

Hamilton School

Hamilton Road, Handsworth, Birmingham, B21 8AH

Inspection dates 23–24 October 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.

- There have been difficulties in the retention and recruitment of staff, especially leaders, over recent years. Improvements have not been sufficiently rapid or consistent to drive the school's overall effectiveness to good.
- Teaching has not been securely good over time and requires improvement. "In a few cases staff do not always maintain up-to-date records, including those on progress and achievement or use space in classrooms well enough to maximise learning".
- Staff sometimes do too much for pupils which slightly reduces their independence and learning.
- Although the outdoor environment has been improved, staff do not maximise its use and pupils do not have enough to do outside.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage requires improvement. Children do not have sufficient opportunities for development outside and record keeping is inconsistent
- Over time, leaders have not monitored sufficiently often or in enough detail. Their view of the school has tended to be overly positive and the drive for improvement not rapid enough. Recent plans to improve monitoring have not yet been fully implemented.

The school has the following strengths

- The school is increasingly effective due to effective links with other schools and improving leadership. Staff, parents and pupils all appreciate this.
- Behaviour and safety are good. Relationships are positive and supportive. The vast majority of pupils are settled and happy at the school.
- The quality of teaching is increasingly good. The vast majority of teaching observed during the inspection was good or better.
- Governors provide effective support and challenge. They are helping to drive improvements throughout the school.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 15 lessons and briefly visited another four. These were taught by seven teachers and one higher-level teaching assistant. Eighteen of these observations or visits were joint visits with the headteacher or deputy headteacher.
- Discussions were held with pupils, governors, an officer from the local authority, senior leaders and staff.
- The inspector received the views of parents and carers through 19 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire, written comments and informal discussions.
- The inspectors received the views of staff through 19 responses to the school’s survey, based on the Ofsted inspection questionnaire questions, and discussions together with the views of pupils through informal discussions in and out of lessons.
- The inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at a number of documents, including the school’s information on pupils’ current and recent progress, pupils’ work, the school’s development plan, planning and monitoring documents, documents relating to safeguarding, and records relating to behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

Jo Curd, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Russell Hinton

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, the school has been designated as a specialist school for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD).
- All the pupils have statements of special educational need. All but a very few pupils have been diagnosed with autism and all have complex and profound learning difficulties. There are more boys than girls.
- A high proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for pupil premium funding. This is additional funding for specific groups of pupils, in this case those who are looked after or who are known to be eligible for free school meals. Although proportions are high, the actual number of pupils who receive this funding in any year group is small.
- Over 90 per cent of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest groups being of Pakistani or African heritage. Half the students have English as an additional language; this is much higher than in most other schools.
- There has been considerable turbulence in staffing, including the leadership, since the previous inspection. There have been two acting headteachers, including an executive headteacher shared with another special school. Another senior leader has also had family leave during this time. The current headteacher joined the school, in this permanent position, in September 2013. Both the deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher posts are held on an acting basis at present.
- The school has had considerable refurbishment, especially indoors, since the previous inspection. This has included the formation of calm rooms within, or adjacent to, each classroom.
- Pupils are taught in one of eight classes. There is a single Reception class, two classes for pupils in Years 1 and 2, two classes for pupils in Years 3 and 4, two for pupils in Years 5 and 6. Due to a large cohort there is currently an additional class for those in Year 3. Classes are organised on the basis of learning style, severity and complexity of need.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that this is consistently good or better by ensuring that staff:
 - keep assessments and records up-to-date to guide teaching and show details of achievement
 - do not do too much for pupils and encourage them to be as independent as possible
 - make good use of space in classrooms throughout lessons.
- Increase opportunities for learning outdoors, especially in the Early Years Foundation Stage, by making better use of school grounds and providing a greater choice of resources for outdoor learning.
- Improve leadership and management by fully embedding plans for rigorous and frequent monitoring so that this provides a more accurate view of the school and guides school development.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Over time, achievement between classes and subjects has varied and requires improvement, because it has not been securely good. This is because too much teaching has been ineffective. However, recent school improvements mean that achievement is increasingly positive. During the inspection, all groups of pupils made good progress in a range of subjects.
- Recent assessments of pupils are accurate and secure. These do not show any significant differences in the achievement of different groups. However, as achievement has fluctuated and not always been monitored or analysed in depth, the equality of opportunity for different groups over time is not secure.
- Pupils start at the school in the Early Years Foundation Stage or at any time in either key stage. They all come with knowledge, skills and experience which are much lower than those typical for their age. Progress throughout the school, including the Early Years Foundation Stage, has fluctuated and children's achievement requires improvement.
- Pupils are now positive about learning and proud of their accomplishments. For example, more able pupils in a Year 3 and 4 class were very motivated in a mathematics lesson on addition, eagerly saying, 'I can do it, I can do it', as they independently moved small toy figures along number squares to find the correct answers.
- Pupils with more profound difficulties made good progress in lessons during the inspection because activities were finely tuned to their needs, repetitive and consistent. Some pupils with highly complex needs in a Years 5 and 6 class made good progress in their daily tasks because they knew exactly what to do, were confident and independent. They were successfully challenged to extend and build upon what they had previously done.
- The starting points and individual needs of pupils who have English as an additional language vary greatly. As a group they currently achieve well, because systems for communication are highly visual, activities are very practical and teaching is now good.
- Pupil premium funding is used for individual, bespoke support for communication and literacy. This appears to contribute well to the currently good progress of these pupils and by the end of Year 6 there are no apparent significant differences in the achievement of this group compared to others. However the precise impact of the funding throughout the school has not yet been fully monitored.
- Parents and carers are very positive about the school, and about how much their children are achieving. One reported how his son had begun to use words at home, while another said how proud her daughter was of all her activities and how well she was developing overall.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Over time, the quality of teaching has varied considerably and has not been securely good. There have been a lot of staff changes and some teaching has been inadequate. This is improving, and during the inspection most teaching was good or better.
- Teaching assistants play an integral part in pupils' learning and well-being. They work in full partnership with teachers and in the best lessons teamwork is highly effective. For example,

most lessons are very calm and purposeful because all the staff know what they are doing and are well deployed. Occasionally, staff do too much for pupils, for example, handing out resources when pupils could do this themselves. This reduces potential achievement and the possibility of pupils doing things for themselves.

- Renovations within the building and new furniture have made the environment far more conducive to learning. Individual learning bays and calm rooms are used well to help pupils settle and concentrate on tasks. Occasionally, staff do not use space in classrooms well enough and pupils are either too crowded round a central table or too scattered to ensure that all are supported sufficiently.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, teachers provide a wide range of activities. These include finely focused routine tasks, social activities and, wherever possible, activities which children choose themselves including early creative and imaginative play. Although children work and play indoors and outside, opportunities outside are more limited, reducing opportunities for learning and development.
- Staff know pupils well and vary activities to meet individual needs. Current records of activities, especially routine tasks, are generally detailed and used well. However, as these are not always kept up-to-date, they are not always helpful in guiding teaching or showing precise steps in pupils' achievements.
- Reading, writing, communication and mathematics are often included well in a range of other subjects. For example, Reception class children developed early mathematical and literacy skills, in small groups in a music lesson. They listened to, and where possible joined in, a range of action songs with staff. They enjoyed this greatly and the activity helped their social and physical skills, as well as their communication and mathematics.
- The practical and visual nature of activities helps all pupils, including those who have English as an additional language. Pupils in an older Key Stage 2 class, including those who have English as an additional language, greatly enjoyed a music lesson where they counted rhythms, danced and watched a video of music in Africa. This successfully helped both their achievement and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour and safety are good because there is a strong focus on these aspects throughout the school. Recent improvements, including the organisation of classes, renovation of classrooms and systems for communication, have all helped these to improve.
- Challenging behaviour is managed well, minimising disruptions to learning. For example, when an older pupil became volatile in a mathematics lesson, he was quickly and quietly taken to the calm room where he continued his work with a teaching assistant while others continued uninterrupted in class.
- Parents, carers, pupils and staff are all very positive about safety. Pupils indicate that they feel safe in school. Those who travel in local authority transport are escorted safely to and from the vehicles at the beginning and end of each day.
- Pupils enjoy school. Most are happy and excited to arrive at school, and some are sad to leave at the end of the day. Although attendance is slightly lower than the mainstream national average, this is higher than most similar schools.

- The effective use of pictorial communication systems has increased opportunities for choice for many pupils and reduced some of their frustrations. This is clearly evident at lunch times, which are calm and pleasant social times. Pupils choose what they want to eat using photographs of the different food available.
- Although it is difficult for most pupils to understand about bullying, they are all taught to make choices and express when they don't like an action or activity. Relationships are good and pupils are confident to indicate to staff any unwanted actions from others. Staff are well-tuned to pupils and respond well to pupils' concerns or anxieties.
- Potential for independence and choice are occasionally limited, particularly at lunch and break times. This is because there are not always enough resources outside and, at times, adults do too much and too quickly for pupils.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- There have been several changes in leadership since the previous inspection which have caused instability and slowed the impact of improvement. Several leaders, both at senior and subject level, are at early stages of development. However, there have been improvements over the past two years and, with the permanent appointment of the new headteacher, the school is now in a stronger position to move forward. Parents, carers, pupils and staff are positive, appreciate developments so far and are excited to see these implemented consistently across the school.
- Developments since the previous inspection have included renovations of the school interior, new furniture, the provision of calm rooms, re-organisation of classes, changes in systems for communication, and reorganisation of the playground. All of these are beneficial to all groups of pupils, reducing discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity.
- The new headteacher is experienced in leadership and dealing with the specific needs of pupils in this school. In the short time he has been at the school, he has developed good relationships and motivated staff, parents and carers. He has also provided a clear vision for the way forward, including a clear plan for frequent monitoring. Although there has not been sufficient time to implement this fully yet there is already detailed evidence of monitoring that has been done.
- Improvements implemented by the experienced Early Years Foundation Stage leader include procedures for ensuring the accuracy of assessments, organisation of the classrooms and improvements to the outdoor area. The outdoor area is secure and pleasant but not always used as fully as it could be.
- Leaders ensure that there are a broad range of opportunities for learning throughout the day. There is a strong focus on the basic skills of English and mathematics and a wide range of other lessons, including information and communication technology, science, humanities and religious education. The use of primary school sports funding is at very early stages. Plans to use it on specialists who can train teachers and take lessons have not yet been implemented.
- Leaders' current understanding of the school is adequate and improving. It has driven improvements in the building, opportunities for learning and teaching. However these are not yet consistently good because monitoring is not always sufficiently frequent or rigorous and improvements are not yet consistent throughout the school.
- Parents and carers who responded during the inspection were all very happy with almost all

aspects investigated. They are extremely positive about developments in the school and increasingly happy with what it provides. They all said they would recommend the school to others. The school roll is rising. A small minority were not happy with the amount of homework given. This varies according to pupils' needs and starting points.

- Although officers in the local authority have had little input lately, they have helped in school development since the previous inspection. Their input has included identifying weakness and arranging an executive headteacher. This has been effective, even though ongoing support has been limited.

- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance has improved since the previous inspection and is effective. The Chair is highly experienced and has undertaken much training. She is currently undertaking some higher level training, which she is using well to help this school and others in the local authority. Other governors have also undertaken appropriate training. Their understanding of the school, including the quality of teaching and how well pupils are achieving in comparison to those elsewhere, is generally accurate. This enables them to tackle any underperformance and support and challenge the school effectively. However, their level of challenge is sometimes limited because some aspects, such as the impact of pupil premium throughout the school, has not yet been fully analysed and because some reports from other school leaders have occasionally been slightly over-generous. Governors are particularly vigilant with finances and ensure that any staff salary increases are related to national standards and outcomes for pupils throughout the school.

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	103600
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	426902

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	64
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Liz Garnham
Headteacher	Jon Harris
Date of previous school inspection	11 October 2011
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