

St Helen's Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	118169
Local authority	Isle of Wight
Inspection number	395589
Inspection dates	22–23 May 2012
Lead inspector	Kath Beck

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	85
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gordon Kendall
Headteacher	Jane Loader
Date of previous school inspection	27 March 2009
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Introduction

Inspection team

Kath Beck

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector spent approximately five hours observing teaching and learning led by five teachers and additional staff. Discussions were held with parents, carers, members of staff and a representative of the Interim Executive Board. The inspector also spoke with pupils during lunchtime and in a formal meeting, and listened to pupils read. The inspector took account of the responses to the online Parent View survey in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at the federation and school improvement plans, the minutes of meetings of the Interim Executive Board, records and reports about pupils' progress, and records to show the monitoring of the quality of teaching. In addition, the inspector looked at records of attendance, and arrangements to safeguard pupils' health and safety. The responses to questionnaires received from staff, pupils in Years 3 to 6 and 37 parents and carers were considered.

Information about the school

This is a much smaller-than-average primary school. Almost all pupils come from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average in comparison to schools nationally. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is above average, but the proportion supported at school action plus is below average. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in the Reception class. Other age groups are taught in mixed-age classes consisting of: Years 1 and 2; Years 3 and 4; and Years 5 and 6. The school meets the current floor targets, the standards expected by the government for attainment and progress.

Since the previous inspection, the age range of pupils has changed from four to nine years to four to 11 years and the number on roll has increased. The school is federated with Brading Primary School. The joint governing body for the federation has been dissolved. An Interim Executive Board has been appointed until a new full governing body for this school is constituted. A privately run pre-school that serves both schools, and which also provides a breakfast and after-school, opened in September 2011. This was inspected separately and its report can be found on the Ofsted website.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school. It is not yet good because of weaknesses in teaching, curriculum, leadership and management and because of below average attendance levels. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Achievement is satisfactory. Pupils join the school with above average starting points. Data from the school show that attainment is above average when they leave. A few pupils with disabilities and special educational needs make good progress in some of their work, but overall pupils' progress is satisfactory. The low attendance levels of some pupils have a detrimental impact on their progress.
- Teaching is satisfactory. Reception children make a good start with reading, but there is a lack of challenge and balance in adult-led and child-initiated activities. Good teaching arises when pupils draw on their own ideas but the frequent use of worksheets limits the demands on pupils to use their initiative. Pupils are right when they say they would like more guidance on how to improve. There is not always sufficient time for pupils to respond to teachers' comments in marking.
- Behaviour and safety are satisfactory. Behaviour observed during the inspection was good in lessons and around the school. Most pupils reveal positive attitudes to work. Parents, carers and pupils, however, raised some concerns that there are occasions when lessons are interrupted by pupils who find it hard to manage their behaviour.
- Leadership and management, including the monitoring of teaching, are satisfactory. A robust action plan has been implemented, but it is too soon to judge its impact. Staff training and performance management are linked to national initiatives and improving teaching. The current initiative on the

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teaching of reading is not yet fully established. Middle leaders do not take sufficient responsibility for their subjects. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is mostly promoted well, although the curriculum provides insufficient opportunities in the creative arts.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Together with the Interim Executive Board, strengthen leadership and management by:
 - measuring the impact of the action plan for the development of the federation in bringing about and sustaining improvements
 - enabling subject leaders to take more responsibility for the development of their subjects and checking their impact on outcomes for pupils
 - ensuring the initiative to enable pupils to learn the sounds letters make (phonics) is monitored for its full implementation in Key Stage 1 and checked for its effectiveness.

- By July 2013 raise the quality of teaching in all classes, including the Early Years Foundation Stage so that it is consistently good by:
 - offering pupils challenging activities that call on them to think critically, explore issues in depth and make decisions about their work, reducing the dependence on worksheets
 - giving pupils more information in lessons and in marking about the steps they need to take to improve their work and achieve highly
 - allowing time for pupils to respond to teachers' comments when work is marked.

- Ensure that the curriculum provides more consistent breadth and balance with:
 - a better balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities in the Early Years Foundation Stage that increase skills in problem solving
 - more opportunities for pupils to apply mathematics skills across a range of subjects
 - more emphasis on the creative arts, especially in Key Stage 2.

- Review the strategies aimed at raising attendance with the objective of achieving at least average levels.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Overall achievement is satisfactory. All parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire are pleased with the progress their children make. Some pupils make good progress, but progress generally is satisfactory.

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Children begin their Reception Year with skills and abilities that are above the levels expected for their age. They sustain this advantage so that outcomes are good, especially in early writing skills and personal, social and emotional development at age five. Progress for pupils in this age group is satisfactory overall and not better because there is too exclusive a focus on child-initiated activities. These lack challenge and do not provide sufficient opportunities for children to solve problems. Adult interventions are supportive, but do not take learning forward effectively enough.

Children make a good start with reading in Reception as they are taught the sounds letters make systematically. They use them successfully when playing games on the computer or completing puzzles to combine sounds to make new words and extend their vocabulary. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 have yet to acquire these skills fully. They have few analytical skills to draw on when confronted with unfamiliar text and find it hard to read fluently or with expression. Attainment in reading in Year 2 is broadly average, although in mathematics and writing it is above average.

In Year 6, pupils enjoy good quality children's literature, for example *The Lord of the Rings*. They have a clear understanding of how the author paints the picture of a character. For example, in a good lesson pupils listened intently and analysed a short video and text to find out the traits of Bilbo Baggins' personality. They worked well together in pairs to devise questions to ask him and gained further insight into character design. The present Year 6 performed well at the end of Key Stage 1 and have sustained this in the intervening years. Their attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is above average. Pupils use a fluent joined script to write briefly for a range of reasons, using accurate grammar and punctuation. In mathematics their attainment is held back by limited opportunities to use and apply their skills to practical situations. That said, a significant proportion of pupils is expected to reach the higher levels of attainment in these subjects this year and this reflects satisfactory progress given their advantaged starting points.

Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall, although some, on occasion, make good progress because they receive intensive support. However, they can become too reliant on their helpers and this limits their opportunities to work independently. All other groups make satisfactory progress.

Quality of teaching

Some teaching is good, but most is satisfactory. Too often tasks are over-defined, and this reduces the challenge for pupils to think through problems independently. Pupils like the way their teachers provide memorable activities, such as reliving what it was like to live through an air raid in the Second World War, but mostly worksheets are frequently used to structure the work. While these enable pupils in the older classes to apply and extend their literacy skills, the activities they contain reduce opportunities for them to use their initiative.

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Teachers make clear at the beginning of the lesson what pupils are to learn and achieve by the end. These objectives are the same for all pupils, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. Tasks for these pupils are not always matched carefully enough to their particular needs. They sometimes rely too much on adult assistance to complete the task.

Pupils make the most of their learning when lessons call on them to engage their feelings and to think critically. Year 1 pupils wrote imaginative and emotive poems about the changing moods of the sea reflecting their sense of awe and wonder of the world around them. It was a challenge for them to think of new language to match the mood of their poem. Their reliance on learning to read whole words and inconsistent knowledge of phonics made it hard to write new words independently. On other occasions pupils use information and communication technology to research fictional or historical characters, for example Samuel Pepys, and extend their reading skills.

Marking has some strengths, particularly in English, where pupils receive a clear idea of what they have done well, but it does not always signpost exactly how they can make their work better. Even when this guidance is provided pupils do not have time to reflect or respond to comments in order to extend their learning. In Reception adults often note what children can do. They do not use this information sufficiently to offer more challenging tasks that excite children's curiosity or to take learning forward in child-initiated activities. Feedback in all classes is often to support the successful completion of a task rather than to take learning forward.

Parents and carers are fully supportive of the work pupils are asked to do at home. They listen to their children read, and especially in Key Stage 1 help them to learn to read new words written individually on cards and memorise them. The majority of parents and carers consider their children are taught well in school. A minority share the view of the inspection that lessons do not challenge pupils sufficiently.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Although behaviour observed during the inspection was good, evidence shows that behaviour over time is satisfactory. Parents, carers and pupils expressed some concerns about disruptions to lessons caused by the inconsiderate behaviour of individuals. School policies to deal with such incidents are consistently applied and effective.

Observations showed pupils as polite, well mannered and articulate. Relationships were seen to be mostly good, with pupils typically treating each other and adults with respect. Pupils are taught to understand that some of their classmates may have difficulties in managing their behaviour and how they can help them. One child commented that 'Being in this school has really changed me. Now I know I can learn I behave a lot better.' Behaviour observed in lessons was mostly good, even when pupils were not fully engaged in their learning. Pupils listened carefully to their teachers and settled quickly to their activities. Mealtimes are happy social occasions.

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Pupils say that there is no systematic bullying of any type, but incidents of unkindness, such as name-calling, or disagreements about who to play with, occur from time to time. They are confident these matters are dealt with by staff and soon resolved. All parents and carers responding to the questionnaire consider their children are safe in school.

Attendance is below average, in part because of some pupils' health issues, or their disability and special educational needs. The school is working closely with support agencies to raise the level of attendance and to ensure that pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable are kept safe.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Uncertainty with regard to the governance of the school over the past two years has been a barrier to the development of the school. The Interim Executive Board is temporarily acting as the governing body. Since January it has acted very quickly, and used its extensive expertise in finance and education to bring security to the school's overall management. The board members already know the school well and are providing rigorous challenge and support. Required policies have been reviewed and updated and the continuing thoroughness of safeguarding and recruitment processes has also been secured.

A cohesive and ambitious approach to development contributes to the school's satisfactory capacity to improve. While the school was without a governing body the headteachers of both schools and pupils worked together on projects, for example 'Best of Both Worlds', to share expertise and successfully improve provision. They used information from these projects, the monitoring of teaching and performance management to work with board members to draw up a sharply focused, and more demanding development plan. This is to bring about further improvements to the quality of teaching, the application of mathematical skills, new methods to track pupils' progress, and to enhance leadership skills, including those of middle leaders. Board members have already gained the funds required to improve the provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, especially the outside area, a key issue at the time of the last inspection. The impact of these initiatives has yet to be closely monitored.

The curriculum prioritises literacy, numeracy and science in terms of the time allocated to these subject areas. The breadth and balance of the pupils' programme is better in Key Stage 1 than Key Stage 2. Throughout the school mathematics skills are rarely applied across a range of subjects. The excessive use of worksheets constrains pupils' ability to work in groups, carry out research and explore subjects in depth. After-school clubs provide experiences for pupils with particular interests in lace making, quilting and fabric collage, with high quality results. That said, the necessary structure and progression in the creative arts, especially in Key Stage 2, is underrepresented in the overall curriculum through restricted lesson time. Residential

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visits and trips to places of interest broaden pupils' horizons. These trips and some other elements of the curriculum, including clubs, promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well; on the other hand weaknesses in breadth and balance restrict this aspect of pupils' development. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory rather than good because curriculum plans are not checked thoroughly by subject leaders for their consistent implementation across the school to meet the needs of all pupils. One of the results of this is that much of the topic work in Key Stage 2 does not provide a sufficient degree of challenge, especially for the most able pupils.

Training and professional development have focused on keeping up to date with national initiatives, for example teaching phonics. This has been implemented successfully in Reception. It is not yet fully established in Years 1 and 2, limiting the range of skills pupils can use to read fluently.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons, and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



24 May 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Helen's Primary School, St Helens PO33 1XH

Thank you for giving me a warm welcome when I visited your school recently. I enjoyed talking to you while we ate lunch together, and listening to your views about the school. I have asked the grown-ups to make some of the changes you suggested. You mentioned how much you appreciated working with your friends at Brading on your 'Best of Both Worlds' project. The Interim Executive Board is encouraging the grown-ups from both schools to work together to help you learn even better, so you may find this happens more often.

At the moment your school is satisfactory but all the grown-ups want to make the school better for you. I have asked them to make sure that:

- all the plans they have made to change the school are checked to ensure they are helping you to do better
- subject leaders help you to make the best progress
- all the pupils in Years 1 and 2 especially learn the sounds that letters make
- you have activities that mean you can work in groups, use your resourcefulness and make choices about how you set out your work
- your teachers give you more advice about how to improve your work, and give you time to respond to their comments when they have marked it
- you have more opportunities to apply your mathematical skills in other subjects and study the creative arts
- children in Reception have more opportunities to solve problems when they are playing
- everyone attends school as often as possible.

You can help bring about the improvements needed by always trying your best.

Yours sincerely

Kath Beck
Lead inspector

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