

Highfields Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114769
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	378925
Inspection dates	9–10 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Julie Winyard 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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	261
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Malcolm Gentry
Headteacher	Hilary Cook
Date of previous school inspection	13 October 2008
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. They observed 13 lessons; saw 10 teachers; and held meetings with parents and carers, groups of pupils, members of the governing body and staff. They observed the school's work, and looked at teachers' planning, the school's self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, safeguarding documentation and 91 parental questionnaires.

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

- The quality of attainment and progress in Key Stage 2, especially for higher-ability pupils in English and mathematics.
- The quality of progress in Key Stage 1, given the dip in attainment in 2011.
- The effectiveness of teaching and assessment, including the match of activities to pupils' ability levels and the quality of verbal and written feedback.

Information about the school

Highfields Primary School is around average in size. The proportions of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, from minority ethnic groups and who speak English as an additional language are much lower than found nationally. There are lower-than-average numbers of pupils identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities and with a statement of special educational needs. There is a breakfast club run by the governing body. The school has the Basic Skills and Eco Schools Silver awards, and 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

Highfields Primary School is a good school. The headteacher gives outstanding pastoral leadership which has resulted in a warm, friendly, nurturing environment where pupils feel safe and are eager to learn. In the words of one pupil, 'I love this school!' The overwhelming majority of parents and carers are delighted to bring their children to the school. There are excellent partnerships with parents and carers, who have many opportunities to become involved in their children's learning. The words of one parent are echoed by many: 'Highfields is a wonderful school. All our children have been happy there and felt safe and valued. The headteacher is excellent. I am always impressed with how she knows EVERY child's name and is able to make each one of them feel special.' Because of the nurturing environment there are excellent relationships between pupils and adults throughout the school. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding both in the classroom and around the school. Their enthusiasm for school means they have good attitudes to learning and this, alongside the good curriculum that engages their interest, is reflected in their above-average attainment and the good progress they make from Reception to Year 6. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make excellent progress from their various starting points, because support is particularly well focused on their individual needs. The governing body provides good challenge as well as support to the school. Safeguarding procedures are good and meet all requirements.

Although the school has created a wonderful learning environment it is not yet maximising pupils' outcomes. Teaching overall is good but in some lessons teachers talk for too long and do not give pupils sufficient opportunities to discuss ideas and think things through for themselves; therefore they are not yet taking responsibility for their learning or becoming independent learners. In some lessons learning outcomes are very closely linked to learning activities; however this is not always the case and sometimes assessment opportunities are missed. Pupils are not always sufficiently challenged and there remain inconsistencies in the quality of feedback given to pupils, both orally during lessons and in teachers' written marking.

The excellent pastoral leadership of the school is not yet fully carried through into the leadership of teaching and learning, which remains satisfactory. Teachers do not have a shared understanding of what high-quality teaching looks like because subject managers are not given sufficient responsibility for leading improvements in their subjects, including monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. Although senior leaders monitor teaching, the outcomes are not always followed up systematically or robustly. However, the school has made good improvement in the key issues from

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the last inspection and this, combined with the good level of challenge given by the governing body, good achievement of pupils and the highly positive climate for learning created in the school by the headteacher and her staff, means that the school has a good capacity to make further improvement. The school gives good value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and assessment by ensuring that:
 - pupils have more time for discussion so that they think for themselves, take responsibility for their learning and become independent learners
 - teachers consistently identify the key learning outcomes for all groups of pupils in all lessons, and that activities are sharply focused on these outcomes and appropriately assessed
 - all pupils are challenged to do their best work in every lesson
 - teachers' feedback and written marking consistently identify the next steps in pupils' learning.

- Improve the leadership of teaching and learning by ensuring that:
 - teachers have a shared understanding of what high-quality teaching looks like
 - subject managers take responsibility for leading improvement in the quality of teaching and learning and the curriculum in their subjects
 - senior leaders monitor and evaluate the work of the school frequently and robustly.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Pupils enter the school with skills that are very slightly below those expected for their age. They make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and through the school. By the end of Year 6 most pupils' attainment is above national expectations. Although pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2011 was significantly below average, these pupils made good progress from their starting points and due to the good provision made for them are continuing to make good progress. Some pupils in last year's Year 6 did not appear to have made the progress expected of them. However, the school realises that this was due to some inaccurate assessment when these pupils were in Year 2. Evidence from lessons seen during the inspection indicates that pupils' attainment is above average and that they are making good progress. It is clear from scrutiny of current pupils' work that assessment throughout the school is now accurate.

Pupils have a good understanding of how to live healthily and there is a good take-up of sporting opportunities offered by the school. However, this is not always reflected in some of their food choices. Pupils have a very caring attitude towards each other and any rare incidents of name-calling or unkindness are dealt with

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immediately and effectively by the school. Pupils are confident to talk to all staff if they have a problem.

Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the caring and happy school community. They are thrilled to have achieved their silver award for Eco schools and the school council meets regularly and discusses issues raised from class meetings. Currently discussion tends to focus on improvements to the school environment more than on what might improve pupils’ learning and progress. Excellent links with the nearby nursery and high school result in seamless moves into the school and then on to the next school. There is a regular programme of visits from high school teachers and pupils get several opportunities to visit their next school. Pupils’ attendance is above average and the school has worked very hard to eradicate inappropriate absences. Thus pupils receive good preparation for the next stage in their education.

Pupils’ good spiritual development is evident in their ability to reflect on issues like remembrance. Their excellent moral and social development is displayed in their behaviour towards each other and their ability, when given the opportunity, to collaborate in class. Pupils’ cultural development is satisfactory as, although they are beginning to develop links with children in more diverse areas of the United Kingdom, they do not yet have a good understanding of cultural similarities and differences.

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	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	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

How effective is the provision?

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

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In the best lessons teachers plan clear and straightforward learning objectives to match the ability groups in their class. Activities are engaging and pupils enjoy learning new things. Teachers assess throughout the lesson what pupils know and understand, and adapt their teaching if need be; for example, in a mathematics lesson the teacher simplified the objectives so that all pupils could achieve their best. Teachers ensure that all pupils are involved in thinking about the questions that are asked because they get the opportunity to talk to a partner about the question. In this way the teacher can hear what all the children’s ideas are rather than the one child who raises their hand to answer. Where teaching is less effective work is not well matched to all ability groups and lessons are dominated by teacher talk. In these lessons pupils remain well behaved but they are clearly frustrated about not being able to get on with the learning activity.

The curriculum is enhanced by a wide range of interesting and exciting extra-curricular activities. For example, Year 5 really enjoyed the opportunity for a residential visit to the Norfolk coast. The film club is well attended, as are all the lunchtime clubs. Information and communication technology is used well to support pupils’ learning. The recently introduced topic-based approach to learning is proving very successful in motivating pupils to work exceptionally hard. Pupils and their parents and carers talk about what fun the Moby Dick theme was, and pupils’ good quality of work reflects their interest and enthusiasm. Although these themes are successful the school is not yet evaluating their effectiveness in a systematic way.

Pupils receive outstanding care, guidance and support. This is evident in the ethos of the school and the way teaching assistants support pupils’ learning in most classes. The learning and development of pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, is exceptionally well supported through very careful planning and rigorous evaluation of outcomes. The learning mentor makes a good contribution to helping pupils develop confidence in themselves and their ability to learn. There is excellent supervision of the breakfast club and those pupils who choose to attend enjoy a healthy breakfast. Following this pupils have good supervision and a good range of activities to carry out until lessons start.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has been highly successful in embedding an outstanding ethos of

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care and support for all pupils that is shared by all staff. This drive for improvement has not yet had sufficient impact on the management of teaching and learning. The members of the governing body have a good knowledge and understanding of the school and have developed good systems to enable them to monitor its work; however parents and carers are not always aware of their role played by its members or how to approach them. The school has excellent partnerships with external agencies. Local businesses really enjoy their contact with pupils; for example the local farming community helped children to plant flowers in the centre of the nearby town. The well-established links with the high school mean that older pupils have access to additional facilities like science laboratories and a much larger sports hall. The special needs coordinator has forged outstanding partnerships with specialist teachers. She has excellent systems to identify precisely what each pupil's needs are, and ensures that these are met through a range of special interventions that are carefully monitored to ensure they are enabling all pupils to make rapid progress. The school ensures that all pupils are treated equally well and that all their achievements are celebrated. However, they are not always given sufficient opportunity to share their ideas and learning experiences in every lesson.

The school has good and robust safeguarding procedures, and staff and the governing body are fully aware of their respective duties in order to keep all pupils safe. There is excellent cohesion within the school and local communities, and links are beginning to be established with schools in Africa thanks to clear planning. Pupils do not yet have a full understanding of cultural similarities and differences although they recognise that they need to help others less fortunate than themselves; for example, they have bought several goats for their link school in Namibia.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
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	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	2
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

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

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Pupils are extremely well cared for and feel very safe in every part of the Early Years Foundation Stage as well as the rest of the school. They love having their special friends from Years 5 and 6 to help them settle quickly into life at school. They already know many of the staff before they start at the school because they are visited by them while in the nearby nursery. Children make good progress because they rapidly make good relationships with each other and with the adults who work with them. As a result of this children behave exceptionally well.

There are a good range and variety of learning activities inside and outside the classroom, including an appropriate balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities. The curriculum is enhanced by visits from special people like the local police and fire service. The children are given good opportunities to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding across all the areas of learning. Teaching is mostly good, although there remains some satisfactory teaching. The best lessons help all children to take an active part; for example in retelling and acting out stories.

The leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good overall. The phase leader has introduced good systems to make sure children settle in well and makes visits to the nursery with the headteacher. Parents and carers are encouraged to take an active part through special sessions when they come in and talk about their children’s achievements at home and in the nursery. Good use is made of assessment to check children’s progress and development. However, monitoring is not yet sufficiently evaluative to provide a precise focus on what works well and what needs further improvement.

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

Most parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire are very pleased with the school, and many added positive written comments. A very few parents and carers raised concerns about their children’s safety. The inspection team found that pupils are outstandingly well cared for and feel exceptionally safe in school. At a meeting held with parents and carers, most were exceptionally positive about all 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 Highfields 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 91 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 261 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	68	75	22	24	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	63	69	25	27	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	58	64	28	31	1	1	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	61	67	26	29	1	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	65	71	23	25	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	63	69	21	23	5	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	59	65	26	29	5	5	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)	49	54	28	31	2	2	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	53	58	30	33	3	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	46	51	30	33	8	9	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	48	53	27	30	7	8	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	62	68	23	25	5	5	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	68	75	20	22	2	2	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 8 April 2011 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 2010/11 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.



11 November 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Highfields Primary School, Manningtree, CO11 2BN

Thank you all for the wonderful welcome you gave us to your school. We were very impressed with how much you love the school and with how safe and happy you feel. We think your headteacher and all the staff do an excellent job in ensuring you are very well looked after and that there are lots of interesting learning activities. I would like to say a special thank you to all those children who came to talk to us about their work. It was lovely to meet you and hear your views. It was great to see one of you making a very special effort to improve your writing by adding more interesting connectives. I was also impressed by how you like to improve your stories and other writing when the teacher explains how to do this. It was good to see how active the school council are in making suggestions to improve the school. We think you could also make helpful suggestions about how all teachers mark your work to make it clear what you have done well and how to make your work even better.

We have judged the school to be good. You make good progress and attain above-average standards because of the good teaching you receive and your excellent behaviour in class. You all listen very well to your teachers. However, we noticed that sometimes you are disappointed not to be able to take part more and we have asked the teachers to give more time for discussion and for you to think things through for yourselves. It is not clear in all your lessons what the teachers expect you to learn by the end of the lesson, and we have asked them to make sure this is really clear and also to make sure all of you get the right level of challenge all the time.

Everyone works very hard together to make your school a lovely place to learn. However, we think that teachers who look after curriculum subjects could be doing more, especially by visiting lessons and seeing you learn and also by looking at your work. Your headteacher looks after you exceptionally well and we think she and the senior teachers should make sure the teaching you get and the work you do are as good as they possibly can be.

Thank you again for a great visit to Highfields and I would like to wish you all every success in your future lives.

Yours sincerely

Julie Winyard
Her Majesty's Inspector

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