

Halton Community Combined School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110391
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	356729
Inspection dates	1–2 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Nick Butt

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	95
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Joy O'Neill
Headteacher	Su Scrimshaw
Date of previous school inspection	22 May 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspection team visited 13 lessons and observed five teachers. Inspectors held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at a selection of documentation, including planning, evidence of monitoring, such as lesson observations, analyses of pupils' work and other assessment information. The inspection team scrutinised inspection questionnaires returned by 59 parents and carers, and by staff and pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. Inspectors looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The effectiveness of the assessment and recording systems in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- The impact of curriculum innovation on outcomes for pupils.
- How effectively the school caters for the many pupils from service families and supports high numbers of pupils joining and leaving the school outside normal times.

Information about the school

Halton is a small school. About 70% of pupils are from service backgrounds, mainly from the nearby Royal Air Force (RAF) base. The proportion of pupils joining after the start of Reception and leaving the school before the end of Year 6 is very high. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, including those who speak English as an additional language, is below average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. The school has National Healthy Schools status. A breakfast club and an after-school club are run by the school daily.

The headteacher has been in post for just over two years. At the time of the inspection, Key Stage 2 pupils had just moved into temporary accommodation on the staff car park pending the school being re-roofed. The school shares a site with a private nursery, which is subject to a separate inspection.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Halton is an outstanding school. In a relatively short time, the headteacher has transformed it, from one causing concern to the local authority into a vibrant thriving learning community, with 100% of pupils attaining the expected Level 4 in reading, writing and mathematics in the 2010 Year 6 national tests. The school was among the five most improved primary schools in England last year. Despite potentially challenging barriers to learning, including the very high number of pupils arriving and departing throughout the school year, almost all pupils make good or better progress. This is because of the outstanding drive and determination shown by the headteacher and her staff in getting to know and understand the pupils and their families, so that they can tailor individualised learning programmes to meet their differing needs. Pupils often arrive from abroad at very little notice and without records, and this may be their fifth or sixth school. At any given time, some pupils may have a parent serving in Afghanistan or the Falkland Islands on tours of duty ranging between four and nine months. The school has developed excellent systems to help pupils settle quickly and to accelerate their learning. The pioneering initiative to appoint a family support coordinator with expertise in working with service families ensured the emotional well-being of pupils and their families was at the forefront of the school's work, and this has created a safe and stress-free environment in which pupils flourish.

Parents are delighted with the work of the school, and the very many heartfelt testimonies to the help they and their children have received pay tribute to the dedication and effectiveness of the school staff. One parent wrote, 'Halton Combined Community School should be proud of its inclusive, varied and positive approach to teaching, learning and communication.' Parents' immense satisfaction was summed up by the parent who commented, 'Halton school, its pupils and staff are a credit to the community ♦ a wonderful journey our family has been able to witness.'

Teaching and learning are consistently good. Lessons are planned to excite and interest pupils with innovative units of work that enable them to achieve well. The outstanding curriculum ensures that topics are presented in radically different ways to what pupils may have experienced at other schools, creating high quality memorable experiences for them to take away with them to their next school. The school has been successful in securing grants for innovative projects to develop the curriculum such as working with the Royal Horticultural Society on inter-cropping.

There is good provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage, giving children a stimulating and enjoyable start to their education. Good progress has been made in developing the outdoor area, and in ensuring children have plenty of opportunities to initiate their own learning. Record keeping is regular, but not systematic enough to build up sufficiently comprehensive portfolios of how each child is performing in all the six areas of learning.

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Assessment information is stored in a variety of formats, making it difficult to access everything that is recorded about each individual child.

Pupils' behaviour is outstanding: they show great consideration for one another, supporting one another as play leaders and road safety officers, and working together very well in class. They have adapted to their temporary classrooms and the restricted space very well.

Outstanding leadership from the headteacher has given a powerful new vision to staff, and created an overcoming culture that has taken on a compelling momentum, enabling very rapid improvements to take place. Rigorous self-evaluation procedures ensure staff have a very accurate view of the school's performance and are focused on key areas for development. The school pays meticulous attention to detail, for example, by ensuring arrangements to ensure pupils are safe and protected are exemplary, keeping parents extremely well informed or making sure that there are no gaps in the performance of any groups of pupils. The school has made excellent progress since its last inspection, improving the judgements grades in many areas, and has an outstanding capacity for further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve assessment procedures in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - compiling records for individual children that keep all the information about them in one place
 - making sure sufficient evidence is gathered on the children in every area of learning to build up a full picture of their achievements.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils respond very well to the outstanding curriculum and consistently good teaching they receive, thoroughly enjoying their learning. One pupil said, 'Teachers are confident in making us good students.' Pupils in Years 5 and 6 entered into lively debate about the advantages and disadvantages of a high speed rail line passing through their village (as is proposed). They met a local resident whose cottage is in the way of the route to hear her views about the scheme. Pupils in Year 3 and 4 enjoyed playing African drums as a class, creating some mesmerising rhythms. Pupils from service families, who come to the school often having had their education interrupted, make the same good progress as all other pupils. All groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those who speak English as an additional language, achieve well. This is because work is matched well to pupils' abilities, and good support is provided where it is needed, enabling pupils to make good progress towards their individual targets for improvement.

Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay healthy, taking plenty of exercise. There are very strong links with the RAF base, which pupils often visit as part of their learning. This year pupils have elected to raise funds for the service charity 'Help for Heroes'. They are involved in village life, for example visiting the elderly in a local care home. Pupils take every opportunity to make the most of the many artistic, cultural and sporting activities available to them. Many of them have lived abroad, or have parents posted overseas. They have a good understanding of other cultures and learn from one another. The

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annual International Week enables them to study a country in depth and make a presentation about it to parents. Attendance is broadly average. Pupils' enterprise skills are well developed, as they create products to sell, and learn about business plans and profit and loss accounts. The school takes pupils in just as they are and gives them the confidence and self-belief to go out into the next stage of their education, wherever that may lead them, with their heads held high.

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	1
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	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?

Teachers use technology well to engage and interest pupils, and to project up their work on a screen so that the class can analyse it. They are very clear about what they want pupils to learn, and always show them the steps to a successful outcome, often encouraging them to devise some of their own. Good questioning and good use of resources enable learning to proceed at a brisk pace. Pupils are used to working in teams, and collaborate purposefully. They mostly know their targets for improvement. Marking is generally helpful, although at times it does not outline specifically enough what pupils need to do to improve. The outstanding curriculum builds on pupils' interests and aspirations. For example, pupils in Key Stage 2 have been learning about flight and put on a performance of Macbeth, rehearsing in an Aylesbury graveyard. Special projects and events, such as the work on African crop rotation with the Royal Horticultural Society, or Stone Age Day, inspire pupils and make an important contribution to their personal

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development and enjoyment of school. There is excellent enrichment of the curriculum through a wide variety of clubs, visits and visitors, and imaginative links across subjects enable pupils to practise their basic skills in a range of different contexts.

Outstanding induction and transition arrangements give pupils the best possible start and finish at the school, and the excellent care, guidance and support sustains them throughout their stay. The contribution of the family support coordinator is exceptional in offering pastoral care to the whole family, especially those from service backgrounds. Her use of the Services' website for enabling pupils to send and receive messages from parents posted abroad is particularly valued. The school has excellent relationships with a host of other agencies, ensuring that all possible assistance is available to families when needed. Teaching assistants provide good support to individuals and groups, and this means pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language achieve well. The breakfast club and after-school club provide pupils with a happy and secure environment to begin and end their day and are run well.

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	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

There is a common drive for improvement among all staff, who share the headteacher's passion for all pupils to do the very best they can in the often short time they attend the school. Teaching and learning have improved considerably as a result of sharing good practice, and continuous professional dialogue reflecting on what works and what can be done better. Staff are highly motivated and willing to try new approaches, knowing that their own suggestions will be supported and encouraged.

The governing body provides effective leadership, especially in promoting links with service families and raising awareness of their needs. The governing body successfully lobbied for money for service children, which funded the Family Support Coordinator's role. Members of the governing body are less confident about using data to hold leaders and managers to account about achievement.

There are excellent partnerships with parents and carers, who are enthusiastic ambassadors for the school. Parents and carers say that communication is outstanding, and they feel their views are welcomed and valued. The extremely successful partnerships with others, such as the RAF base, the schools' psychological service and creative organisations, support pupils' good personal development, their good academic progress and their great enjoyment of school.

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The school promotes equality of opportunity extremely well through its excellent systems for making new pupils welcome, its outstanding pastoral care, and the academic rigour that ensures all groups of pupils, whatever their circumstances, make good or better progress.

Exemplary safeguarding arrangements ensure pupils are kept safe. The headteacher is a qualified trainer in child protection and implements best practice in all policies and procedures, keeping meticulous records. The school promotes community cohesion well, having an outstanding understanding of its local community, and good links internationally. It is in the early stages of developing video conferencing with an urban multicultural school as part of a project to enhance learning through new technology.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make good progress as a result of lively teaching that focuses on promoting their learning, so that most of them achieve or exceed the early learning goals by the end of the Reception year. During the inspection, children were celebrating Chinese New Year, and sat down to a banquet of traditional Chinese fare, using chopsticks. They made a dragon and enjoyed parading around the school with it. The classroom is attractive and stimulating, with an Antarctic area inspired by the Falkland Islands and plenty of penguins. The curriculum is well planned and geared to children's interests. There is a good balance of activities led by adults and those the children choose for themselves, something that has improved in the past year. While regular assessments take place of how children are doing, these are not recorded systematically enough, or in a sufficiently accessible manner, with the result that several records have to be found in order to build up a picture of each child's achievements. Good leadership and management ensure that staff

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work together as a strong team, and are constantly seeking ways to improve their practice.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	2
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 Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

A much higher proportion of parents and carers responded to the questionnaire than is usual. Parents and carers all agreed that the teaching is good, children are well prepared for the future, the school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour and that it is led and managed well. Many parents submitted written comments, which were all extremely positive about the school's work, how it cares for them and their children, and how it is led. A small number of parents disagreed with some of the statements, but did not explain why. Inspection findings were that the school's overall effectiveness is outstanding, and that outcomes for pupils are good.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Halton Community Combined 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 inspector received 59 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 95 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	38	64	18	31	1	2	1	2
The school keeps my child safe	45	76	12	20	1	2	1	2
My school informs me about my child's progress	41	69	16	27	1	2	1	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	35	59	21	36	2	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	37	63	20	34	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	40	68	16	27	2	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	33	56	25	42	1	2	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)	34	58	18	31	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	39	66	17	29	1	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	34	58	22	37	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	38	64	17	29	4	7	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	47	80	12	20	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	46	78	9	15	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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



3 February 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Halton Community Combined School, Wendover HP22 5PN

We very much enjoyed visiting your school recently, and want to thank you for looking after us so well. Thank you also for telling us your views and sending in the questionnaires. You told us how much you enjoy school and that you like a challenge. You also told us how quickly you were made to feel welcome when you first joined the school and how friendly everybody was. We are pleased to tell you that Halton is an outstanding school. This means it has many strengths. Here are some of them:

- You make good progress in all your subjects.
- Your behaviour is excellent.
- You keep healthy and know how to stay safe.
- You care for one another well and are helpful around the school.
- Teachers make your lessons enjoyable and expect a lot of you.
- There are plenty of clubs for you to take part in and visits for you to go on.
- The school looks after you extremely well, especially if you are new.
- The headteacher is an extremely good leader.
- The school works very well with your parents and others to help you do your best.

There is very little that needs to be improved, but here is one thing:

- We have asked the teachers in Reception to keep a careful check on how well the youngest children are doing and to put the information all in one place, so it is easy to find.

You all can help by telling your teachers what you enjoy about learning and what you would like to find out next.

Thank you once again for helping us.

Yours sincerely

Nick Butt

Lead Inspector

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