

Hilltop Infant School

Hill Avenue, Wickford, SS11 8LT

Inspection dates 30–31 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Pupils have an outstanding start to school life at Hilltop Infant. They are very well prepared for their future educational achievement.
- The headteacher, governors and senior leaders are relentless in their drive to sustain pupils' outstanding achievement and the highest quality of teaching.
- Senior leaders set excellent examples in their own teaching and, in turn, have very high expectations of all members of the school community and will settle for nothing less than the best.
- Early literacy and numeracy skills are taught exceptionally well. By the end of Year 2, pupils' attainment is similar to that found in the top 20% of schools in the country.
- Pupils' learning is outstanding in mathematics because pupils have many opportunities to consolidate their learning. However, when pupils record their work, the lack of guides, such as lines or squares, in their books sometimes leads to inaccuracies.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs and those eligible for pupil premium funding make similar progress to their classmates.
- More-able pupils make excellent progress because teachers set them very challenging tasks.
- All adults set very high expectations for pupils' behaviour. Within a framework of outstanding relationships, pupils have consistent guidance, so that, from their start in school, they quickly develop and maintain very positive attitudes to learning.
- Teachers always mark their pupils' work. The great majority of marking is excellent. The headteacher and senior leaders have correctly noted that more needs to be done to ensure that all marking is of the highest quality.
- The school looks after its pupils very well. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe. All parents agree that their children feel safe and happy in school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 14 lessons, 10 of which were seen either with the headteacher or deputy headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, governors and staff. Inspectors also spoke with two groups of pupils. A telephone discussion was held with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of school documentation including: the school's own evaluation of its performance and its improvement plan; information about pupils' progress and the support given to those eligible for pupil premium funding and to disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Inspectors also looked at evidence of leaders' monitoring of teaching and records relating to safeguarding and attendance.
- Inspectors looked closely at pupils' work in all year groups and heard some pupils from Years 1 and 2 read.
- Inspectors took account of 17 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and 25 responses to the questionnaire for school staff. Inspectors also spoke with 17 parents at the start of the school day. In addition, the outcomes of the school's own questionnaire completed by 73 parents in December 2013 were taken into account.

Inspection team

Cheryl Thompson, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Andrew Lyons

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school. There are eight classes including three for Reception children.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also below average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is below average. In this school, the extra funding is for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals.
- Since the previous inspection, there has been a change of three-quarters of the teaching staff, including senior leaders; some newly qualified teachers and others who are at the early stages of their teaching careers have been appointed.
- The school is a partnership school with the Billericay Educational Consortium School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT).
- The school is a National Support School and the headteacher is a National Leader of Education. The school and headteacher are providing support for a local school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the marking of pupils' work by all teachers is consistently outstanding by implementing the planned support for staff and making rigorous checks to ensure improvements follow.
- Make sure that pupils can set out their mathematics work neatly and accurately by providing them with resources which provide a helpful framework for recording their work.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- When children start in the Reception classes, their levels of skills and personal development are below those typical for their age. They make rapid progress for two main reasons. First, all staff ensure children develop good learning habits, such as listening attentively, behaving well and trying hard. Second, teaching is outstanding. Excellent deployment of highly proficient teaching assistants and the teaching of basic literacy and numeracy skills in enjoyable ways ensure children are very keen to learn.
- Progress in developing early literacy and numeracy skills is impressive. For example, on entry to school in September, a child could write two letters of their name. At Christmas, the same child wrote a simple letter, comprising three sentences, to Father Christmas. Similarly, a child who could count to 20 in September is now able to find, accurately, many combinations of coins to make 20 pence.
- From their starting points, the achievement of the relatively small number of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is outstanding. In their attainment, these pupils are around a half a term behind their classmates but, from their generally lower starting points on entry to school, make outstanding progress. Teachers know their pupils very well and quickly note any learning or social difficulties. The extra funding is exceptionally well targeted to provide one-to-one support for learning or developing social skills or for activities such as 'Gym Trail' to develop physical strength and balance.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make similar progress to their classmates. The special work planned for each pupil is at just the right level to ensure at least good progress and high self-esteem from successful learning. Teachers' strong links with parents help families know how to be involved in their children's learning.
- Rapid progress continues through Years 1 and 2 where pupils build on their secure learning of phonics (letters and sounds). In the past two years, the school's results in the national phonic check in Year 1 have been below average. There are two main reasons for this. First, the school made the decision not to practise for the test. Second, the great majority of pupils have very well-developed phonic and reading skills. As a result, they frequently made the 'non-words' make sense. For example, 'fape' became 'tape'.
- By Year 2, pupils have developed excellent skills to bring to their writing. They read widely and with enjoyment so bring ideas and vocabulary from their reading to include in their stories. Their phonic and spelling skills are such that they write enthusiastically without having to worry about how to spell each word. For example, they write adjectives they wish to use by drawing on their phonic knowledge. They use dictionaries and thesauruses competently to improve their work.
- Pupils say they 'love maths' and this is apparent in their enthusiasm in lessons. For example, more-able pupils in Year 1 worked hard to add tens and units such as $23 + 14$, making very good use of apparatus. They made a good start in understanding how to change more than 10 units to one ten and the remaining units. When they record their work on plain paper it is always neat, but it is difficult for them to keep figures accurately in line in a column so that figures representing 'tens' are muddled with figures representing units.
- More-able pupils make outstanding progress and attain high standards. Teachers set very high expectations for these pupils and provide them with challenging tasks, especially in mathematics.

- Pupils' attainment at the end of Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics is above average and similar to that found in the top 20% of schools in the country. The proportions of pupils attaining the higher Level 3 in reading, writing and mathematics are much higher than average.
- The school is using its primary sport funding to enhance pupils' well-being and their performance in physical education. Pupils have a clear understanding of the need to take exercise and know the importance of healthy living. Almost all pupils belong to an after-school or lunchtime club to develop gymnastic or games skills.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Throughout the school, there are excellent relationships between all adults and pupils. Teaching assistants are highly proficient and a valued part of the teaching team because of the positive impact they have on pupils' learning and personal development. All adults are consistent in their approach to setting very high expectations for pupils to work hard and behave well. As a result, no time is wasted. Pupils settle very quickly to their tasks and concentrate well.
- The experienced teachers have excellent subject knowledge and all staff have very good opportunities to update and extend their knowledge and skills. The impact of professional development opportunities is particularly evident in teachers' subject knowledge and enthusiasm for teaching mathematics.
- Teaching for the Reception children is outstanding. All staff set out, model and reinforce the school's high expectations for behaviour and learning. As a result, from their start in school, children settle very quickly into routines, develop good learning habits and demonstrate good manners and kindness to others.
- All Reception staff are accomplished at teaching early literacy and numeracy skills. As a result, the great majority of children make rapid progress. Those who have difficulties are quickly noted and expert support put in to help them succeed.
- Outstanding teaching continues through Years 1 and 2. Highly interesting links between subjects enthuse pupils and make learning very relevant. For example, Year 2 pupils gave a great deal of thought to designing and making their innovations for their forthcoming competition at the science fair.
- Teaching for the more-able pupils is outstanding and ensures these pupils reach very high standards. Teachers know their pupils' level of ability very well. Consequently, these pupils have challenging tasks set for them from the start of the lesson. Pupils tackle these tasks with determination because they have learned to persevere and know, if they do this, they will succeed.
- Outstanding teaching and support for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs ensure they make the same progress as their classmates. Teachers frequently review how well these pupils are making progress and request extra help from outside agencies, such as educational psychologists, if necessary. They make sure that pupils have the right level of work and support.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. It is equally impressive around the school and in lessons, and outstanding behaviour is typical over time. Pupils know that their teachers care about them as individuals and want the best for them. They say they like their teachers very much and that they are fair.
- When children start school, they are guided to develop good social skills and to understand and adopt the right way to behave in school. The headteacher and senior leaders make sure that all staff are consistent in their high expectations. As a result, children make excellent progress in developing very positive attitudes to learning, respecting others and knowing that they must take responsibility for how they behave.
- Pupils take pride in belonging to their school community. They are polite to each other and to visitors. Lunchtimes and break times are very social occasions.
- In the older year groups, pupils sustain their enthusiasm for learning and demonstrate high levels of perseverance. Pupils work very well together and show high levels of respect for each other's opinions and efforts.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. The school has a strong emphasis on making sure pupils are aware of how to keep themselves safe when using mobile phones and computers. For their age, pupils have a very good understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe.
- Pupils are confident that there is no bullying in the school, although they acknowledge that sometimes there are 'fallings out'. They are totally confident that should they have concerns, they could 'sort it out' themselves or staff would deal with them immediately and to their satisfaction.
- Attendance was below average in 2013 and a school priority for improvement. In part, the attendance rate was affected by a high number of pupils absent with the norovirus and also a small number of parents had not made sure their children came to school regularly. The school has taken a firm line on unauthorised absence and the rate of attendance is now above average.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher leads by example. She inspires her staff and ensures exceptionally good opportunities for them to develop their teaching and leadership skills. There is a very strong team spirit within the school and morale is high. All staff are committed to making sure that all pupils have equal opportunities to succeed in all they do.
- Senior leaders have a strong capacity for sustaining the high standards in the school. They provide excellent role models for teachers new to the profession and for the trainee teachers who spend time in the school. In their leadership roles, they have an astute understanding of how good the teaching is, the progress pupils make and the standards achieved.
- Leaders with responsibility for aspects of the school's work make a significant contribution to school improvements. For example, they work alongside teachers to model good practice; they introduce and carefully monitor new initiatives such as the marking of pupils' work to make sure that all teachers are using the same methods and pupils are benefiting.

- The headteacher, governors and senior leaders have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and where further improvements are needed. There is no complacency. Senior leaders are undertaking training for the implementation of the new National Curriculum. They have many innovative ideas for how this will be organised.
- The school's well-focused improvement plan, based on accurate evaluation of its performance, identifies the right priorities for improvement. For example, the target set for the proportion of Year 1 pupils to achieve the expected standard in phonics is above the 2013 average and, from school data, already close to being met.
- The school is discerning and rigorous in its use of setting targets for teachers to improve or develop their skills further. A key feature is that some targets are set for more experienced teachers to have a positive impact on a particular area for the whole school. If these are not met, they do not move up the pay scale.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted exceptionally well through the stimulating and rich curriculum. Subjects are linked together in themes that provide many opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy and numeracy skills. For example, the school has a 'money week' when pupils plan how they can raise money, carry out their plans and check how much profit they have made. The curriculum includes numerous opportunities for pupils to work together, go on trips and have visitors to the school.
- The partnership with the Billericay SCITT is very advantageous for both partners. Trainees have excellent examples of teaching and leadership. The school has opportunities to see trainees teaching and, if there are vacancies, to offer a trainee a post in the school. These appointments have been most beneficial to the school in terms of teaching and leadership.
- The school uses the additional sport funding appropriately to develop further staff's knowledge of how to teach a range of sports and to provide training for mid-day assistants to run games type activities at mid-day breaks.
- The school finances the services of an educational consultancy which is used very productively to confirm the school's view of itself and also to train school leaders. The local authority provides the right level of support for the school. Its representatives visit the school to discuss data about pupils' progress and improvement planning.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is highly effective. Governors are not complacent and are determined that pupils' achievement is sustained at an outstanding level. They provide the right amount of support and challenge for all leaders and have a very good understanding of the quality of teaching and the link between performance and pay. They know how well pupils are doing compared with schools nationally and locally. Governors are closely involved in all spending decisions, especially those about pupil premium and sports funding. They check on how effectively this specific funding is used. Governors regularly review their skills and undertake training when they need to. They make sure that the school meets the current national requirements for safeguarding and child protection.

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	114886
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	441388

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	225
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Young
Headteacher	Karen Mackenzie
Date of previous school inspection	10 November 2008
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