

Powers Hall Junior School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	114957
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	395523
Inspection dates	19–20 June 2012
Lead inspector	Andrew Saunders

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	237
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Susan Sings
Headteacher	Jane Bass
Date of previous school inspection	8 January 2008
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Age group	7–11
Inspection date(s)	19–20 June 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

Andrew Saunders

Additional Inspector

Clementina Ogunsanwo

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Lesson observations included 18 lessons or parts of lessons, and involved 12 teaching staff. Observations totalled nine hours. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View survey in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at the school's records and evaluation of the performance of pupils, records relating to the monitoring of teaching and learning, pupils' work, and the school's self-evaluation summary. Inspectors took account of the 84 questionnaires returned by parents and carers during the inspection, as well as responses by pupils and staff. The inspectors considered the views of pupils, teachers and members of the governing body, holding meetings and speaking to them informally.

Information about the school

This is an average sized school of its type. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. Most pupils are White British; other pupils represent a wide range of different minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below average and a very few are at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs or those supported by school action plus is above average. These pupils include a wide range of needs, including complex needs, physical disabilities and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Among the many awards the school has earned it holds the Inclusion Quality Mark and the Healthy Schools award. The school meets the current floor standards, which set the minimum standards expected by the government.

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	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key findings

- This is an outstanding school because well-focused leadership has ensured teaching is typically outstanding. Pupils are given exciting work to do which engages and enthuses them and, consequently, their achievement is excellent. Since the previous inspection the school has continued the trend of improvement.
- Pupils reach levels of attainment which are above average and make rapid progress from their starting points. Together these demonstrate the outstanding achievement of all groups of pupils. While reading is strong by the end of Year 6, there are occasional inconsistencies in teaching the links between sounds and letters (phonics) for pupils who sometimes find learning difficult. Consequently, their progress is not always quite as consistently rapid as for other pupils. Nonetheless, they make significant strides in their reading, especially in Year 6.
- Teaching is outstanding because well-focused and effective professional development complements opportunities to observe and share best practice. Accurate information about how well pupils are doing and the views of pupils inform planning of lessons, which meet pupils' needs well.
- Pupils are passionate learners and their behaviour is exemplary. They help each other to maintain their focus and enjoy celebrating their successes. Excellent relationships and mutual respect between pupils and adults engender a highly positive learning community. Pupils have a well-balanced perspective on keeping safe, and feel exceptionally well cared for at school.
- Leadership and management are exceptionally strong. A calm but determined atmosphere results from the clear vision that has been developed to ensure the best possible opportunities for the pupils. There is a widely shared responsibility for bringing about improvements. The innovative curriculum, respect for the views of all members of the community, and opportunities to enjoy art, music,

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dance and sports greatly enhance pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the consistency of progress in reading for all pupils who find learning difficult by ensuring that all members of staff:
 - have a good understanding of how to teach letters and sounds (phonics)
 - always use the best practice when teaching phonics.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Lessons observed during the inspection demonstrate that pupils are working at levels above those expected for their age by the end of Year 6, and that pupils make rapid progress during lessons. Work in pupils' books and teachers' records of the performance of pupils confirm that this is typical. A dip in attainment in 2011, where standards dropped to average, was addressed immediately. Consequently, the most recent cohort is on track to reach standards of attainment which are above average, and most significantly so in mathematics. From their broadly average starting points when they join the school, pupils from all ethnic backgrounds make outstanding progress. For example, Year 6 pupils made rapid progress in their writing, grappling with the Shakespearian text and producing emotive diary entries for a character in 'King Lear'. As one pupil praised another, 'I look forward to seeing you among the Oscars!'

Disabled pupils and those with complex special educational needs are very well supported by highly skilled, devoted staff who look after their wide-ranging needs with great sensitivity. Consequently, these pupils make excellent progress within their capabilities and are helped to participate as fully as possible in school life. Impressive levels of expert support mean that pupils who speak English as an additional language develop fluency in speaking and listening, and confidence in reading and writing. Pupils with who find learning difficult are helped by knowledgeable staff, who support them while developing their independence, as well as through strong partnerships which the school has instigated. They make rapid progress in writing and mathematics, and most do so in reading. The progress in reading for those pupils with learning difficulties is not always as consistently rapid but increases when they reach Year 6 so that the gap between their achievement and that of others is not significant. The school's comprehensive analysis shows that pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, and those from different ethnic heritages, make similar, outstanding progress to their peers. An innovative scheme to encourage reading across the wider community as well as in the school means that pupils are enthusiastic and very capable readers, with above-average attainment by the time they leave. The 'creative links' curriculum ensures that the skills pupils learn are consolidated within exciting, realistic contexts. Parents and carers are

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highly satisfied with how well their children are achieving, which aligns with the inspection evidence.

Quality of teaching

The highly dedicated staff plan and prepare lessons thoughtfully, ensuring the needs of all groups are closely met. Teachers take account of how well pupils have understood their work and grasped the skills they have been learning, so that subsequent lessons build on this and promote pupils' progress. For example, after an outstanding lesson a teacher asked the pupils how they thought the lesson could be even better, responding to their suggestions the following day. Teachers probe pupils' understanding with adept questioning and pupils ask insightful questions. Such reflections help promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Accurate assessment by teachers and pupils helps them to know what they need to do next and contributes towards setting helpful targets. Marking in books, by teachers, peers and pupils themselves, includes perceptive comments about their next steps. Pupils usually respond to these comments, which help to consolidate progress. Attitudes towards homework are very positive because it is interesting and relates well to the engaging topics pupils are studying; insistence on its completion means it reinforces pupils' progress. Parents and carers are very happy with the quality of teaching provided, as are pupils, and their views reflect the inspection findings.

Colleagues support each other readily, sharing their expertise on particular subjects, and identifying the most effective strategies to tackle any issue. These agreed strategies are almost always implemented with impressive consistency, and ensure that pupils think deeply about the work they are doing. However, teaching of reading is occasionally not quite as effective across the school because the very best practice in teaching phonics is not always adhered to. Lessons typically proceed at a quick pace, pupils have opportunities to choose what they do, and they are keen to push themselves to achieve their very best work. Parents and carers expressed highly positive views about teaching and the staff of the school, particularly for their dedication and availability to discuss concerns and respond quickly.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils are extremely polite and courteous. They love learning and tackle their work with great enthusiasm, helping each other when they get stuck and encouraging each other to do their very best, particularly when working in small teams. Pupils spontaneously explained the benefits, saying, 'We used to not get along, but since working together, now we're like best friends'. They enjoy celebrating each others' success and are sensitive when others are finding things difficult. For example, pupils had written wonderful, affirmative comments electing their peers as ambassadors of the week for an assembly. They appreciate the consistency with which well-conceived behaviour management strategies are implemented. They contribute their views, for example deciding that allowing two warnings for unacceptable behaviour in a lesson was too lenient. They asked the headteacher to change this to one

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warning before sanctions are applied, or three single warnings in a week. Along with the immensely supportive attitudes towards one another, this means that pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties are helped to play a positive part in the community.

Pupils acknowledge that they occasionally fall out with one another and that they have a responsibility to help sort this out. They have an excellent understanding of the different forms of bullying. They insist any bullying is very rare and would be taken seriously and dealt with. Pupils are extremely confident that they can talk to an adult at the school if they are worried. The lunchtime club provides a particularly good avenue for this, where pupils know they will be listened to respectfully and that adults will help them sort it out. This facility also helps pupils who face difficult circumstances outside of school, to build their resilience and develop confidence. Pupils enjoy lively, creative play while maintaining appropriate awareness of their own and others' safety. They have an excellent grasp of how they can stay safe outside of school, for example on the internet. The emphasis on developing pupils' personal beliefs means that they have an excellent grasp of moral dilemmas and social responsibility, and do not tolerate prejudice-based bullying, such as racism. As a visitor said, 'These are "go-get-'em kids", who make the most of all the opportunities available to them'. Parents' and carers' views are similarly positive. Pupils' enjoyment of school is further confirmed by their above-average attendance.

Leadership and management

Pupils' academic success and outstanding personal development are due to the exceptional quality of leadership in the school. The headteacher, members of the governing body and other senior leaders have great clarity of vision, closely focused on the best possible outcomes for every pupil. There is a strong determination to promote equality and tackle any discrimination and the school takes robust steps to ensure all pupils achieve outstandingly well. This vision is universally shared by adults in the school who strive hard to make it happen. Monitoring of teaching leads to highly effective support, systematically followed up to check that agreed strategies are implemented. Teachers and staff are encouraged to reflect on the effectiveness of what they do, and are given opportunities to excel in the areas they are most passionate about. The school is particularly effective at supporting teachers new to the profession and they develop excellent skills very quickly. A school-wide focus on mathematics led to improved resources, greater consistency in approaches, training to help parents and carers support their children, tasks putting mathematics into realistic contexts and wider use of mathematical language. As a result, attainment has risen impressively. The curriculum meets pupils' needs exceptionally well. The pioneering 'creative links' approach enables pupils to develop key skills, then put them to good use through open-ended tasks, often chosen by the pupils themselves. For example, Year 5 pupils designing an Olympic stadium challenged themselves to work out the cost of filling the long-jump pit with sand.

Safeguarding procedures are given the highest priority and meet requirements. Members of the governing body and school leaders ensure policies, procedures and

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training are kept up-to-date and that adults are confident in dealing with any issues which might arise. Art, music and sport play an important role in pupils' learning, ensuring the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is strong. By maintaining the outstanding achievement, raising the quality of teaching and developing a highly effective curriculum, the school has demonstrated its capacity and determination to be even better.

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.

21 June 2012

Dear Pupils



Inspection of Powers Hall Junior School, Witham, CM8 1NA

Thank you for showing us your work and sharing your excitement about what you were doing. Your headteacher is right when she says you are the school's greatest asset. You are exceptional young people who help to make your school an excellent place to learn and develop. We could see how much you enjoy school, and how rapidly you learn and make progress, particularly in mathematics. By the end of Year 6, you reach levels which are above those of other pupils your age. As a result of all these factors, we have judged that your school is outstanding.

Your teachers know a lot about how well you are doing, and plan work which challenges each of you. They make sure that you learn the skills you need through the 'creative links' curriculum, and then give you the chance to choose how you practise these skills. This means that teaching is often outstanding. You work very well in your teams, helping each other to focus on your work and giving each other excellent feedback about what you need to do to improve. We were impressed with how carefully you think about your learning, and you ask fantastic questions. You also get along with one another very well during your free time and help to look after younger pupils. You know how to stay safe, and told us you feel adults care about you a great deal. We could see how well they listen to you, for example in the 'Let's Talk' assembly.

Although it is such an excellent school, we know that the headteacher and all the staff want to continue making it even better. They already get your ideas on how they can do this. We have asked them to do one thing particularly.

- Make sure that those of you who find learning more difficult get the very best teaching and support when you learn how to link letters and sounds (phonics), so that you always make the same quick progress that other pupils make.

You can be very proud of the part you play in making this such an impressive place to learn. Above all you should continue to enjoy your learning. I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Saunders
Lead inspector

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