

Hillshott Infant School and Nursery

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117123
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	358087
Inspection dates	4–5 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Selwyn Ward

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	205
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ben Coates
Headteacher	Joanne Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	21 April 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 19 lessons and observed 11 teachers. They spoke with staff, parents and carers, representatives of the governing body and groups of pupils. Inspectors looked at samples of pupils' work, the analysis of the tracking of pupils' progress, school policies and procedures, school leaders' monitoring records, school development planning and risk assessments. They also analysed the questionnaires received from 106 parents and carers. The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- How are pupils of different capabilities, including those in the speech and language base, helped to make progress?
- What has been the impact of measures to raise attainment in reading and improve provision for the more able?
- Are there features of the curriculum, welfare arrangements and pupils' personal development that stand out in this school?

Information about the school

This is an average-sized school. The large majority of pupils are White British, with around a quarter coming from a wide range of different minority ethnic backgrounds. Only a small number of pupils are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. A high proportion of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including many with a statement of special educational needs. This is, in part, because the school incorporates a specialist base for up to 10 pupils with speech and language difficulties. The school also provides a 'nurture group' to support pupils who need extra help to boost their confidence and learning. Children in the Nursery attend part time. The school has attained the Investors in People, Sports Partnership and ICT Mark awards, as well as Healthy Schools status.

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

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

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school where pupils achieve well, both academically and in their personal development. Progress is good throughout the school, from the start of the Nursery and Reception to the end of Year 2. As a result, pupils' attainment has been consistently in line with the national average, even though many children join the school with low prior attainment. The school caters for a high proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those in the speech and language base. These pupils' achievement is especially impressive, with many surmounting their learning difficulties to go on to attain standards in reading, writing and mathematics that similarly match the national average. This illustrates the school's outstanding promotion of equality for pupils of all abilities and backgrounds.

The school's success is due to consistently good teaching and excellent arrangements for pupils' care and welfare that result in pupils feeling exceptionally safe in school. Parents and carers, with whom staff work in very close partnership, are especially appreciative of the way in which their children are nurtured and looked after. One parent summed up the views of many in explaining, 'My daughter comes home excited and inspired by what she has done and cannot wait to return. She has even asked to come in at the weekends! On numerous occasions, I have been made aware that the staff are catering for her individual needs, developing her areas of special interest, giving her opportunities to learn new skills and challenging her.' The curriculum is outstanding not only because the topics studied are made interesting and exciting but also because learning is carefully matched to pupils' individual needs. Regular dialogue between school leaders and class teachers results in close monitoring of each pupil's progress and individualised provision that maps out a programme of tailored support to boost learning. For pupils identified as at risk of falling behind, this means interventions such as 'reading recovery' and other one-to-one assistance to accelerate their progress. For more able pupils, it means more challenging work and stimulating activities, such as, the opportunity afforded to pupils to make animation films that bring their modelling clay figures to life. The school draws extremely effectively on its partnerships with a wide range of outside agencies to enhance the support provided to pupils.

From the start of the Early Years Foundation Stage, teachers quickly establish orderly routines that ensure that children listen carefully and work with concentration. Behaviour throughout the school is exemplary, even for those children who, when they join the school, initially struggle with self-control. In this, facilities such as the 'nurture group' play a key role. Just occasionally, however, some pupils' attention drifts when they are expected to sit for too long listening on the carpet. Relationships throughout the school are very good and so pupils are eager to please their teachers. A notable feature of lessons is the way teachers set out at the start not just what it is that the pupils are expected to learn, but also why this is important. This helps to make learning relevant and

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contributes to pupils' sense of achievement. However, its impact is sometimes dissipated when the learning objectives are displayed only on small handwritten sheets that can be difficult for pupils to read or refer to during the lesson. Pupils have targets in their writing and mathematics books and they often refer to them when they are working. Marking gives pupils helpful guidance on how to move their learning on, but sometimes spelling errors go un-noted, with sentences ticked as correct when they are not. Although pupils have word books and cards that list common spellings, there is not a consistently routine expectation that pupils check their own or each other's spellings.

Although the governing body is supportive, the retirement last year of several key members without effective plans for others to take on their roles has limited governors' involvement in overseeing the school and setting its direction. The school development plan is comprehensive but not all of its objectives are linked to quantifiable outcomes. Nevertheless, the headteacher and leadership team have a sharply accurate picture of the school's many strengths and have been perceptive not only in identifying where improvements can be made but also in putting in place improvements. Monitoring of lessons now involves all staff so that teachers visit each other's classes and learn from each other's teaching. This has contributed to the picture of consistently good teaching across the school. Leaders last year identified that the progress of some of the more able pupils was less rapid than that of others. Measures put in place, including changes to the curriculum, have corrected this. Such changes for the better demonstrate the school's good capacity for continued improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By the start of the summer term, 2011, further accelerate pupils' learning by:
 - rigorously correcting spelling errors and routinely encouraging pupils to check their own and each other's spellings;
 - ensuring that pupils are not expected to sit for too long on the carpet before moving on to other activities;
 - making more effective use of the learning objectives set out for pupils by displaying these more prominently so that pupils can readily read and refer to them during the course of the lesson.
- Strengthen the contribution made by the governing body, by the start of the autumn term 2011, by:
 - putting in place succession plans so that newer governors are prepared for taking on leadership roles as longer-serving governors stand down;
 - ensuring that the school development plan includes precisely measurable performance targets.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Children join the Nursery with skills that are low in relation to those expected for their ages. They make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage, although their attainment remains below average by the end of the Reception Year. This good progress continues in Years 1 and 2, with pupils' attainment matching the national average in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2. Pupils' books this year show

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similarly good progress. For example, children who started Year 1 in September barely able to form letter shapes are already now writing decipherable sentences. Progress is good or better for boys and girls of all abilities and ethnic backgrounds, including the small number at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. This is because pupils all benefit from well-targeted support and a curriculum that is matched to their individual learning needs. For those with special educational needs, including those in the speech and language base, progress is exceptional because the curriculum is so carefully tailored to individual needs, often drawing on excellent partnerships with specialist outside agencies. Within the school, initiatives such as the 'nurture group' help to boost both pupils' self-esteem as well as accelerating the progress of those with additional learning needs.

In lessons, pupils make good progress because they are well-focused and eager to learn. They are challenged to stretch themselves. For example, able pupils in a Year 2 literacy lesson writing descriptions of their 'amazing animal' chimera responded to the teacher's encouragement to incorporate more lively accounts of its features by writing 'if you look very closely you will see...' rather than simply 'it has...'.

Pupils' have a good appreciation of the need for a healthy diet and regular exercise. They know that the school discourages them from bringing in chocolate but some confess that this just means that they have to eat it quickly before it is spotted. Pupils enjoy the opportunities that they have to take on responsibility within the school, for example as 'Hillshott Helpers'. They take a growing interest in the wider world, including through their support for a range of national and international charities. Although attendance rates are only average overall, absence is mostly unavoidable because it is due to medical appointments and sickness. Attendance rates, together with pupils' average literacy and numeracy skills, mean that pupils are satisfactorily prepared for the next stage of 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	3
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	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
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	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?

Lessons are well planned to meet pupils' different learning needs, with tasks usually set to extend more able pupils. Questioning is used well to draw out pupils' thoughts and to develop their speaking and listening skills. Although most pupils are keen to volunteer answers to questions, teachers look out for those who are more reluctant contributors and will often quiz them directly. Teaching assistants provide valuable support for small groups of pupils, and not just those with additional learning needs, but they are not always fully utilised during teachers' lesson introductions. Opportunities are missed, for example, for support staff to make a note for the teacher of pupils' contributions.

The everyday curriculum is enriched through regular themed and 'big idea' weeks that link subjects together. Recent themed work on fairy tales has resulted in much imaginative writing and artwork. The school offers a very wide range of clubs, covering several sports as well as activities such as craft and gardening. These go beyond the range commonly available to pupils in Key Stage 1. What most stands out about the curriculum at Hillshott, however, is the way in which provision is matched to pupils' individual needs. Linking to the excellent arrangements for pupils' guidance, care and welfare, staff keep a careful track of each child's progress and tailor activities to help them get the most out of their time at school, including through schemes to help those who initially struggle to get to grips with reading. Parents and carers of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and especially those in the speech and learning base, voice exceptionally

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strong praise for the support their children receive. In a typical comment, one explained, 'The school provides outstanding support to my child both in the base and mainstream classroom which has literally changed her entire learning experience and opened up the curriculum to her.' Several parents and carers also told inspectors how much they appreciated the family support sessions organised by the school.

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?

In this very well run school, the headteacher and leadership team have built excellent partnerships with outside agencies and with parents and carers to ensure high quality provision for the pupils. Their monitoring has helped to maintain consistently good teaching throughout the school and, together, the staff team has been innovative in developing a curriculum and support that are highly responsive to pupils' individual needs. As a result, equal opportunities are promoted exceptionally well, so that even those pupils with complex special educational needs are helped to achieve their full potential. Community cohesion is promoted well through the opportunities to foster an appreciation of other cultures and ways of life elsewhere in the country and abroad. Some teachers' recent visit to a school in Romania, for example, has sparked an interest in that country. Year 2 pupils have been inspired by Romanian paintings to emulate the style in their artwork.

The school has reviewed and tightened its procedures in response to a recent local authority audit, and current safeguarding arrangements now exceed government requirements. There are especially robust systems for dealing with child protection issues. The governing body is supportive and shares the headteacher's ambition to drive the school forward but it has not taken the lead in setting the strategic direction or in ensuring that the targets in the otherwise comprehensive school development plan are quantifiable and objective.

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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	3
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	2
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 settle very happily due to the warm welcome they receive and the good induction procedures. In this well-run provision, the promotion of children's welfare and safety is good. The children quickly learn the school's established routines and this increases their feeling of security. As a result of the consistently good teaching, children make good progress in gaining skills and understanding in all areas of learning. However, their attainment is still below age-related expectations by the end of the Reception Year. Opportunities are well planned for both indoor and outdoor learning, and there is a good balance of adult-led sessions as well as purposeful activities chosen by the children themselves. Plenty of practical play and stimulating focused activities are provided, for example learning about celebrations and different cultures' festivals of light. Children were observed talking about the importance of firework safety on Bonfire Night and the need to take care of their own safety and that of pet animals. An effective programme of learning letters and sounds supports the development of communication, reading and writing skills. Children were seen enjoying role play and developing their speaking and personal skills well when engaged in a variety of role play situations, for example, the 'dark room' outdoors, the hairdressers and the Diwali dressing up activity.

There are rigorous systems for keeping track of children's progress, although leaders recognise that there is some mismatch between the systems used for assessing attainment at the start of the Early Years Foundation Stage and those used for the Foundation Stage Profiles compiled in the Reception Year.

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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 Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

More than half the parents and carers returned their questionnaires. They voice exceptionally favourable views about every aspect of the school. Many express particular praise for the 'nurture group' and the high quality support provided for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Inspectors endorse parents' and carers' overwhelmingly positive views on these and other aspects of the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Hillshott Infant School and Nursery 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 106 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 205 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	83	78	22	21	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	85	80	21	20	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	66	62	39	37	1	1	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	70	66	35	33	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	78	74	28	26	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	69	65	35	33	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	65	61	38	36	1	1	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)	71	67	31	29	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	68	64	35	33	1	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	66	62	39	37	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	63	59	40	38	1	1	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	87	82	19	18	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	86	81	20	19	0	0	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.



8 November 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Hillshott Infant School and Nursery, Letchworth, SG6 1QE

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful when we came to visit your school. Many of you told us how much you enjoy school, and your parents and carers told us how very pleased they are with the school. We agree with them that Hillshott Infant is a good school. It is exceptionally well run by the headteacher and staff team, although we have asked the governing body to further develop its role. We were pleased to see that you are all making good progress throughout the school, from the start of the Nursery through to the end of Year 2. Those of you who need extra help with your learning, especially in the base, the 'nurture group' and in the reading recovery lessons, make excellent progress. We were also impressed by how well you get on together and with your excellent behaviour.

The school works in very close partnership with your parents and carers and with outside agencies to make sure that you all get the help you need to succeed. Staff keep a careful track of how well each of you are doing. One of the features that stands out at your school is the way in which the things you are learning are so closely matched to your individual needs. You benefit from high quality care and support, and that is one of the reasons why you feel so very safe at school.

Another important feature of your school is the consistently good teaching. This has been achieved because staff visit each other's lessons and share good ideas for improvement. Just occasionally, some of you get a bit restless in lessons when you have to sit on the carpet for a long time, so we have asked staff to avoid this. We have also asked them always to correct spelling mistakes and to give you all more responsibility for checking your own and each other's spellings. That means that you can all play a part in making your work, and the school, even better. A notable feature of your lessons is the way teachers give you clear learning objectives and show you why what you are learning is important. We have asked teachers to help you more with this by displaying these clearly for you so that you can read and remind yourselves of them during the course of the lesson.

Thank you again for being so kind and helpful, and our very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Selwyn Ward

Lead inspector

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