

Powers Hall Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114944
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	357655
Inspection dates	16–17 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Alan Lemon

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	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	254
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steve Bird
Headteacher	Claire Edwards
Date of previous school inspection	17 January 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. Seventeen lessons were observed taught by 10 teachers. Meetings were held with a group of pupils, members of the governing body, staff and a local authority school improvement advisor. Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised data on pupils' standards and progress. They looked at school improvement reports, the school improvement plan and the headteacher's reports to governors. Questionnaires submitted by 63 parents and 22 staff were analysed.

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

- The attainment on entry and progress made by children in Nursery and Reception years.
- The challenge in learning for higher attaining pupils and for those pupils with a statement of special educational needs or speech, language and communication difficulties.
- Whether the level of attendance is average or better and if the school's measures to improve attendance are effective.

Information about the school

The school roll has increased since the last inspection. Nearly half those on roll are Nursery and Reception year children. In Key Stage 1, all five classes are a mix of Year 1 and Year 2 pupils. The school manages local authority provision for pupils who have a statement of special educational needs for speech, language and communication difficulties. There are places for 10 pupils and, at present, there are seven on roll. In the rest of the school, the proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs and/or disability is average. Almost all of the pupils are of White British heritage. Several new teachers took up appointments at the start of this school year, including three who are newly qualified teachers.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

This is a satisfactory school whose steady improvement is being managed soundly by the headteacher, governors and staff. Over the last few years pupils have attained broadly average standards in reading, writing and mathematics and in doing so have made satisfactory progress in most years. The quality of teaching and learning seen in lessons in Years 1 and 2 varies widely while most teaching is good there are a few instances of inadequate teaching. Teaching and learning are good in Nursery and Reception classes and, as a result, children make good progress. The same can be said of the group of seven pupils with speech, language and communication difficulties, who benefit considerably from well-planned, expert teaching and support.

Pupils are cared for well by staff, who are attentive to their needs in the classroom and around the school. Many parents, from the views they have expressed, know this is the case and that their children are well supported. Care and support help promote the good behaviour pupils display and the good regard they show for each other. Pupils have a positive outlook towards school and contribute enthusiastically to the work of the school council and raising money for good causes. Pupils feel safe, are self-confident and their attendance is above average. A good curriculum continues to be developed by subject leaders. This makes learning enjoyable with an emphasis on themes and activities that engage pupils. They have learnt the importance of a healthy lifestyle and have adopted some good practices such as including healthy choices in their lunchboxes.

Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory and the on-going capacity to sustain further improvement is satisfactory. Action has been taken to help pupils develop their handwriting and challenge higher attaining pupils to a greater degree, but in both cases there is inconsistency in practice in some Year 1 and 2 classes. Subject leadership is clearly defined. The quality of self-evaluation is satisfactory, although several new teachers have recently become involved and some of the key leadership functions for subject leaders around monitoring and raising standards are not embedded. The monitoring of lessons is satisfactory, although the evaluation of teaching resulting from this is sometimes slightly generous as there are shortcomings that have not been detected.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards and strengthen teaching by:
 - ensuring lessons are planned effectively in order that all pupils in Years 1 and 2 are appropriately challenged.
- Increase the impact of leadership and management on school improvement by:

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- making the evaluation of teaching and learning more rigorous to ensure any shortcomings are found and eliminated.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Although pupils' learning and performance vary in Years 1 and 2 classes, resulting from differences in teaching, progress overall in lessons is satisfactory. Pupils are keen learners and responded with interest and enthusiasm in the many enjoyable and challenging lessons observed. Pupils in one class were well engaged in reading, with many confidently using skills linking sounds to letters to read accurately and fluently. This is because the teacher used an interesting variety of book activities well-matched to the class's different capabilities. In the good and outstanding lessons good quality of questioning helps pupils learn rapidly how to improve their handwriting and appreciate the importance of setting out their writing neatly. When well supported in learning the rules of measurement, pupils quickly became skilled in using a centimetre ruler to measure and compare lengths of different objects. In another lesson where this support was absent pupils were unsure of their objectives and most made no substantial progress in their knowledge and skills of measurement.

The very few pupils with speech, language and communication difficulties work hard and with confidence on practising sounds that lead to their speech and communication being clear and accurate. They apply newly learnt skills in literacy effectively, ensuring they make good progress and are well placed for the next stage of education. Across the school, most of the other pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress.

Pupils perform a variety of roles that help them develop responsibility and make a positive contribution. They are keen classroom helpers, playground leaders and school councillors. They connect with the wider community through the popular gardening club that contributes to the Witham in Bloom festival.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
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	3
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?

In the majority of lessons teachers use their experience and expertise to plan pupils' learning effectively. A good appreciation of pupils' different capabilities derived from assessment is used well to ensure learning is closely matched to pupils' age and attainment. Objectives for lessons are clear and communicated to pupils, which enhance their engagement in learning and their enjoyment in achieving what is intended. A similar picture is found in the teaching and assessment of pupils with speech, language and communication difficulties. Their learning is highly planned, based on thorough assessment. The teamwork of the teacher, speech and language therapist and classroom assistants is effective in ensuring pupils are challenged by their teaching and in making significant headway in overcoming barriers to their learning.

In the very small number of less effective lessons, planning did not sufficiently match learning to pupils' different levels of attainment, with the result that too many were not challenged by their work. Sometimes learning objectives were not made clear to pupils and they did not get the support they needed to work independently. The summing up at the end of the lesson was disorganised so pupils gained too little sense of what they had achieved.

The curriculum provides a good variety of learning opportunities for engaging pupils, using themes which pupils choose that are current and interesting. School clubs and after-school

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activities such as dance, gardening and football further enrich pupils' learning opportunities.

The staff working with pupils with speech, language and communication difficulties are well qualified to meet their needs and provide good support. This is strengthened by good working links with outside agencies. The school encourages good attendance with various awards and this has led to fewer absences.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
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 drive school improvement satisfactorily which can be seen in the consolidation of satisfactory outcomes for pupils. The senior leadership team has also been robust in managing the impact of changes in staffing by ensuring the school maintains its direction, expectations and its drive for improvement. A considerable amount of monitoring of the school's work takes place and continues to be developed. The tracking of pupils' performance ensures equality of opportunity is being promoted satisfactorily and any discrimination tackled. Subject leaders are increasingly taking on a monitoring role. Evaluation of the outcomes from monitoring is not always timely or sufficiently rigorous. In particular, weakness emerging in lesson planning using a new school format has gone unchecked. Governance benefits from the strong leadership, although several new members of the governing body are not yet settled into their role. Safeguarding procedures meet requirements. While the school community is a cohesive one, partnerships with more schools and other local organisations and a global dimension are beginning to develop.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
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	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

In some years, a significant proportion of children enter the Nursery with skills below the level expected, particularly in communication, language and literacy and problem solving, reasoning and number. The emphasis in children's work and activities reflect their needs effectively. Speech and language are practised at the start of each day and linking sounds and letters is taught expertly. The enjoyment experienced in indoor and outdoor games and play involving number progresses learning effectively. As a result of good teaching, children make good progress so that, by the time they finish Reception year, they have reached expectations, ready to make a good start in Year 1. Staff are warm and sensitive in their approach to engaging children and this encourages learning. Children enjoy learning, which is well planned and based securely on good assessment. Children feel safe and are well cared for by staff. When learning together they share and take turns. All staff work together as a cohesive team, keeping a close track on children's performance and ensuring they have good opportunities to close the gap whenever their levels are below expectation. Leaders are ambitious in promoting learning and ensuring make good progress, close any gaps and are ready to make a good start in Year 1.

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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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Stage	
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Views of parents and carers

The response to the questionnaire was low for an infant school of this size. As it is the beginning of the school year, a few parents new to the school felt unable to answer some of the questions. All of the parents who responded are happy with their child's school experience. They agree their child enjoys school and almost all agree the school helps to keep their child safe and lead a healthy lifestyle. A similar number believe teaching is good, their child is making enough progress and that the school keeps them informed about their child's progress. Inspectors found teaching to be satisfactory and while pupils make satisfactory progress this could be better if the shortcomings in teaching are eliminated. A very few parents had reservations relating to whether the school takes accounts of their suggestions and concerns and whether the school is led and managed effectively. Inspectors found that, while the school's engagement with parents is satisfactory, more could be done to reach those parents who feel the school is not communicating sufficiently with them.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Powers Hall 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 63 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 254 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	42	67	21	33	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	35	56	26	41	2	3	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	28	44	28	44	5	8	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	30	48	25	40	4	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	30	48	27	43	3	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	28	44	26	41	4	6	1	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	36	57	23	37	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)	29	46	24	38	3	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	32	51	24	38	3	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	21	33	32	51	2	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	24	38	24	38	5	8	3	5
The school is led and managed effectively	28	44	20	32	4	6	7	11
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	33	52	23	37	2	3	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	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.



20 September 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Powers Hall Infant School, Witham, CM8 1NA

Thank you for your welcome during our recent visit to your school and many thanks to the members of the school council who met with inspectors and talked about feeling safe and staying healthy. Here are some of the good things we found out about your school:

- the extent to which you feel safe, adopt a healthy lifestyle and contribute to the success of the school and community are good
- your behaviour is good
- you are making the progress expected for your age in Years 1 and 2
- you are making good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes
- most of your lessons are taught well
- staff provide you with good care and support and make sure you are kept safe

Your school could be more effective if:

- some of your lessons need improving so that the good learning in most lessons takes place in all of your lessons
- your headteacher ensures she and all staff have a clear understanding of what works well in lessons and what does not in order to put things right quickly.

Inspectors hope that you continue to keep up your good behaviour and hard work. I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Alan Lemon

Lead inspector

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