

Hilltop Junior School

Hill Avenue, Wickford, SS11 8LT

Inspection dates 10–11 September 2013

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement.

- Pupils' achievement is improving but it has not been consistently good since the previous inspection.
- Attainment by the end of Year 6 has been average in English and mathematics.
- Pupils do not always have sufficient opportunities to write extended pieces in different subjects.
- The handwriting and presentation of the work of youngest pupils require improvement.
- The quality of teaching is improving, but has not been consistently good throughout the school to ensure that pupils make good progress.
- Tasks are not always pitched at the right level for the differing abilities of pupils, particularly the most able.
- Marking and setting targets for pupils to achieve are not fully effective in informing pupils of the next steps in their learning.
- Strategies to assess and moderate pupils' attainment on entry to the school have not been rigorous enough.

The school has the following strengths

- After a period of staff changes, leaders, staff and governors are working well together to raise pupils' achievement and to improve teaching. Pupils' progress is improving as a result.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are progressing well.
- The headteacher and staff have created a positive and safe environment for pupils to learn and develop.
- There are examples of outstanding teaching.
- Pupils show a keen interest in their learning.
- Behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. It is outstanding in some lessons, especially in Year 6.
- Pupils are well cared for by staff and they feel safe at school.
- There are good partnerships with parents.
- Attendance is consistently well-above average.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 20 lessons. Some of these were seen jointly with the headteacher.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, staff, an external consultant, governors and pupils.
- The inspectors took account of the 39 responses to the online survey (Parent View).
- Responses to an inspection questionnaire from 29 staff were analysed.
- The inspectors examined school policies, information about pupils' attainment and progress, teachers' plans, pupils' work and the school's development planning.

Inspection team

Derek Watts, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Lynne Thorogood	Additional Inspector
Paul Burton	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger-than-average junior school.
- Most of the pupils are White British.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is well-above average. The proportion supported through school action plus or a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- A below-average proportion of the pupils are eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in local authority care, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and others.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- It converted to academy status in August 2011.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is good or better in all classes by:
 - ensuring that teachers always set tasks at the right level of difficulty for individual pupils, particularly for the most able
 - strengthening marking and setting targets for pupils so that all know how to improve.
- Raise pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics to, at least, above average by the end of Year 6 by:
 - increasing opportunities for pupils to write extended pieces in English and in other subjects
 - improving handwriting and presentation of the work of the youngest pupils
 - sharing more widely the best practice of investigative work in mathematics.
- Strengthen leadership, management, governance and the checking of the school's performance so that work is always set at the right level for pupils to learn by:
 - using a range of strategies to assess pupils' attainment on entry to the school
 - recording a wide range evidence to support these assessments
 - using external agencies to check and moderate the accuracy of assessments.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- The school's own assessments and the findings of the inspection are that pupils enter the school with broadly average attainment. Consequently, the analysis of progress shown on the school's Data Dashboard, indicating that it is weak, does not give the full picture. The inspection found that the rate of pupils' progress was better than this, but still requires improvement.
- Pupils' achievement requires improvement because their progress, since the school converted to become an academy, has not been good. As a result, attainment by the end of Year 6 has not been as high as it should be.
- After the previous inspection, some key staff left and this hindered the school's development. . The current leadership team and staff are taking positive action to raise achievement. Although progress is improving and an increasing number of pupils are making good progress, the positive changes are too recent to have a full impact on pupils' attainment.
- Year 6 national test results in 2012 were average in English and mathematics. Test results in reading, writing and mathematics for 2013 are looking average but national comparative data is not yet available to ensure accurate evaluation.
- Pupils' writing skills are improving. For example, pupils in Year 6 used personification, subordinate clauses and well-chosen vocabulary to great effect in describing the announcement of the Second World War. Phrases such as, 'huddled around the crackling wireless' set the scene well. This was a good example of pupils applying their writing skills in history. Not all classes are having sufficient opportunities to write in subjects other than English. The handwriting and presentation of the youngest pupils requires improvement.
- Pupils' progress is improving in mathematics. Opportunities for pupils to use mental calculation and apply their numeracy skills in investigations have increased. For example, pupils in a Year 4 class made good progress in using their understanding of place value to create large and small numbers using randomly selected number cards.
- More pupils are attaining the higher National Curriculum levels, particularly in mathematics, because teachers have raised expectations and the level of challenge. However, there are still occasions when tasks are not sufficiently demanding to fully extend the most able.
- In the 2012 Year 6 national tests, the pupils supported by the pupil premium attained standards lower than the other pupils in reading, writing and mathematics. They were about nine months behind the others. The school has increased the support for these pupils and they are now making much better progress. More recent performance information shows that the school is narrowing the gap in attainment between the groups. For example, pupils in Year 4 were seen making rapid progress in literacy skills.
- The progress of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is good. Pupils' learning needs are carefully assessed and tasks and adult support are well suited to advance their learning.
- Pupils are developing healthy lifestyles and physical fitness through the school's physical education programme and the good range of additional activities. For example, nearly 40 pupils participated with energy and enthusiasm in an early morning dance club led by a specialist

teacher.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Teaching has not been consistently good enough over the past two years to ensure that most pupils make good progress.
- Teaching is improving and this is having a positive impact on pupils' rate of progress but there are still elements of practice which are not strong enough. For example, teachers are now making better use of information about pupils' attainment to plan their teaching and to set tasks at the right level of difficulty for pupils. However, there are times when activities are not sufficiently demanding to accelerate the progress of the most able.
- The school has clear systems for the marking of pupils' work and for the setting of individual learning targets in literacy and numeracy to help pupils improve. However, some inadequacies in marking and the setting of targets mean that not all pupils know the next steps to take in their learning.
- Teachers and support staff establish strong relationships with pupils and promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their positive attitudes to learning well. Pupils are cooperative and considerate of others. They respect the views of others and work well in pairs and groups.
- Teachers' make the learning purpose of the lesson clear to pupils. Explanations and instructions are informative and successfully engage the pupils.
- There are examples of outstanding teaching, such as in art and mathematics in Year 6 and in English in Year 4. In these lessons, pupils were motivated by teachers' enthusiasm and strong subject expertise. Consequently, pupils made rapid gains in their knowledge, understanding and application of skills because of the teacher's high expectations, very clear demonstration of techniques and skilful questioning that extended their thinking.
- The teaching of essential reading and writing skills is being strengthened. There has been an increased emphasis on improving pupils' mental calculations and on investigative approaches in mathematics. The best practice is not yet fully extended across the school.
- Small-group teaching to accelerate the progress of those eligible for the pupil premium is highly effective. For example, in a Year 4 session seen, pupils made rapid progress in speaking, reading and writing. They rose to the teacher's high expectations and benefited from his expertise and the range of quality resources.
- The teaching of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is effective. Activities and adult support are well matched to pupils' needs. In most classes, teaching assistants are well deployed and make an effective contribution to pupils' learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils' behaviour and safety continue to be a strong feature of Hilltop Junior.
- Parents who responded to Parent View stated that their children are happy, feel safe and well looked after at school. These positive views reflect the findings of the inspection.

- Most pupils show considerable interest and enthusiasm for learning and learn very successfully when teaching is good. They remarked, 'We really like learning.' They added, 'Maths and science are fun.' They form very positive relationships with adults and other pupils. As the pupils said, 'We learn from each other, especially from our partners.' Pupils are courteous, friendly and considerate of others, particularly in the upper year groups of the school.
- Behaviour is good in lessons, in assemblies, in the dining hall and in the playground. In the Year 6 lessons, pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour were outstanding. There are, however, a few pupils in Year 3, whose attitudes and behaviour are less positive. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning improve the longer they are in the school.
- The school's records of incidents indicate that behaviour is typically good over time and that effective steps are taken to deal with unacceptable behaviour. There have been no exclusions in the school since it became an academy.
- Discussions with pupils reveal that they have a good understanding of bullying and the different forms it can take, including persistent name-calling, physical bullying and cyber-bullying. They informed the inspectors that bullying in the school was very rare. Pupils had total confidence in the staff in sorting out incidents of unacceptable behaviour.
- Parents are supportive and pupils clearly enjoy coming to school. As a result, attendance levels are well above the national average.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- During the last two years, leaders and managers have not been effective enough in promoting consistently good teaching so that pupils' achievement is consistently good. As a result, attainment by the end of Year 6 has been average rather than above.
- Soon after the previous inspection, some key leaders left the school. This had an adverse impact on the school's performance and hindered the school's capacity to improve. The school has appointed experienced and effective leaders during the past year or so. The relatively new leaders of mathematics and inclusion are enthusiastic and effective in their roles but have not been in the school long enough to have the full impact on end of Year 6 attainment.
- 'The school's assessment of pupils' attainment on entry provides the basis for monitoring progress but has previously not sufficiently incisive to plan programmes of work to rapidly fill gaps in their knowledge and skills. There are now detailed plans in place to address this so that assessment is based on a broad range of strategies and for these to be externally checked and moderated each year.
- The headteacher, key leaders and staff are working well together in moving the school forward. Teaching has improved and this is having a positive impact on pupils' progress. Teamwork and motivation among the staff is stronger with a more settled staff. Initiatives such as extending investigative work in mathematics, strengthening assessment and broadening writing opportunities are working well but these are too recent to have had the full impact intended on raising attainment by the end of Year 6. Progress in the current year groups is improving with more pupils making good progress.
- The checking and development of teaching have received stronger attention recently. There are

clear policies and procedures for the performance of staff. Teaching is improving and targets for improvement are well linked to the school's key priorities.

- The pupil premium funding is being used effectively to provide eligible pupils with additional support and learning opportunities. The good use of the funding is having a positive impact on these pupils' progress. Lesson observations and the school's more recent performance data show that the pupils eligible for the pupil premium are making better progress.
- The local authority has provided a useful review of the school's performance and provided clear points of action to guide further improvement. An external consultant is also used well to support the school's development.
- An interesting range of subjects and topics is provided to promote pupils' learning and personal development. Pupils enjoy the wide range of additional clubs and educational visits on offer. Outdoor learning and the growing of food are interesting additions to the school's curriculum.
- All pupils in the school have access the full range of activities on offer. Pupils and staff work well together in a positive and purposeful school community. There are no signs of discrimination.
- The school has established positive partnerships with its parents. The results of the Parent View survey indicate that parents hold positive views about the school and that concerns are few.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governors are enthusiastic and supportive in their role. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and the key areas needing improvement. Governors have a good knowledge of pupils' attainment and progress. They have a secure understanding of the implications arising from inaccuracy in evaluation of pupils' attainment on entry and are aware of the pressing need to ensure that pupils make good progress. The governors have been kept accurately informed of the quality of teaching by the headteacher and are convinced of its improvement. The governors' clear knowledge of the school's performance enables them to hold it to account. Governors understand the requirements relating to the management of staff performance, and make sure that promotion and salary increases are linked to pupils' progress. They are checking that the pupil premium is raising achievement for eligible pupils – and are well aware that this has not been the situation until recently. Governors have attended a range of useful courses to increase their effectiveness. They ensure that all safeguarding requirements are met.

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	137245
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	425315

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	290
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Eileen Bull
Headteacher	Alison Waite
Date of previous school inspection	November 2011
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