

Hermitage Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109815
Local Authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	356632
Inspection dates	29–30 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Derek Aitken

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	193
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Dunnett
Headteacher	Peta Collicott
Date of previous school inspection	24 June 2008
School address	Hermitage Thatcham RG18 9SA
Telephone number	01635 200355
Fax number	01635 202802
Email address	office.hermitage@westberks.org

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Eight teachers were observed teaching 12 lessons. In addition, inspectors sampled five lessons taken by teaching assistants which included focused support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and an extension class for more able pupils in mathematics. Meetings were held with governors, staff and groups of pupils and informal discussions were held with a few parents and carers. The inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at documents, including policies and procedures relating to the safeguarding of pupils, self-evaluation records and assessment information. The inspectors analysed questionnaires from 105 parents and carers, 95 from pupils and 14 from staff.

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

- the impact of programmes to support the progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, especially in Years 5 and 6
- the impact of initiatives undertaken since the previous inspection to raise attainment and achievement in English and mathematics
- how well more able pupils are supported and challenged to do their best
- the impact of the improved outdoor area on outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage Reception class.

Information about the school

This is a smaller than average village school. The majority of pupils are of White British origin. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is low. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. Most of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties. More pupils than is generally the case join or leave the school before the end of Year 6. There is an after-school club on site, which is privately managed and subject to a separate inspection. The school has Healthy Schools status and holds the Activemark, Eco-Schools Green Flag and Artsmark (Silver) awards.

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

Hermitage has improved the quality of its provision since it was last inspected and is a good school. Attainment remains above average by the end of Year 6 and this is despite significant changes to the size and composition of the school roll in the last four years. New staff appointments have improved the quality of teaching and learning and have had a significant impact on the rate of pupils' progress, especially in Key Stage 1. Pupils' overall achievement and outcomes are good and this means that Hermitage prepares pupils well for the next stages of their lives.

While most of the teaching is good, not enough use is made of teaching assistants during lesson starters to maintain a brisk pace of learning for all groups of pupils. New assessment arrangements have enabled teachers to track the progress of individual pupils in their class more closely, adapt their lesson planning accordingly and identify accurately pupils who would benefit from an extra boost to their learning. However, gaps in the school's whole-school tracking system inhibit the school's capacity to identify more broadly trends in pupils' performance over time and then to evaluate the impact of initiatives to improve the outcomes for pupils. A few pupils make less progress than they are capable of in writing and mathematics.

The school has a considerable number of strengths. Pupils are well cared for, new arrivals settle well and good use is made of staff expertise and external agencies to monitor and support the large percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities in Year 5 and Year 6. Pupils enjoy school. They take a keen interest in ecological matters and make good use of the varied opportunities they have to exercise responsibility and to articulate reasoned, mature views. Their cultural development is only satisfactory as the school has not yet implemented plans for developing the national and global aspects of community cohesion.

The capacity of the school to improve further is good. This is a result of effective self-evaluation and the impact of development plans. Almost all of the issues identified at the last inspection have been successfully resolved and pupils now achieve well. School leaders have an accurate overview of the quality of provision. They recognise, however, that further efforts need to be made to enable parents and carers to contribute to the school's work and to support their children's learning more fully.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further raise achievement by:
 - developing a more robust whole-school tracking system to enable curricular initiatives and trends in pupils' performance over time to be more sharply evaluated

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- make better use of teaching assistants at the beginning of lessons so as to enhance the support given to pupils in their learning to very best effect.
- Implement by July 2011 a structured plan for developing the national and global aspects of community cohesion and in so doing enhance pupils' cultural awareness by providing them with more first-hand experiences of pupils from different national and/or ethnic backgrounds.
- Improve the school's engagement with parents and carers by:
 - providing a wider range of opportunities for parents and carers to contribute to the school's work
 - increasing the opportunities for parents and carers to learn how they can best support their children's learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Pupils' achievement is good. Children's skills when they join Year 1 are broadly average. By the end of Year 6, they are above average, sometimes significantly so. Pupils' attainment is strongest in reading and they make particularly good use of guided reading lessons to develop their skills. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well. Pupils who are targeted for extra support for reading make good progress. For example, Year 5 pupils steadily improved their fluency due to focused practice on working out new words by using individual letters and sounds. More able Year 6 pupils tackled complex mathematical problems with enthusiasm during their 'brain academy' lessons and completed most questions correctly working against the clock. Year 1 pupils demonstrated a developing understanding of forces and motion during an exciting outdoor scientific experiment.

Pupils' positive attitudes, enthusiastic response and hard-working approach while completing their independent tasks are key factors in their enjoyment of learning. Their behaviour is good as they get on well with each other and the staff. They say that they feel safe and they have a secure knowledge of what action to take in hazardous situations. They make good use of the school's extensive playground equipment to take lots of exercise at break-times and participate keenly in a wide range of physical activities after school. They have a good knowledge of healthy lifestyles, as reflected in the school's awards, and most make healthy food choices. Pupils identify well with their school, for example in supporting the school council's plans to raise funds for playground equipment. Year 6 prefects support the staff very effectively. They take their monitoring duties seriously, dispensing wise words of advice to their classmates and to younger children. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall but not yet outstanding as there are some gaps in their knowledge and understanding of different cultures. Pupils' above average attainment and very regular attendance stand them in good stead for the next stage in their education.

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

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Teaching has several strengths. Teachers have good subject knowledge and mostly question pupils well to test their understanding of new learning. They plan interesting tasks which are adapted well to pupils' needs when they learn independently. Teaching assistants are very effectively deployed to support small groups or individual pupils during this part of the lesson. More able pupils have good opportunities to demonstrate and extend their skills and relish their challenge activities. Lesson starters, however, are sometimes less successful because insufficient use is made of teaching assistants to match questions to pupils' different abilities or engage pupils in discussion. On these occasions, the concentration of some pupils flags. While teaching is consistently good in Key Stage 1, there is some satisfactory teaching in Key Stage 2 which slows the pace of learning. Oral feedback and marking are good and most pupils know how they can improve their work.

The curriculum is well matched to pupils' needs. Enrichment activities make a significant contribution to pupils' personal development and enjoyment of school. Pupils participate keenly in a wide range of activities, especially sport, and the school's recent focus on developing opportunities for gifted and talented pupils has proved successful in raising standards at Level 5. Provision, both for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and for those pupils who would benefit from an extra boost to their learning, is extensive and makes good use of the expertise of teaching assistants to ensure successful outcomes for these pupils.

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The warm climate of mutual respect ensures that pupils are very confident in approaching adults on any matter that is troubling them. The emotional, social and behavioural needs of pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable are met well by support from staff or through partnerships with other agencies. Attendance is effectively monitored and promoted and this ensures that the school regularly meets its attendance targets.

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	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders and managers at all levels have adapted well to the challenges posed by the changes to the school roll. Good teamwork has ensured that new initiatives to improve pupils' learning, for example in developing guided writing, have proved successful. Teaching and learning are effectively monitored through lesson observations and useful actions have been taken to improve teachers' practice where required. Leaders have good aspirations for pupils' progress and set appropriately challenging targets for the performance of Year 6 pupils which are regularly met.

The school promotes equal opportunities and tackles discrimination well as reflected, for example, in the good progress of more able pupils and those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The governing body supports the school well in fulfilling its safeguarding duties and the new chair and vice-chair have good plans for the governing body to contribute more to self-evaluation processes to influence the school's strategic direction to very best effect. While some initiatives, some very recent, have been put in place to involve parents and carers, this remains an important area for further development. Community cohesion is promoted satisfactorily as the school's intentions for developing wider national and global links are still in the planning stage.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

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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	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
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	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make good gains in their learning from entering Reception with skills which vary from year to year, but are broadly in line with those expected for their age. The Reception leader makes very effective use of recent improvements to the outdoor area to plan a good range of activities to engage the children. Children actively embrace these opportunities to pursue their own interests. They work and play well and are keen to share new experiences with adults. They concentrate and persevere well when they direct their own learning. For example, they skilfully manoeuvre trucks round the toy farmyard, construct garage-ramps with stickle bricks and develop their numeracy skills well by striking number-discs with beanbags. Children identify numbers and can already count to 20 accurately, but at this early stage in the term have not yet mastered simple addition or the written formation of numbers. Children relate well to the additional adults, who intervene at well judged moments to support their learning. The Reception leader's assessment records clearly show that under her good leadership, children's learning, most notably in literacy, has benefited significantly from better learning opportunities, such as the new letter and sounds programme.

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	2

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Stage	
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Views of parents and carers

Questionnaires were returned on behalf of over half the pupils registered at the school. The inspection questionnaires included a large number of written comments which were evenly balanced between very positive and more mixed responses. The latter mentioned several ideas as to how the school could enable parents and carers to work more closely with the staff to support their children's education and expressed some disquiet that the school did not plan more to involve them in its work. Parents commend, however, without reservation the approachable, caring and welcoming staff and appreciate the new learning logs. Inspectors endorse these views, but found no evidence to validate the concerns of a few parents about the management of pupils' behaviour.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Hermitage Primary 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 105 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 193 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	61	58	43	41	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	56	53	47	45	2	2	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	29	28	63	60	13	12	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	35	33	55	52	6	6	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	45	43	50	48	2	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	43	41	43	41	13	12	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	43	41	50	48	4	4	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)	38	36	52	50	4	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	34	32	60	57	10	10	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	25	24	61	58	16	15	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	37	35	53	50	7	7	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	34	32	48	46	13	12	2	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	47	45	53	50	2	2	1	1

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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 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. 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.



1 October 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Hermitage Primary School, Thatcham RG18 9SA

I would like to thank you for your help when the inspection team visited your school recently. This is what we found out.

Yours is a good school. Children do well in the Reception class. You keep up this good progress, especially in reading, right through to the end of Year 6. By then, your standards are above average in all subjects, which sets you up well for secondary school. All parts of your personal development are good, including your behaviour, and the prefects are a credit to themselves and the school. You get on well with your teachers and enjoy your lessons. Pupils who find learning more difficult get lots of skilful support from the teaching assistants to help them catch up, while those pupils who find learning easier have good chances to push on with more challenging work. The staff do a good job. They look after you well, so that all pupils, including newcomers, settle in quickly and make good friends. You feel safe and enjoy all parts of school life, including the activities at the end of the school day.

I have asked the staff to do a few things to make your learning better. The teachers are to make more use of the teaching assistants during lesson starters to make sure all pupils are learning really well at these times. The school is to set up a full tracking system to follow your progress right through your time in school. The staff are to plan carefully to make sure you know more about people of other cultures. Lastly, the school is to work more closely with your parents and carers to get them more involved in your learning and to give them more chances to have a say in planning the school's future.

You can help by keeping up your good attendance and continuing to work hard.

Yours sincerely

Derek Aitken

Lead inspector

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