

Hilltop Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	137245
Local Authority	N/A
Inspection number	385583
Inspection dates	10–11 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Susan Thomas-Pounce

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	273
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Eileen Bull
Headteacher	Alison Waite
Date of previous school inspection	5 May 2009
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Age group	7–11
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They visited 12 lessons, and ten teachers were observed. Inspectors held meetings with representatives of the governing body, an external consultant, members of staff and pupils. They observed the school's work, looked at pupils' books and scrutinised a range of documentation, including safeguarding and other policy documents, the school development plan and records of pupils' progress. Inspectors also took into account the 80 questionnaires returned by parents and carers, together with questionnaires from pupils and staff.

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

- The inspection team considered how well teaching and the curriculum are increasing pupils' progress in mathematics, particularly for more-able pupils.
- It looked at the consistency of pupils' understanding of the advice given on how to improve their work.
- It explored the effectiveness and rigour of the school's self-evaluation by leaders at all levels.

Information about the school

This is a larger than average school for its type. Most pupils are of White British heritage and very few are at the early stage of learning to speak English. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is below the national average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is much lower than that found nationally. The school holds a number of awards including recognition of its work to promote healthy lifestyles. The school became an Academy in August 2011.

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

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

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Hilltop Junior School provides its pupils with a satisfactory standard of education. The school cares well for all pupils with the result that most aspects of their personal development are good. Parents and carers are supportive and pupils enjoy coming to school. This is reflected in the above-average level of attendance. The school makes very good provision for pupils to take part in a planned programme of outdoor education. Pupils are eager to join in all the activities provided by the school. Consequently, they have an outstanding understanding of how to lead healthy and active lifestyles. Pupils are proud of their school and are keen to make a good contribution to its development. The school works increasingly successfully with parents and carers. Their views are canvassed regularly and they are encouraged to learn how to help their children at home.

The school has established systems to ensure that pupils' attainment is accurately recorded when they first join the school, and meticulously tracked throughout the school. This enables leaders to identify clearly any whose progress gives cause for concern. Pupils begin in Year 3 with standards that are broadly in line with those expected for their age in English and mathematics. They make satisfactory progress as they move through the school and leave Year 6 with standards in line with those expected nationally. Progress in mathematics, while satisfactory overall, is not as good as it should be, with boys who are more able not always achieving their potential. Inspection evidence confirms that the gap is beginning to close, although rates of progress vary between year groups. In addition, there are too few opportunities for all to practise their mathematical skills in other subjects. There are no significant differences in the progress of pupils who are learning English as an additional language and their peers, or in the progress of those pupils identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Teaching is satisfactory and improving, with examples of good teaching across the school. In the best lessons, teachers explain carefully what it is the pupils are expected to learn and use assessment information to plan work for different ability groups. Where teaching is less successful, teachers do not ensure work is sufficiently challenging for all groups of pupils and do not provide opportunities for them, particularly the more-able boys, to move on sooner to more taxing work. Although termly meetings are helping staff to be more accountable for their pupils' outcomes, there is scope for senior leaders to support class teachers more in analysing data to identify gaps in the knowledge of pupils in their class. Despite improvements and

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some common strengths in teaching, there is not enough good teaching to ensure that pupils make consistently good progress.

The otherwise satisfactory curriculum is enriched by a good range of clubs, visits and visitors. These stimulate pupils' learning and promote their personal development well. There are signs that improvement in curriculum planning is beginning to raise pupils' attainment, but development has been underway for too short a time for the impact to be fully realised in all subjects. The school's focus on improving pupils' writing is beginning to show an impact. More pupils are using interesting vocabulary and phrases and understanding how to improve their writing. Results of assessments of Year 6 pupils show that attainment in English is improving. Overall, achievement is satisfactory.

The headteacher provides firm direction and members of the governing body visit the school regularly and provide support. Since becoming an Academy, the governing body has reviewed services to ensure the school is getting best value for money. Senior leaders have a clear vision of areas for development and they are working in close partnership with several local schools to improve provision. With the headteacher, senior leaders have begun to evaluate their impact in monitoring all aspects of provision. Teaching is regularly monitored, but points for improvement are not always followed through with enough rigour to lead to rapid change. Although good improvements have been made in pupils' writing, other strategies have yet to show an impact. Therefore, the capacity to improve further is satisfactory.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit from an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that 85% is good or better by December 2012 by:
 - ensuring that teachers provide work that is consistently more challenging for all groups of pupils, particularly the more-able boys
 - ensuring, through monitoring, that identified development points are acted upon and embedded in daily practice
 - giving class teachers and support staff, where appropriate, more involvement in analysis of data to increase their accountability for the outcomes of pupils.
- Further raise attainment in mathematics by:
 - ensuring teachers identify and plan every possible opportunity to promote numeracy skills in subjects other than mathematics.

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Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Pupils have positive attitudes to their work, their achievement is satisfactory and they generally enjoy their learning. The school’s baseline assessment shows that pupils enter the school with broadly average attainment. Although progress for boys has been slower, particularly in mathematics, both boys and girls make satisfactory progress. Pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and the small number from minority ethnic groups make the same progress as their peers. Although satisfactory overall, there are inconsistencies in the rates of pupils’ progress in lessons. In a good English lesson, pupils were highly motivated by a topic on the Second World War. Both boys and girls were eager to share their poems and the level of discussion that followed enabled them to learn successfully from each other. The work was clearly matched to their interests and challenged them well. When the activity does not provide appropriate challenge, the pace of work slows. In some lessons, more-able pupils were not challenged by their work because it was not appropriate to their skills and understanding.

All pupils behave sensibly in lessons and move efficiently between whole-class work and group work. They are very courteous to adults and show respect for each other. The very large majority of pupils feel safe within the school. They have confidence that any concerns will be tackled by staff. Pupils are exceptionally aware of the importance of healthy eating and the need to exercise. For example, they have great respect for the outdoor learning environment through their regular participation in the strong outdoor education programme provided by the school. Pupils enjoy a broad range of after-school clubs, which are well attended. Moments of reflection are undertaken thoughtfully by pupils in assemblies and they sing together with pride. The way the whole school paused to remember those who died in combat was impressive. Pupils are eager to take on responsibilities within the school, as members of the school council and playground helpers. They contribute well to the wider community, for example raising money for local and national charities as well as singing in nationally organised events. The social, moral, spiritual and cultural development of pupils is good.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2

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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Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The school has a caring ethos in which all pupils, especially those whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable, receive good support. There is clear evidence that this support has been effective in improving the life chances of individual pupils. Regular communication with parents and carers ensures a coordinated approach to any emerging problems. There are well-established links with the full range of support agencies to meet the needs of individual pupils.

There is a core of successful teaching that ensures that progress is at least satisfactory and improving. In satisfactory lessons, activities are not sufficiently challenging for pupils to make good progress, and there is a failure to match work carefully enough to the full range of abilities within groups. Where teaching is more effective, teachers set clear learning objectives and plan a range of activities based on their knowledge of pupils' prior learning. Questioning is used effectively to assess learning and to extend thinking. While in nearly all lessons teachers show perceptiveness in how each lesson can contribute to furthering pupils' literacy skills, they are less skilled in promoting numeracy across the whole curriculum. Assessment procedures have improved recently and teachers are becoming more aware of the progress made by different groups of pupils. Marking is regular and often includes supportive comments, but the provision of clear advice on what pupils need to do in order to improve is inconsistent across the school. Teachers benefit from pupils' good attitudes, and above average attendance and relationships are strengths.

The curriculum has been revised recently, and closer links between subjects are making learning more exciting and encouraging independence. There is provision for literacy across subjects but development of mathematical skills across the curriculum is underdeveloped. The curriculum for personal development is good. There is a good range of enrichment opportunities, which enables pupils to enjoy a wide variety of visits and to benefit from visitors to the school. The school offers a good choice of musical and sporting activities for pupils, some of them in conjunction with other schools.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher's purposeful leadership has given the school clear direction. There is a strong commitment to pupils' personal development and well-being. The senior leadership team and the governing body have high aspirations and are determined to develop and improve the quality of education provided by the school. Responsibilities for leading the school are now spread more widely. The use of systems to track pupils' progress across all subjects and to monitor the quality of teaching and learning is showing signs of improvement. However, areas for development identified by the monitoring of teaching and learning are not always followed through rigorously enough. Regular pupil-progress meetings are held and are increasingly used as a means of holding staff to account for pupils' outcomes. The next step is to support staff to make better use of performance data to ensure acceleration in pupils' progress.

The school is aware of the areas in need of development and has put in place appropriate plans to address them. Action plans focus clearly on improving teaching and raising pupils' attainment. They have quantifiable criteria by which success can be measured. Gaps in performance between different groups are closing but some key differences in the performance of boys and girls remain. Improvements in literacy have been more effective than in mathematics.

The governing body is appropriately organised, well informed and has a clear commitment to pupils, their families and the community. Members can point to ways in which they have offered challenge to the school in order to shape its direction. However, their success in tackling weaknesses identified in the last inspection, although ongoing, is not fully embedded. There are well-defined systems for safeguarding and child protection and the organisation of the curriculum ensures that pupils understand how to keep themselves safe. The school engages well with community interests and with parental expectations. Potential discrimination is tackled resolutely. However, equality of opportunity is satisfactory since not all pupils make as much progress as they should. The school is a cohesive community, and there are real strengths in pupils' involvement with others beyond the school and the immediate community. Although there are appropriate policies and procedures to promote community cohesion, as yet they are not fully evaluated. The good links with outside agencies help the school to provide well for those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those whose circumstances make them vulnerable.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers returning questionnaires was lower than seen nationally. Almost all those responding to the questionnaire said that their children enjoyed school. Most were happy with all other aspects of the school. A few parents and carers have concerns about the progress their children are making. Inspectors agree that progress for those pupils who could do more challenging work is not yet as good as it should be. There are signs that pupils' progress is improving, especially in literacy. Many parents and carers made positive comments about the school and in particular the leadership of the headteacher. Comments included, 'I have always found the teaching staff, office staff and the headteacher very approachable, enthusiastic and supportive'.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Hilltop Junior 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 80 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 273 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total		Total		Total		Total	
My child enjoys school	46	58	31	39	2	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	56	70	21	26	2	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	35	44	38	48	7	9	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	35	44	41	51	2	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	42	53	36	45	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	38	48	34	43	4	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	39	49	37	46	3	4	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)	39	49	31	39	2	3	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	39	49	36	46	2	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	32	40	41	51	2	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	32	40	41	51	4	5	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	44	55	30	38	6	8	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	47	59	31	39	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	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 08 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.



14 November 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Hilltop Junior School, Wickford, SS11 8LT

Thank you very much for your warm welcome when we visited your school recently. We really enjoyed talking to you, looking at your work and watching you learn. This letter is to tell you the outcome of the inspection and what we have asked the school to do to become even better.

- You go to a happy, welcoming school that provides a satisfactory quality of education.
- You have a very good understanding of how to keep healthy.
- You behave well, work hard and feel safe.
- There is a good range of clubs, visits and visitors that add interest to the curriculum.
- The staff look after you well, particularly those of you who have difficulties.
- The school works hard to develop links and partnerships.

We always leave the school with some suggestions as to how it could improve. We have asked your headteacher and staff to improve the teaching so that you make more rapid progress by:

- providing work that is more challenging
- using information about your attainment and progress more rigorously.

We would also like the school leaders to:

- do more to help you improve your numeracy skills in other subjects.

You can all help by making sure you tell your teachers if work is too easy or too hard. We wish you all the best for your future learning.

Yours sincerely

Susan Thomas-Pounce
Lead inspector

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