

Hillcross Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102655
Local Authority	Merton
Inspection number	355228
Inspection dates	15–16 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Wendy Ratcliff HMI

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	429
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Julie Hyam
Headteacher	Rachel Jacob
Date of previous school inspection	4 March 2009
School address	Ashridge Way Morden SM4 4EE
Telephone number	020 8542 6936
Fax number	020 8540 6743
Email address	rachel.jacob@hillcross.merton.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
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M2 7LA

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 25 lessons, held meetings with the headteacher, representatives of the governing body, senior staff and pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at policies, planning and assessment evidence and monitoring records. The team received 241 parental questionnaires, 171 pupil questionnaires and 46 questionnaires from staff. Inspectors met some parents and carers informally.

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

- The effectiveness of the newly-formed governing body in challenging and supporting the senior leadership team.
- How effectively assessment information is being used to ensure teaching and the curriculum are meeting the needs of all pupils and providing them with the challenge and support they need to achieve well.
- Pupils' achievement, particularly in Key Stage 2.
- Whether monitoring, evaluation and improvement planning at all levels of leadership are rigorous, accurate and helping to raise standards, particularly in teaching and learning.

Information about the school

This is a larger-than-average sized primary school. Pupils come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, with a high proportion of children from different minority ethnic groups. Just over half of the pupils are from White British backgrounds. The remaining children come from a range of other ethnic groups, the largest being of Asian backgrounds. A higher-than-average number of pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average, but a higher than average number of pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Fewer pupils than average are known to be eligible for free school meals. Since the new headteacher took up post in January 2010, the proportion of pupils joining and leaving the school at other than the usual times has fallen from above average levels. A new governing body was formed in September 2010, and includes members who were part of the interim executive board. The school achieved Healthy School status in 2007.

A private provider runs the Little Caterpillars Day Nursery on the school site and offers extended childcare, including a before- and after-school club. This provision did not form part of the 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

Hillcross Primary School is an outstanding school where each pupil is highly valued. The headteacher is very much at the heart of the school's success and staff, pupils, parents and carers agree. One parent reports, 'Wow, what a different school from a few years ago. It has improved significantly in so many areas.' As a result of the school being extremely well led and managed at all levels, it has made exceptional progress since the last inspection and has highly effective systems in place to ensure that these are maintained. Staff morale is high across the whole school and staff show a strong commitment to helping pupils to do well. As one staff member commented, 'We are a united team with a clear vision of educating our children together.' The senior leaders, together with the governing body, are clear where the school needs to improve further. This includes continuing to raise attainment for those pupils in Key Stage 2, particularly in mathematics. They communicate high expectations for the school community to work towards challenging, yet realistic targets. As a result, the school has an excellent capacity to build on their success and sustain improvement.

The school has been extremely successful in securing highly positive relationships with all groups of parents and carers, particularly those who have in the past been more reluctant to engage with the school. Parents and carers appreciate the family learning sessions and opportunities they have to find out how well their children are doing, with 95% of families attending parents' evenings. Parents and carers express their satisfaction with the school and this is reflected in comments such as, 'The school has given us tools that have made us effective, productive contributors to our children's educational need.'

Pupils greatly enjoy coming to school and are enthusiastic to learn. Their behaviour is exemplary both in lessons and when moving around the school. All pupils are quick to say that they always feel safe at school because the adults look after them so well, and their parents and carers agree. Pupils are developing a great deal of knowledge and a secure understanding of how to maintain a healthy lifestyle. The 'Philosophy for Children' programme is providing pupils with many opportunities to understand factors that may affect their emotional well-being. There are many exciting opportunities for pupils to participate in physical activity, such as the 'Big Pedal' and 'Bling your Bike'. Pupils are proud and committed to their school and they take their additional responsibilities very seriously, for example on the school council or showing visitors around the school.

Children start school with skills that are below age-related expectations and make good, and for some, exceptionally good, progress in their learning. Attainment in English and mathematics for pupils in Key Stage 2 has been in line with national expectations and has improved year-on-year. The school's assessment data and lesson observations show the accelerated progress pupils are now making across the school and particularly in English in Year 6. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make exceptionally good

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progress relative to their starting points. The use of assessment to support learning is a particular strength. Robust processes are in place, which include extremely accurate early identification for those who require additional support and systems to very closely monitor the progress of all pupils. Pupils know their targets, 'steps to success,' for both literacy and mathematics and effective feedback through marking is extremely successful. This helps pupils to clearly understand the next steps in their learning, although feedback through marking is less consistent in mathematics within Key Stage 2.

The quality of teaching is outstanding as the great majority of lessons motivate and enthuse pupils in securing at least good and sometimes better progress in their learning. A common feature of teaching throughout the school is the focus on meeting individual needs through creative activities. Support staff are highly skilled in supporting small groups and individuals. While lessons in mathematics for the older children are consistently good, the use of resources and activities are less creative.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve the attainment of pupils at Key Stage 2, particularly in mathematics by:
 - injecting further creativity in the teaching of mathematics
 - ensuring consistency of feedback in marking so pupils more fully understand their next steps in learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

The lessons observed during the inspection confirm that the majority of pupils across the school are making at least good progress in their learning, with some making exceptional progress, and no groups underachieving. The excellent and well-targeted support for those pupils who speak English as an additional language and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities means that most of these pupils make exceptionally good progress, as do those pupils from minority ethnic groups. Attainment in Key Stage 2 has been broadly average in recent years with English as the stronger area. However, the school's tracking and lesson observations show that pupils in the current Year 6 are on track to attain higher results.

Pupils have exceptionally positive attitudes towards their learning and show an excellent understanding of a wide range of social and moral issues. Attendance is above average. They show a great deal of pride in their school and in the care and respect they show for each other. The use of the 'Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning' and 'Good to Be Me' themes are helping pupils develop secure understanding of individual qualities and the diversity of others. Pupils' consistently thoughtful behaviour is a key factor in their successful learning and creates an extremely positive school ethos. Pupils are helped by their teachers and other adults to develop an impressive knowledge of how to keep safe through the 'Philosophy for Children' sessions and an internet focus during anti-bullying week. Pupils have an excellent appreciation of how to keep themselves healthy through participation in regular exercise and maintaining a healthy diet. They highly enjoy the range of sporting activities such as swimming, rock climbing and dance clubs.

Pupils are developing effective workplace skills as they are given responsibility to lead specific projects such as 'mufti days' and running class stalls at the Christmas fair. Pupils

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take a substantial role in both the school and the wider community. They have made significant contributions to the improvement of their school environment such as the newly opened 'Jungle Library'. Pupils talk confidently about raising money for charity and participating in community events. Year 5 pupils are looking forward to performing in the 'With One Voice Concert' concert at the end of term as part of their partnership work with 'Merton Music Foundation' and 'Pop for Schools'.

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	1
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	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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

How effective is the provision?

The recently-reviewed creative curriculum is embedding well. The school is making effective use of visitors, such as authors to support topics such as book week, and information and communication technology (ICT) is being used increasing well in lessons. The curriculum is providing a broad range of experiences and links areas of the curriculum well, for example making links across history and English as pupils explore and write about the Egyptians. Pupils are keen to talk about how they are learning in more exciting ways, for example through topics such as the ice age.

Teaching is exemplary because lessons are skilfully planned to support individual learning needs. 'Steps to Success' are clear and carefully explained to all pupils. In the best lessons, teaching is lively, shows creativity and inspires pupils to learn extremely well. This is particularly evident in literacy lessons. An example of this was seen in an imaginative literacy lesson, which focused on a 'lost good friend'. This lesson excited and motivated

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the pupils as they arrived in the classroom to find the teaching assistant upset as she had lost her friend. Pupils were keen to find the 'lost friend' and developed their skills in using adjectives as they described the missing friend. Lessons in mathematics are consistently good in both key stages, but show less creativity in Key Stage 2. Assessment information is used exceptionally well to identify targets, monitor pupils' progress and identify where additional support may be required. For example, the 'numicon' intervention programme is having an impact on the progress of individual pupils in mathematics. The vast majority of pupils' work is expertly marked and pupils feel teachers work hard to help them to do the best they can. However, marking is slightly less consistent for mathematics in Key Stage 2.

Care, guidance and support for pupils are of extremely high quality, are consistently applied and do not disadvantage any one group. Parent support advisers offer enrichment opportunities for family-based learning, for example through a successful cookery course. The school is extremely proactive in supporting families who are more vulnerable and works very closely with other agencies to ensure pupils receive the support they need to succeed.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

A dedicated and enthusiastic senior team ably supports the headteacher. Together they have been highly successful in inspiring the school community to rapidly overcome previous weaknesses. This has resulted in significant improvements for the outcomes of individuals and groups of pupils. The school community shows an excellent commitment to continue on their journey of improvement. One member of staff commented, 'I am proud to be part of Hillcross and consider we have made tremendous strides in the education of children in our care.' The governing body already knows the school well; its members have good levels of expertise and are providing the school with an effective balance of challenge and support. The school provides excellent value for money. There has been a vast improvement in the school environment and this is being used exceptionally well. The governing body and the headteacher have worked increasingly hard to ensure the school's deficit budget is reducing.

Robust procedures, which are rigorously applied, ensure the safeguarding of all pupils. The school is extremely successful in engaging parents and carers and other partners, and working efficiently together to promote each pupil's personal development and well-being. Such partnerships include the Merton connecting classrooms project, where pupils are developing an increased awareness of others' cultures, for example those of Pakistani heritage. This is an inclusive school which ensures all pupils enjoy equal opportunities to

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succeed. The inclusion manager is instrumental in ensuring that the progress of individuals and groups of pupils is rigorously monitored; as a result, no groups are underperforming. The school has established excellent partnerships with other key agencies and effectively uses the Common Assessment Framework to ensure pupils receive the additional support they need to do as well as they can in their learning. Community cohesion is good as the school has an exceptional understanding of its own community and celebrates the wide range of backgrounds the pupils represent. The school is developing national and international links well. For example, the school council has been developing partnerships with local and national Members of Parliament, which included a visit to the Houses of Parliament. Successful links are developing with a school in Buckinghamshire. The community cohesion action plan comprehensively illustrates the strategies and arrangements for this area of school life.

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	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

The quality of provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. As a result, they make very good or better progress in all areas of learning. Children start school with skills and abilities that are below age-related expectations. Communication, language and literacy is consistently a weaker area. The 'Every Child a Talker' project has made a significant impact on the progress children make in their speaking and listening skills at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Highly effective transition arrangements mean that children settle quickly. Children are safe, happy and confident learners. They show great enthusiasm for learning because teaching is highly imaginative, well planned and inspiring and successfully encourages a curiosity and fascination of the world. Children were bursting with enthusiasm to tell inspectors about the incident that had happened overnight. An area of the classroom was 'taped off' as a polar bear had visited and left an awful mess. This included paw prints and blocks of ice. The Ice Queen

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had visited that morning apologising for the mess. She explained that the polar bear had heard great noises, which were different from the sound of the crashing waves he hears at home. The children went on a sound hunt around the school, wearing their 'listening ears' in order to collect sounds for the polar bear to take home.

The children are developing a successful understanding of the importance of being kind and careful and their behaviour is exceptional. For example, as two children meet on the 'stepping shoes' one child quickly moves to one side to let the other child pass. Adults reinforce this behaviour with a token for being kind. There is a comprehensive balance of adult led, group and child-initiated activities. Leadership and management are outstanding due to highly effective monitoring and identification of areas to improve. Children's tracking data are meticulously analysed and, as a result, planning is securely focused on children's next steps, such as small motor skills for boys in correctly holding a pencil and the development of 'team working' for some girls.

Children already know how well they are doing and can identify if they have met any of the 'steps to success' as they sing the calculator song. Children in Reception are keen to share their 'learning journeys' and clearly articulate what they could do in Nursery and what they can now do. Children are developing a secure understanding of how to keep themselves safe and healthy. As children play as pirates on the boat in the outside area, the adult skilfully reminds the captain not to stand on the side of the boat as they continue on their adventure.

Parents appreciate the hard work of the dedicated staff team. Parents' comments include, 'The teachers are passionate about what they do and are very inspiring,' and, 'The unit this term on globetrotting has particularly captured my child's interest ? she has tried French food, done Chinese dancing and made a North American dream catcher.'

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Views of parents and carers

All of the parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire say that the school keeps their children safe. The very large majority say that their children enjoy school, are happy with their children's experiences and that the school helps them to support their children's learning. Their responses show high levels of satisfaction with the work of the school and how effectively the school is led and managed. A few parents voiced reservations relating to individual concerns. These did not follow a pattern. Several parents and carers made positive comments about the progress their children are making such as, 'My child has made fantastic progress,' and, 'I was overwhelmed at the progress my child has made.'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Hillcross Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 241 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 429 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	160	66	78	32	3	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	169	70	71	29	1	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	142	59	94	39	2	1	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	133	55	102	42	5	2	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	149	62	90	37	1	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	140	58	96	40	5	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	104	43	129	54	4	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)	84	35	132	55	7	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	113	47	117	49	2	1	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	98	41	122	51	11	5	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	110	46	120	50	7	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	149	62	88	37	2	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	156	65	79	33	4	2	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.



17 March 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Hillcross Primary School, Morden SM4 4EE

This letter is to thank you for your help during the recent inspection of your school and to tell you what we found. We thoroughly enjoyed being in your lessons, attending your assemblies and meeting with you. We were particularly impressed by the enthusiasm you have for your school and your excellent behaviour. You are exceptionally kind to each other and respect each other's different backgrounds. You told us that you had noticed the huge improvements in the school since the new headteacher joined.

It was great to hear how you have helped the adults to make your school a bright, vibrant and attractive place to learn. The new 'Jungle Library' is a very good example. You told us how much you enjoy coming to school. We were not surprised, having found out about some of the exciting things your teachers plan for you. It was good to hear how much Year 3 had enjoyed their trip to Fishbourne Roman villa and how excited they are to learn more about the Romans. Your headteacher and all the other adults are extremely keen for you to do as well as you can in your learning and care for you exceptionally well. They work very closely with other people outside the school to provide you with excellent levels of support. You told us that you always feel very safe at school and your parents agree. It was good to hear about the different responsibilities you are given, such as being on the school council and leading assemblies.

Your school has improved very quickly and is now an outstanding school. You make at least good, and sometimes better, progress in your learning. We have asked the staff to help the older pupils make even better progress in mathematics. They can do this by making these lessons even more creative and ensure the feedback you get when teachers mark your books helps you know exactly what you need to do next. You can help by continuing to work really hard in your lessons. We hope that pupils in Year 5 enjoy participating in the 'With One Voice Concert' at the Albert Hall at the end of the term. Thank you again for making us feel so welcome when we came to your school.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Ratcliff

Her Majesty's Inspector

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