

The Howbridge Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114951
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	357657
Inspection dates	4–5 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Martin Beale

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Infant
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	253
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul McGrath
Headteacher	Sandra Herring
Date of previous school inspection	19 March 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They visited 21 lessons seeing 10 teachers at least once, and held meetings with staff, groups of pupils, and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body. Informal discussions were also held with parents as they arrived with their children at the start of the day. Inspectors observed the school's work, and scrutinised assessment information, pupils' books, records of pupils' progress and improvement plans. Inspectors analysed 78 parental questionnaires.

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

- How effective is the school's action to raise attainment in mathematics and reduce gender gaps in reading and writing?
- To what extent does the leadership team play an effective role in promoting school improvement?
- How effectively does the school support the academic and personal development of pupils whose circumstances make them more vulnerable?
- How well do teachers meet the needs of all pupils in their classes including providing greater challenge for the more able?

Information about the school

Most pupils are from White British backgrounds in this above average sized school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. There has been a considerable increase to well above average in the proportion of pupils identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Their needs are mostly associated with speech and language difficulties. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in three Reception classes. The school has achieved Healthy Schools status and received the Activemark award.

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

The Howbridge Infant School provides a satisfactory quality of education for its pupils. Under experienced leadership, the staff team is pulling together to break down barriers to learning so they can give each child a better start to their school life. The school has the support of parents, most of whom agree that their children are kept safe and taught how to stay healthy.

Pupils agree with their parents' and carers' views and say that they enjoy being in school and participating in the interesting activities provided. They greatly enjoy and gain much from the sporting activities available, which are made possible by specialist teachers from a local secondary school. The pupils' enjoyment of school is also reflected in their steadily improving levels of attendance. Their considerate behaviour towards each other, welcoming approach to visitors and the respect they show to their teachers help to generate a happy atmosphere throughout the school.

The children make satisfactory but uneven progress in the Reception classes. Satisfactory but inconsistent progress continues across Years 1 and 2 so that attainment is broadly average by the time pupils move on to junior school. The slower progress in mathematics particularly of the more able pupils has received successful attention, as seen in increased numbers working at levels above those expected for their age. Staff and the governing body are aware that girls have been reaching higher levels than boys in both reading and writing, and this is now a matter that the school is starting to consider.

The uneven progress of pupils is largely because there are some inconsistencies in teaching within each year group. Nevertheless, there are some outstanding features to teaching in the best lessons and none that are less than satisfactory. Many lessons engage pupils' imagination, challenge their thinking and generate interest in learning, but these qualities are not seen universally. There are times when the purpose behind activities is not clear and the learning needs of all pupils not sharply met. This is, in part, because the leaders and those with the most effective practice do not have structures around them to support their colleagues towards consistently better teaching and there is not always a common understanding of how to promote more effective learning. Furthermore, assessment systems while satisfactory are not totally secure and accurate in the picture they give of pupils' levels and the steps needed to move them forward more rapidly.

Pupils benefit from experiencing a wide range of enjoyable activities on a daily basis that are planned to move their learning forward. These build satisfactorily in Year 1 on the experiences children had in Reception, but are not always purposefully planned to develop their learning. Pupils whose circumstances make them more vulnerable, such as those with speech and language difficulties, receive carefully targeted support. This promotes their well-being, helps them to access lessons more easily and leads to them making satisfactory progress in their basic skills.

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The school has satisfactory capacity for further improvement. The role of leaders within the senior team is developing, and they are starting to play a more pivotal role in sharing the drive for higher achievement with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. However, the impact of actions taken has not always been evaluated carefully by the wider school community and, as such, self-evaluation is satisfactory rather than good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate learning for the children in Reception and for pupils in Years 1 and 2 and bring the quality of teaching more consistently up to that of the best by:
 - identifying as a whole staff the characteristics of teaching that will promote more effective learning
 - providing opportunities on a more regular and planned basis for good practice to be shared
 - identifying action to narrow the gap between boys' and girls' attainment in reading and writing
 - ensuring that lesson planning clearly identifies the purpose behind all of the activities provided.
- Increase the accuracy of assessment information by:
 - ensuring that all teachers have a common and accurate understanding of what constitutes each level of attainment
 - providing regular opportunities for evidence of the pupils' progress to be moderated within and between year groups.
- Develop the skills of staff in leadership roles and the governing body so that they become fully involved in evaluating the impact and effectiveness of all school initiatives.
- Up to 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**

Children join the school with skills slightly below those expected for their age, particularly in communication and literacy. Pupils develop their skills and understanding at a satisfactory rate. They concentrate and persevere with tasks set, particularly when they are clear about the purpose behind what they are doing. These features were seen in a Year 1 mathematics lesson, when pupils were very attentive and readily shared their ideas with a partner. Because they understood why they were undertaking each activity, they worked well together and the time seemed to fly past. Pupils are keen to do well and take great pride in their achievements. They also respond well to their teachers' expectations by behaving well in lessons. Pupils have appropriate opportunities to develop their basic skills, such as writing, across other subjects. They develop teamwork skills and greatly enjoy sharing their thoughts and ideas in discussions with each other. These qualities give them a sound footing for success in the next stage of their school life.

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Embedded in the school's ethos is an understanding of what it is to be healthy and how to make sensible choices. Pupils respond well to this and keenly take action through exercise and diet to stay fit and healthy. They say they feel safe and are very confident that they can confide in any adult, knowing they will deal with any concerns. Their contribution to school through the responsibilities they undertake, and their support for charities and community life give them a great sense of pride. The school does its utmost to broaden pupils' horizons. The recent 'international week' was a memorable and enjoyable experience for the pupils as they learnt about customs and cultures of India and France.

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	3
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?

The best teaching drives pupils' learning forward at a good pace and generates great enjoyment. These lessons are carefully planned, involve pupils through skilled questioning and provide challenging tasks for the more able. Other adults are deployed carefully to guide the learning of different groups of pupils, not just the least able. These characteristics were seen to good effect in a Year 1 mathematics lesson, where a quick-fire starter activity generated much enthusiasm and quickly focused pupils' minds. This carried over into the main part of the lesson where the teacher used the interactive whiteboard creatively to challenge their thinking as they tried to identify two-dimensional shapes. However, in the less effective lessons, opportunities are missed to check pupils' understanding and for them to rehearse their ideas and answers to questions in discussion

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with one another. Pupils are increasingly involved in assessing their own progress and that of others. They also find marking and other feedback helpful in enabling them to improve their work. However, teachers do not always use assessment information to plan purposeful and relevant activities for all pupils, so that some lose interest in what they are doing.

There is a carefully planned balance between promoting basic skills and broadening pupils' experiences in other areas. Linking learning inside and out, such as the 'autumn walk' in Year 1, stimulated pupils' ideas for writing related to the Percy the Park Keeper books. The daily sessions of teaching the sounds that letters make are leading to the transfer of skills into pupils' writing. However, the daily reading sessions are not as effectively planned. Experiences are broadened considerably in dance, sport, drama and art through the expertise of outside providers.

The school's well-structured care and support have a beneficial impact on the development of pupils whose circumstances make them more vulnerable, including those with speech and language difficulties, by giving them access to the skill development they need. This includes making use of the guidance of outside experts. The 'bubble group' sessions are particularly effective in developing social skills and enhancing confidence. All pupils are carefully prepared for their movement from one class to the next and then into the neighbouring junior school.

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	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The staff team shares the headteacher's ambition of meeting the needs of individual pupils and improving their performance, although this has not been consistently realised. The exception to this is in tackling weaknesses in mathematics by teachers observing each other, identifying good practice and then adopting these methods in each classroom. Targets are sufficiently challenging and improved systems put in place to check on the progress of pupils and take action when they fall behind. Staff and the governing body are clear about the main actions needed to secure improvement but these are not always reflected in sharply focused school planning.

Governance is satisfactory. The governing body supports school developments but has not been systematically involved in establishing the evidence by which its members can challenge the school to do better. The governing body fulfils all statutory requirements and through school policies makes the promotion of equal opportunities and tackling discrimination a school priority. The governing body ensures that everyone is kept safe in

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school through the rigorous implementation of policies and by carefully vetting all those who work in the school.

The large number of parent helpers shows the strength of the partnership with home. This is enhanced by activities that help parents to support their children's learning at home and regularly surveying their views about aspects of the school's work. The harmonious atmosphere reflects the promotion of a cohesive school community. Many actions are undertaken to promote wider community cohesion including reaching out to community groups, but their impact has not always been evaluated and the information used to plan the next steps to be taken. Links with other organisations have a sound impact on pupils' achievement and a positive impact on their well-being and enjoyment of school life. The school recognises the value of these links as it could not provide the benefits they bring on its own.

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	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
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	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children's progress in the different classes is uneven because of inconsistencies in the quality of the provision. Consequently, a minority do not reach levels expected of them by the time they move into Year 1. For example, calculating is a weaker area. The leader is aware of this and has started to introduce a plan to tackle this gap with the other areas of learning.

The adults in the team have sound knowledge about the learning and development requirements of young children. They use a reasonable range of methods to stimulate interest and move learning forward. Consequently, children are content, settled and willingly take part in activities. They have opportunities to choose activities and make decisions about their free play, although the resources inside are more engaging than those outside. There is sufficient challenge to interest the children particularly when the

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learning intentions for an activity are clearly communicated. Behaviour is generally very good and children treat the environment and resources with great care. They feel safe because of the attention paid to safeguarding their welfare by all members of the team.

Areas of weakness have been identified and are starting to be addressed. However, the leader has not had the opportunity to observe others in the team to eliminate any inconsistencies in performance. One main reason for the inconsistent practice between the classes centres on assessment practices. Assessment arrangements when children enter and when they move onto Year 1 have not been sufficiently accurate or robust for school leaders to have an accurate picture of the impact of provision on their progress. Furthermore, while regular observations are made of what the children can do, these are not always used to plan activities to meet the needs of each child.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

The number of responses to the questionnaire was typical of most other primary schools. The inspection supports the positive views of parents and carers about how their children are helped to adopt safe and healthy lifestyles. Parents also judge teaching to be good, although the inspection found some inconsistencies between classes. The inspection team found no evidence to support the views of a small number of parents that unacceptable behaviour is not dealt with effectively. Not all parents have positive views about the partnership between home and school including whether their suggestions are sought, although inspection evidence indicates that these aspects are good.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Howbridge 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 78 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 253 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	44	56	31	40	2	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	37	47	37	47	2	3	1	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	14	18	50	64	9	12	2	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	17	22	49	63	8	10	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	22	28	50	64	3	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	22	28	45	58	9	12	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	36	46	39	50	2	3	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)	18	23	45	58	6	8	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	21	27	51	65	5	6	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	16	21	46	59	8	10	4	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	17	22	44	56	10	13	4	5
The school is led and managed effectively	21	27	42	54	6	8	5	6
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	34	44	36	46	6	8	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.



6 October 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Howbridge Infant School, Witham, CM8 1DJ

Thank you all very much for your friendliness and help when we visited your school recently, for making us feel welcome and for being so ready to share your thoughts with us. We had a chance to talk to quite a lot of you and we have told your teachers that you were very helpful and polite. We judge that The Howbridge Infant School gives you a satisfactory start to your education. You clearly enjoy school and we agree with you that your teachers take good care of you. Your behaviour is good, and you are very clear about how to keep yourselves safe and healthy. Your attendance has also improved much in recent years. Well done for this and please keep it up.

You make satisfactory progress during your time in school, learning the skills you need for the future. Many, but not all, lessons are taught well and have interesting things to learn. 'International week' was clearly memorable and you benefit much from the sporting activities provided. Those of you who find learning more difficult also make satisfactory progress because of the care and support you receive, such as when working in the 'bubble group'.

Everyone is trying hard to make the school even better. The three things we have asked the teachers and other adults to do are to:

- help all teachers to bring their teaching up to the quality of the best
- improve the accuracy of the assessment of the levels you are reaching
- make sure that staff, governors, parents and pupils are involved in establishing how well the school is doing.

You can play your part in helping the school to get even better by continuing to work hard. Well done for showing pride in your school.

Yours sincerely

Martin Beale

Lead inspector

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