	7	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	29	34	41	48	7	8	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	48	56	35	41	2	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	50	59	30	35	5	6	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 all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



16 May 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Highover Junior Mixed and Infant School, Hitchin, SG4 0JP

Thank you for your warm welcome when I came with my colleagues to inspect your school recently. Our conversations with you were extremely useful and a great help in enabling us to reach our judgements.

You will be pleased to know that you go to a good school. You will also be pleased to know that it does many things outstandingly well. Top of the list is how well the school cares for and supports each and everyone of you. It was a pleasure to see how well-behaved you are and how well you all get on together. You have lots of opportunities to keep fit and stay healthy and it is good to see so many of you joining in these activities after school. Almost all of you say you enjoy school and we could see that in most lessons and in much of your work. You make good progress because of the extra help you get and you have activities which are often memorable and exciting to do. By the time you leave, your attainment is similar to that found in most schools and is improving, so you are well prepared for secondary education.

Your headteacher and other leaders have worked hard to improve teaching and this is helping you to learn better. However, there are two things we want to happen that will make your school even better. To help you make faster progress, we have asked that:

- teachers work even more closely together to learn from each other
- you are provided with more opportunities to write in different subjects.

You can help by always trying your best.

Yours sincerely

Susan Thomas-Pounce
Lead inspector

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