

The Howbridge Infant School

Dengie Close, Witham, CM8 1DJ

Inspection dates 9–10 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Attainment is improving and progress rates are rising across the school.
- Skills in literacy and numeracy are reinforced in other subjects and through the excellent range of high-quality clubs.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress because of the individual and small-group support provided in and out of lessons.
- Teaching is good and some is outstanding. No teaching is inadequate.
- Behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. Pupils say they feel safe and parents agree with them.
- The headteacher, staff and governors are united in their efforts to develop the school. As a result, achievement and teaching are now improving at an increasingly rapid rate.
- Governors are supportive of the school, ready to challenge and regularly evaluate the quality of their own and leaders' work.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well promoted.
- Pupils are proud of their school and represent it well in their interaction with the local community.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In a few lessons, assessment data are not well used to match work closely to ability levels and fully challenge pupils.
- Pupils do not always have opportunities to write at length from a variety of perspectives.
- Sharing of their best classroom skills between teachers and among teaching assistants is at an early stage.
- Subject leaders' roles are still developing, including in evaluating the effect of their work to improve standards further.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team visited 21 lessons taught by 10 staff and observed a range of extra help for individuals and small groups of pupils. Five joint observations of teaching were carried out with the headteacher.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, governors, staff, a representative from the local authority and two groups of pupils. An inspector spoke to parents and carers in the playground before school.
- Inspectors took account of the 56 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and the 17 staff questionnaire responses in planning and carrying out the inspection.
- The inspectors observed the school’s work. They also looked at the school’s improvement plan, data on pupils’ progress and attainment, monitoring and self-evaluation procedures, a wide range of policies and procedures and arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils. An inspector observed school clubs at breakfast, lunch time and after school.
- Pupils’ books were examined in lessons and in a separate joint work scrutiny with senior staff.
- An inspector listened to pupils reading.

Inspection team

Michael Sutherland-Harper, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Diana Songer-Hudgell	Additional Inspector
Fatiha Maitland	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is an average-sized infant school.
- The very large majority of the pupils are White British.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above the national average as is the proportion of those who are supported at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium is below the national average. This is additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, those in the care of the local authority and those with a parent in the armed forces.
- The school offers breakfast, lunch and after-school clubs run by school staff and which are very well attended.
- The headteacher has been in post since April 2011.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching to outstanding to raise achievement, by:
 - providing greater challenge and a closer match of work to pupils' abilities in lessons
 - making better use of assessment data to ensure an accurate understanding of pupils' starting points in planning targeted work
 - sharing the strongest classroom skills of teachers and teaching assistants more frequently across the school
 - increasing opportunities for pupils' extended writing across a broader range of subjects and from a variety of perspectives.
- Ensure that subject leaders are able to drive improvement forward more quickly by checking the work in their subject areas more thoroughly and evaluating the impact of their work more frequently.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Achievement on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage is below and, sometimes, well below standards typical for their age. A significant number of children have speech and language difficulties. Skills in all areas are weak but skills in this area and in calculation are especially weak.
- Children make good progress, overall, in the Reception classes because personal and social skills are well developed. An emphasis on the acquisition of language and opportunities to use it in role play and other activities helps children to develop their thinking skills and improve participation rates. Children are keen, willing learners who co-operate well with each other and with adults.
- Provision in the outdoor area has been enhanced and now makes a significant contribution to children's choices in their learning. Children's personal and learning needs are quickly identified and they are well supported, for example, through additional work in mental mathematics and opportunities to speak and listen. Children leave the Reception class still below age-related expectations in some areas, such as writing and speaking, but have made good progress from their starting points.
- Children's understanding of sounds and letters (phonics) is well promoted. Results in the end of Year 1 phonics screening check were well below national averages last year, but increased sessions this year to consolidate skills have raised results significantly.
- Pupils make good, and increasing, rates of progress in Key Stage 1. Mathematical development is strongest because of the reinforcement offered by two sessions a day and more practical activities, such as work on time using the television schedules. Results at the end of Years 1 and 2 are now showing year-on-year improvement since 2011.
- The school has improved literacy skills by further opportunities for pupils to read and engaging work on topics like limericks, which are then followed up in writing activities. Development of writing skills is, rightly, a current focus across the school, especially in enabling more pupils to reach the highest levels of attainment.
- Current data show that Year 2 have improved on the results of the previous year because the quality of teaching has improved and a wide range of clubs and activities, including the highly popular 'Bridge the Gap' breakfast and after-school clubs, have engaged pupils with learning from a variety of different angles.
- Literacy and numeracy are effectively promoted in other subjects. For example, pupils have opportunities to write at length in history and to explore quantities as they worked out the recipe for a cheesecake in a cooking club.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress because of the growing number of intervention strategies and the close support which have been put in place to meet their learning needs. Effective liaison with parents, including regular sharing of information, ensures that these pupils, and all others, are effectively supported at home as well.
- Pupil premium funding is used well to ensure that eligible pupils make similar progress to their

peers through successful initiatives – for example, booster classes, funding for the school clubs to reinforce pupils' confidence and skills, and parent-support advisers. There is no gap in pupils' performance in mathematics between eligible pupils and others. Eligible pupils are one term behind others in reading and about two terms in writing, but the gap is, currently, closing quickly.

- Pupils are confident readers who read regularly in school and at home. They are able to apply their knowledge of sounds and letters to what they read. Their skills are increasing at a faster rate than previously lower down the school with more opportunities to read and to practise sounds and letters.
- Pupils say they enjoy learning and their parents agree. Pupils are especially proud of the mixture of writing, art and history in the workbooks they assemble on topics like volcanoes and dinosaurs.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good because teachers use questioning skills well to encourage pupils to think about their studies and to test their understanding. They ensure that children have a careful balance of practical tasks and opportunities to use their imagination as they explore subjects.
- Where teaching is strongest, there is a strong emphasis on helping pupils to express themselves better and to understand what the next steps in their learning are. For example, in a Year 2 lesson, the teacher built on a visit to the local church, first using photographs which allowed the pupils to recall the visit in great detail. This led to a discussion of the role of the church in society and the importance of the objects in the church, such as the baptismal font.
- The teaching of literacy and numeracy is reinforced in other subjects. Pupils have opportunities to apply mathematical skills in science lessons and outdoors in the Early Years Foundation Stage as they worked out the sequence and timing of activities in a waiter's race. In history and geography lessons, they have written about volcanoes and dinosaurs.
- Teachers and teaching assistants together plan learning to ensure disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs learn successfully. These pupils are fully included in all activities because additional resources and constant encouragement are provided whenever necessary, but without tasks being done for the pupils. The Makaton club run in the school gives pupils a first glimpse of how to use sign language to communicate.
- Opportunities for staff to develop teaching and support skills are growing, and are especially apparent in the range of clubs they run. However, the best classroom skills are not, at present, fully and consistently shared between staff to help raise teaching to the highest level.
- In lessons where the teaching requires improvement, work is not always closely enough matched to pupils' abilities to provide full challenge, especially for the more able in writing. In these lessons, assessment data showing pupils' progress are not fully used to plan targeted work and opportunities for extended writing across a broader range of subjects are more limited.
- Reading is well taught. Pupils have access to a good variety of books and are encouraged to talk about them. The 'Bug Club' offers online reading at home and supports the good home-school reading links.

- Marking is regular and, consequently, pupils' presentation is generally neat. Pupils have good opportunities, including through an engaging 'traffic light' system, to assess their own and others' work. Teachers provide clear and frequent feedback about the next steps towards pupils' targets. In a few cases, this advice about how to ensure the most rapid progress possible is not followed up by pupils.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Clear systems are in place to ensure that behaviour is good in and out of lessons. The school places a high emphasis on good behaviour and listening skills as part of its core values. Pupils understand that good behaviour is rewarded and that there are sanctions when behaviour is less acceptable.
- Pupils feel safe in school and say that behaviour is good. Their parents agree with inspection findings that their children are kept safe and are well behaved. Pupils spoke proudly of their school to inspectors and represent it well when they visit the local community or participate in competitions.
- Pupils enjoy good relationships with adults and with each other. Behaviour was of a very high standard during an assembly on responding to others delivered by a local vicar, and pupils were praised for their conduct during a visit to the local church. Pupils know that there is always an adult to whom they can turn when they have difficulties of any kind. These relationships are reinforced because it is school staff who deliver the very well attended before- and after-school clubs.
- Incidents of bullying are rare. Pupils know about the different kinds of bullying which they may encounter, including cyber-bullying and name calling. Any bullying reported is quickly and consistently dealt with. Older pupils readily take responsibility through the school council and eco groups and are willing to assist the youngest whenever necessary.
- Most pupils attend regularly. The school tracks any persistent absence carefully and works closely with parents and carers as part of its efforts to raise attendance levels. Contacting parents on pupils' first day away from school is effective in reducing absence and holidays during term time are discouraged. Pupils arrive punctually to school and to lessons.
- Exclusions are rare. No racist incidents are recorded and none reported to inspectors. Assemblies, displays and close links with the local church help to reinforce the notion of what constitutes acceptable behaviour. The school values are centred around equal opportunities for all pupils and families and the elimination of discrimination in any form.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has effectively led improvements in teaching and achievement. She has established a new senior leadership team with clearly defined responsibilities and the impact of their work, in union with the fully supportive staff and governors, is an accelerating rate of progress across the school.
- Senior leaders are improving the quality of teaching and learning through more efficient tracking of individual progress. They take a lead in delivering sessions in key areas like extended mathematical skills, writing support classes and further opportunities to read.

- Subject leaders now have increased responsibilities for developing their subject areas. However, procedures for checking the quality of teaching and learning in subjects are not yet thorough enough and lack full evaluation of their impact to ensure the highest quality is achieved.
- The school offers an increasingly broad range of subjects as a result of a recent review. Pupils are offered opportunities to develop their interest in subjects through additional out-of-school-hours activities and clubs and by themed work in classes on specific subjects of interest to pupils. For example, science and geography have been developed in the garden, which has recently participated in the 'Witham in Bloom' competition – another indication of the school's close links with the local community.
- Procedures for managing staff performance are conducted in line with the national standards for teaching, which are effectively applied. Targets for teachers and other staff are closely linked to the school's improvement plan and progress towards those targets is closely monitored. Staff have good training opportunities to develop their skills.
- Promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength. Social and moral values are reinforced by visits and visitors, in colourful displays throughout the school and in the assemblies attended by pupils and adults. Spiritual development occurs through visitors from and visits to local churches. Opportunities for pupils to use their imagination are growing as, for example, when they were invited to help plan the new playground and outdoor area. Links with a number of other countries are developing well.
- Safeguarding procedures meet all requirements.
- Links with the local authority are strong but 'light touch' since the arrival of the new headteacher following an earlier period of intensive support which has helped to raise standards across the school.
- Links with parents are good and are growing through initiatives like the recently established parents' forum.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is good. Governors visit the school regularly to support its work and to be a visible presence. They have had training in key areas, such as the interpretation of data on pupils' progress, and are keen to develop their skills further. Minutes of their meetings record the strong challenge they present to leaders, for example, about the consistency of challenge in lessons so pupils of different abilities can all achieve well. Governors have begun to assess their own efforts as part of their development and now aim to report termly to the headteacher in writing. They know the amount of the pupil premium and how effectively it is spent. They know what the quality of teaching is across the school and, in discussion with the headteacher, regularly review how to develop teachers' skills and improve the quality of teaching and learning. They require good evidence of the impact of teaching on pupils' progress and achievement before authorising increases in pay or promotion.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	114951
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	405551

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	5–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	254
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Colin Hooker
Headteacher	Anna Conley
Date of previous school inspection	4 October 2010
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