

Houghton Regis Lower School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	109459
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	377924
Inspection dates	27–28 February 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	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	230
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Graham Morgan
Headteacher	Jean Gamble
Date of previous school inspection	10 December 2008
School address	St Michael's Avenue Houghton Regis LU5 5DH
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Introduction

Inspection team

Peter Sudworth

Additional inspector

Fatiha Maitland

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed 20 lessons or parts of lessons and saw nine teachers. They had discussions with pupils, staff, and three members of the governing body, including the Chair of the Governing Body, 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, such as those relating to safeguarding and pupils' progress. The inspectors read the parents' and carers' comments on the 65 questionnaires returned and also examined responses from staff and pupils.

Information about the school

This is an average-sized primary school. It has eight classes, three of which are mixed age, including the Nursery which has two sessions and which the children attend part time. Most Nursery children transfer to the Reception class and do so in the September before their fifth birthday. Most pupils are White British and no children are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average, as is the percentage of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. The school has gained the Basic Skills Quality Mark Award and also has the Active Mark and national Healthy Schools 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	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. Attainment has risen over time and pupils achieve well. It has the very strong support of parents and carers who think highly of the school. They report that it develops pupils well academically, with a very strong pastoral dimension, caring for the whole family. One parent wrote 'Houghton Regis Lower School is a wonderful school. It has a fantastic and dedicated staff with the pupils' needs and happiness at the heart of everything it does.' While the school is developing well, it is not yet an outstanding school because improvements are still needed in mathematics in Years 1 to 4 and in writing in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Pupils make good progress in reaching average standards from their low attainment when they start school. Writing is a particular strength by the end of both Years 2 and 4. The pupils read competently.
- Teaching is good. Lessons are well planned and made interesting so that pupils enjoy their learning. The staff cater well for different needs and mixed ages and are deployed effectively throughout the school. The ratio of staff to pupils is good and this is one of the main reasons why pupils do well.
- Pupils behave well in class and around the school and get along together. They have a good appreciation of how to keep themselves and others safe.
- The school is led well by the headteacher, with the effective support of other senior leaders. The leadership of teaching is good and arrangements for performance management support pupils' attainment and progress. There is a good team ethos. Staff work together cooperatively in the interests of the pupils. They are supported well by an interested and involved governing body.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase pupils' rates of progress in mathematics so that they match the good progress made in reading and writing by:
 - ensuring that pupils use their mathematics skills more widely in different subjects
 - insisting that pupils work more neatly when setting out their calculations, with greater attention to the formation of the figures and the use of squares in their exercise books
 - enabling staff to be aware of the range of skills that can be taught mentally to support pupils' quicker calculation
 - ensuring that pupils learn from their mistakes.
- Ensure that the various activities in the different areas of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage help the children to make better progress with their writing.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Although attainment on entry is low, particularly in communication, language and literacy, pupils attain in line with national expectations by the end of Year 4. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage progress well because the carefully arranged activities, generally, offer good potential for learning. Nursery age children were enthralled to observe large, coloured blocks of ice melting, in which animals had been hidden, touched the ice, expressed how it felt and developed their vocabulary by doing so. Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage, although their progress in writing is not as good as in other areas of learning which have risen to an average standard in the last two years. This is because opportunities to develop writing in different aspects of their learning are not always exploited fully.

Parents and carers, unanimously and correctly, state that their children are making good progress. Progress in Key Stages 1 and 2 is good overall. It is developed strongly in reading and writing, although not as brisk in mathematics, in which several pupils have difficulty, particularly in calculation. Good opportunities to develop different styles of writing in Years 1 to 4, through different subjects, support pupils' writing skills effectively. This is because teachers pay close attention to teaching letter sounds and how letter sounds blend together (phonics). Pupils work in small groups and learn in an active way, with activities that are matched well to their different abilities. In one lesson, Year 1 pupils learned new sounds, held letter cards in front of them and had to arrange themselves to form different words. Knowledge and confidence gained from such interesting activities enable them to write independently.

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Pupils enjoy reading. The support of volunteers and teaching assistants enables pupils to read to an adult regularly, remember new words, and use their knowledge of letter sounds to build up words. Parents and carers have been helped to support with reading at home and their help is effective also. Although reading skills are low when the children start school, by the end of both Years 2 and 4, pupils reach average standards and a few exceed expectations.

Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress, given their starting points, because the work is matched well to their needs and they have the good support of adults when they undertake their activities. They feel confident to try their best as a result.

In the recent past, there have been differences between the performance of boys and girls in favour of the girls. In some respects, this has been due to more boys having greater difficulty learning than girls. The gap between their respective attainment is now closing, helped by a revised and more-creative curriculum with themes more motivating to boys' interests, such as the theme 'vehicles and electricity'.

Quality of teaching

Parents, carers, and pupils, correctly, think that teaching is good. Phonics is taught well and reflected in the Basic Skills Award achieved by the school. Staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage provide well-ordered learning environments, which support the children's learning effectively. Staff in the Nursery and Reception classes engage well with the children, supporting their learning and vocabulary development. They provide a good balance of activities, which the children can choose, and brief, formal, adult-led sessions, such as for mathematics and literacy. In one session, children used pennies to pay for different items, later learning how a number sentence is written. The children made good progress and quickly understood the significance of the symbols for plus and equals.

Good relationships between staff and pupils support pupils' confidence. Teachers track pupils' progress regularly and put extra support programmes in place for any pupils who are not making expected progress. They make good use of individual whiteboards so that pupils respond with answers when lessons are being introduced, ensuring that all pupils are thinking for themselves. Staff share successful ingredients for different styles of writing with pupils, which supports their good progress in writing.

Work is marked daily and effectively. Staff comment positively on the good features of pupils' work and also suggest improvements, but pupils do not consistently learn from their mistakes in mathematics. Teaching assistants work effectively with small groups. In mathematics, staff do not always ensure that pupils work neatly enough and this sometimes leads to inaccuracies in calculations.

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Staff manage the mixed-age classes well. The taught curriculum and range of experiences motivate pupils to work with interest and enjoyment. Opportunities for outdoor learning on site and walks to the park to see the changing seasons contribute well to the pupils' sense of wonder at the world and contribute effectively to the pupils' spiritual and social development.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils enjoy school. They report that behaviour and safety are good, as do parents and carers. Pupils behave well in school, displaying politeness and courteousness to one another and to visitors. Behaviour is good because of the staff's good behaviour management and a very clear behaviour code which pupils understand. The pupils say that they are not allowed 'to be bad.' They are able to distinguish between right and wrong. The introduction of a special room to support those who find it hard to follow the school rules has reduced the number of incidents of misbehaviour. Pupils understand the concept of bullying and are insistent that such occasions are most rare. Pupils are confident that any issues are dealt with and that the very few incidents of bullying are handled swiftly.

Pupils feel safe and valued in school. They feel confident to ask for support should a concern arise. One said 'The teachers look after the children and they are friendly.' Pupils are knowledgeable about the fire alarm system. They know that they should eat healthily and state that they try to eat five fruit and vegetables daily. They take part readily in the extra-curricular sporting activities. This knowledge and the opportunities are reflected in the school having gained the national Healthy Schools status and the Active Mark award. Pupils wear bright jackets when out on school trips and they know the reason for this. They acknowledge that the zoning of the playground for different age groups is designed for their own safety. The school's efforts to improve attendance have been successful and it is now average.

Leadership and management

The good opportunities for the professional development of staff have contributed to continuing school development and individual teachers' skills, shown in the good improvements since the last inspection. The leadership of the school is good. The well-written school development plan, based on honest self-evaluation, contains the correct priorities, which are reviewed regularly. The governing body is well organised, with members having specific responsibilities which they undertake effectively. The senior leadership team makes a full contribution alongside the headteacher in ensuring that the school provides a good learning environment for pupils, that each pupil is known individually, and that they make good progress.

The curriculum is well organised and balanced, thoroughly planned, with good links between subjects so that skills are planned to develop incrementally in different subjects, including all the foundation subjects. Schemes of work are very clear. The good range of extra-curricular activities supports pupils' interests in sport and other areas, such as pottery and the choir. While there are good opportunities to use

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writing as part of topic work, there is less evidence of the use of mathematics and there is not an overall plan for teaching mental mathematics. The good provision for personal, social, health and citizenship education, together with the religious education content, philosophy sessions, and good-quality assemblies, ensure that provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development is good.

Leaders and managers ensure that safeguarding measures are effective. This is evident in the good attention to child protection and the wide range of clear policies which refer to these matters. Staff and the governing body ensure that all pupils have equal opportunities, as seen in the thoroughness of tracking, so that all pupils make good progress, and there is no evidence of discrimination.

The improvements made since the last inspection, together with good school leadership, good teaching, and pupils' progress indicate that the school has a good capacity for improvement. The good partnership with parents and carers, which has included the sharing of the school's calculation methods in mathematics to improve this aspect, is another contributory factor.

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.



29 February 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Houghton Regis Lower School, Houghton Regis, LU5 5DH

Thank you for your help when we visited your school, for sharing your work with us and for talking to us about your school. We enjoyed our visit a great deal. You attend a good school and the staff take good care of you. We were impressed with your behaviour, which we found was good. You get along together very well and look after each other. Your parents and carers are pleased that you attend Houghton Regis Lower School and have told us lots of good things about it. You, clearly, enjoy school a great deal. You make good progress in getting to the standard that you reach. We enjoyed listening to you read, hearing your answers in class, and seeing you at work. You try very hard in your lessons.

While we saw many good things at your school, there are two things that we would like to see improved. We were very impressed with your writing, but, at the moment, you do not make as much progress in mathematics as you do in reading and writing. We have asked the school to help you to make better progress in mathematics. You can help with this by making sure that you set out your work neatly, which will help you to get your work right. Another thing that you can do is to check that you are doing the right type of calculation so that you work out the sums correctly. We have also asked the school to make sure that there are better chances for children to learn to write in the Reception and Nursery classes. This is because this part of the work in these classes is not as good as other parts.

Thank you once again for your help. We trust that you will carry on working hard and doing your best.

Yours sincerely

Peter Sudworth
Lead inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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