

Helmdon Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	121827
Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	380334
Inspection dates	16–17 January 2012
Lead inspector	Peter Sudworth

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	111
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Charles Warman
Headteacher	Jacqui Johnson
Date of previous school inspection	2 November 2006
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Peter Sudworth

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector observed ten lessons or parts of lessons, had discussions with pupils, staff and two governors, listened to pupils read and examined pupils' work. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at various documents including those relating to safeguarding and progress. The inspector read the parents' comments on the 64 questionnaires returned and the responses of pupils and staff.

Information about the school

This is smaller than the average sized primary school. It has five classes, of which three are mixed-age. All pupils commence the Reception class in the September following their fourth birthday. A high proportion of the children have previously attended Nursery or pre-school groups. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage and all speak English as their first language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The percentage of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is about the same as in most schools, although at the current time the proportion of these pupils with statements, mostly for autistic spectrum disorders, is higher than usually seen. The school manages its own breakfast club. The school has Healthy Schools' status. The school meets the current floor standard, whereby the government sets the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school.
- Parents and carers are very pleased that their children attend the school. They can recommend it to others. One parent wrote, 'I cannot speak too highly of Helmdon Primary School. It provides fantastic and interesting teaching and the welfare of each child is paramount.'
- Pupils enjoy school and feel safe and well cared for. Their behaviour is good. They are attentive in lessons and have good attitudes to their work.
- The staff work well as a team with much commitment under the good leadership of the headteacher and work very hard on the pupils' behalf. Leaders and managers have a good knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses and how to improve.
- The pupils achieve well. They consistently reach above average standards in English and mathematics. Pupils acquire good communication skills through the opportunities provided. Pupils' progress in writing is not as good as in reading and mathematics. They do not always develop writing skills in subjects other than English as well as they might.
- The school provides well for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities. The school is well staffed so that these pupils receive the help that they need. These pupils, too, make good progress.
- Progress is good because of the good teaching. Work challenges pupils well. However, pupils are not consistently made fully aware of how they can be really successful in their activities.
- The curriculum is developing well. Staff are focussed on making it more interesting and creative for the pupils. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities, including sport.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that pupils practise and develop their writing skills further through better application of them in other subjects.

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- Help the pupils to understand how to reap full success in their learning by clarifying more fully what is required in activities, what the teachers are looking for in the finished work and what needs to be included in the pupils' responses.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

The attainment of the children varies from year to year both on entry and at the end of the Reception year, because the numbers are comparatively small and each pupil makes a significant difference to results.

Parents and carers rightly feel that their children make good progress. Pupils achieve well, with particular strengths in both mathematics and reading. Reading standards are above average by the end of Years 2 and 6. Pupils learn well and respond well to being set problems. For example, in a Year 3/4 mathematics lesson, pupils worked enthusiastically and successfully when challenged to find different solutions to a given answer. When reading, pupils have good strategies to tackle unknown words that they meet. Pupils are interested in books and share their opinions of them well. The good progress that the pupils make helps them to reach above average attainment at the end of Key Stage 2.

The pupils also develop good communication skills and confidence in speaking publically through the opportunities provided, for example through school productions, in speaking at assemblies and in paired class discussions. Pupils are challenged with the word of the week, such as 'surreptitious', to find its meaning and to use it in their work.

Pupils' progress in writing, despite being above average, is not as rapid as in other core skills and handwriting is not always well formed. Nevertheless, significant progress has been made in writing attainment in Key Stage 1 during the past two years, the result of a focus on teaching letter sounds and blends from an early stage in the school. Pupils make good progress in their knowledge and understanding of science.

Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress because of the early identification of any learning difficulties, the good support that they receive and specific programmes personal to their needs. The individual support for pupils with disabilities and those who find it difficult to relate to others is particularly helpful.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage settle quickly. They make a good start in learning the basic skills. They enjoy learning when the context is interesting. For example, a small group of children developed their knowledge of number bonds to ten by organising the same number of teddies in different ways, and were taught

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well how to count objects accurately. They acquire a good familiarity with letter sounds and more able pupils in the group are already beginning to read key words. The opportunities provided enable them to progress well in most of the areas of learning. However, the limited outdoor space and absence of large wheeled toys restrict opportunities to make the best possible progress in their physical development. The school works hard to compensate by enabling the children to exercise to programmes shown on the electronic screen.

Quality of teaching

The parents' and pupils' views that teaching is good are confirmed by the inspection. Staff have a good knowledge of the content that they teach and so are able to answer pupils' questions fully as they arise. For example, the Year 6 teacher 'hot-seated' herself in the role of a Victorian child in the workhouse. The pupils asked questions of her and increased their knowledge about life for a Victorian child as a result. The lesson also developed pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. It invoked the pupils' imaginations and empathy. Afterwards pupils imagined they were in the workhouse and responded with what they could 'see' and 'hear', for example, 'people crying and coughing'. In a Year 5 lesson, the content extended pupils' moral and cultural development as they considered two contrasting characters from a Zimbabwean story and individually recorded their own thoughts about them.

Classes are well managed and organised. They meet the needs of the mixed ages through the effective curriculum planning that leads to a good match of task to pupils' needs. Visual presentation of lessons through effective use of the electronic whiteboards helps to maintain the pupils' interest and adds to the pace of lessons, which is often good. Well conceived questioning encourages the pupils to reason their answers. However, pupils are not always told exactly what they need to do to meet the aim of the lesson –they are often told the learning target, but not always how to be successful in the activity.

Marking is often good with pointers for development, but staff are not always consistent in their expectations of presentation. A good range of writing styles is tackled in literacy lessons, but written work in other subjects does not always extend pupils sufficiently well, for example missed opportunities to make notes and develop these into prose. Pupils make good use of computers to follow individual programs in mathematics to maintain their skills but they are not used extensively for word processing. Sound use is made of mathematics in other subjects, such as in science to record and evaluate results.

Teaching of the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good including phonics (letter sounds) to support early reading. Activities that are not directly taught are chosen well. For example, children explored the 'dark' in a small outdoor plastic construction and discussed the effects of shining a torch through different coloured papers. The children have good opportunities to work creatively and they demonstrate good scissor control.

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Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils behave well, and a large majority of parents and carers and pupils agree. There is no evidence of bullying of any type. Pupils relate well to their teachers and to each other in class. They undertake their work conscientiously and have positive attitudes to learning. They move around the school sensibly and with regard to others. A very small number of parents and some pupils feel that behaviour is not good. Further analysis of these responses indicates that they refer to instances rather than a general picture. Where these occasional instances occur, they are well managed. The pupils confirm verbally that behaviour is good but mention that 'a few individuals have problems because of their condition and the rest of the pupils understand that'. The behaviour policy is known to all pupils and displayed in classes. The harmony in the school and pupils' awareness of what is appropriate behaviour promotes pupils' social development strongly. Pupils behave well in the breakfast club, and are well provided for and cared for.

Pupils feel very safe in school. They know that they can report matters if they have any concerns and are confident to talk to their teachers if this should ever arise. The suggestion and worry boxes provide alternative mechanisms for matters that might not be easy to report initially. Attendance is above the national average and reflects pupils' enjoyment of school.

The staff are acquainted fully with potentially vulnerable pupils and have a good knowledge of all the children and their families. Parents and carers find the staff approachable when they want to discuss any concerns and feel that staff deal with any such matters quickly.

Leadership and management

Staff have good opportunities for professional development. In addition to specific professional training needs, regular internal meetings take place for the staff about teaching and learning. The headteacher gives effective guidance, and self-evaluation is accurate. School development planning is followed through and the good achievement is consolidated well. Plans are leading to ongoing improvements in, for example the curriculum and in strategies to help pupils with learning and/or other difficulties. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. For example, more pupils are reaching the higher level in mathematics at Key Stage 1. There has been a greater sharing of subject responsibilities. These things demonstrate that the school has the capacity to continue to improve.

The curriculum organisation gives good coverage of the National Curriculum subjects. The staff are trialling a structure to make sure key skills are covered in a range of subjects while blending in creativity. Visitors to the school and visits to places of interest, such as exhibitions, enhance the quality of learning. Wall displays focus extensively on technical aspects and reminders about literacy and numeracy but leave little space for displaying pupils' own work for others to share and to

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enhance their spiritual development and self-esteem. Nevertheless, the curriculum itself supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well, for example through music, drama and religious education and through the study of thoughtfully chosen literature. Pupils have recently visited a city mosque. Several pupils learn an instrument, enabling the school to have its own orchestra.

The governing body has increased its effectiveness. Its recent reorganisation of governor responsibilities is enabling governors to focus more specifically on particular aspects of the school's work and to be better informed about the school's progress and the curriculum. Governors share a good range of personal and professional expertise and as well as supporting the school, also challenge and ask questions. The governing body together with the headteacher make effective arrangements for safeguarding. Child protection arrangements meet requirements. The breakfast club is well managed. The school ensures that pupils have equal opportunities in the activities provided and the match of work to abilities and need. There is no evidence of discrimination.

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	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.

18 January 2012

Dear Pupils,



Inspection of Helmdon Primary School, Helmdon NN13 5QT

Thank you for your warm welcome when I visited your school, for sharing your work with me and for talking to me about what you do in school. I enjoyed our discussions and seeing you at work. You attend a good school and reach a standard in your work above that usually found. The teachers work hard to make sure that your lessons are interesting and to help you make the good progress that you do. I can understand why your parents are so happy that you attend Helmdon Primary. Your questionnaire replies, which I have studied, clearly show that you like your teachers and the activities that they provide. Thank you for filling these in for me.

There are several other strengths in your school.

- You are well looked after and taught.
- The staff work hard, and together as a team, under the good leadership of your headteacher.
- The school makes good arrangements for pupils who do not find it as easy as others to learn.
- You behave well. You are attentive in lessons and have good attitudes to your work.
- The staff provide interesting work for you to do.

I found that there are two things that need more attention which senior leaders want to improve.

- Your progress in writing is not quite as good as that in reading and mathematics, so I want you to use it more in other subjects.
- You are not always sure how to be really successful in your activities.

You can help by always doing your best, writing neatly, working hard and listening to what is expected. I hope that you will go on making good progress and looking after one another. Thank you once again for all your help and I wish all of you well.

Yours sincerely

Peter Sudworth
Lead inspector

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