

Hilltop Junior School

Hill Avenue, Wickford, Essex SS11 8LT

Inspection dates

29–30 September 2015

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The headteacher and governors have not made sure that the overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment is consistently good. As a result, pupils' achievement and standards are not rising rapidly enough.
- Pupils do not have enough opportunities to improve their spelling. This restricts their ability to develop their writing skills.
- The teaching of reading skills for the younger pupils in the school has not been as well planned as it needs to be. This is currently improving.
- Progress is not consistently strong across the school in all subjects but particularly in writing.
- New subject leaders do not have the skills needed to lead their areas of responsibility effectively.
- The most-able pupils are not making the progress they should across the whole school. The tasks and work provided for these pupils are not challenging enough.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils of all ages love coming to school. Attendance is consistently above national figures.
- The headteacher and governors have put effective strategies into place to assess and check pupils' skills and knowledge when they join the school.
- Disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs and those in receipt of the pupil premium make good progress.
- Pupils behave well, feel safe and know how to keep themselves safe. This view is strongly supported by parents and staff.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management so that it is good by making sure that:
 - new leaders quickly develop the skills they need to lead in their areas of responsibility effectively
 - all leaders are focused on improving teaching and raising achievement.
- Raise the quality of teaching across the school by:
 - ensuring that the quality of teaching of early reading and writing skills for the youngest children in the school is regularly reviewed and improved
 - improving the teaching of spelling.
- Raise the achievement of the most-able pupils by:
 - setting high expectations for all of the work that these pupils produce
 - routinely providing opportunities for them to think more deeply and challenge themselves.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Leaders and managers, including governors, have not succeeded in making sure that the pace of implementing improvement is fast enough. The most-able pupils are not challenged to do their best. Consequently, the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement are not yet good.
- New subject leaders are beginning to lead staff development and check on the quality of teaching. Teachers are responding positively to the advice they are given and adapting their practice accordingly but there has not been time for this to impact on improvement.
- School leaders have identified that a large proportion of pupils start the school with lower than expected knowledge about letters and the sounds they make (phonics). A good start has been made this term to tackle this and, although more work needs to be done, pupils' reading and writing are showing signs of improvement.
- Appraisal has been completed this term for leaders and key subject leaders with targets focused on ambitious outcomes for pupils. New staff speak favourably about the usefulness of the induction training the school provides.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress. The school has a clear view of what needs to be done to raise standards further and works successfully with parents and outside agencies.
- The curriculum supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively. Pupils are given many opportunities to enrich their education. They speak enthusiastically about learning about other cultures and religions through their lessons and assemblies. Pupils say they particularly enjoy the 'richness of culture that new pupils coming to the school from other countries' bring with them. They are very well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The school offers a wide selection of extra-curricular activities, including ukulele club, choir and gardening, which are well attended. One parent noted that: 'the school clearly recognises the importance of music' and pupils are excited about singing at The O2 arena. Many parents comment positively about the recent curriculum evenings, agreeing that they had been given 'invaluable advice about how best to help our children'.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively to support the small numbers of pupils who are eligible to receive it. Funds are allocated on an individual basis. As a result, these pupils are making good and sometimes better progress, particularly in mathematics.
- The school is making good use of the PE and sport premium for primary schools to increase teachers' skills and confidence and promote pupils' physical development and their understanding of healthy lifestyles. Pupils participate in several different sports, ranging from indoor athletics to cross country. Both boys and girls agree that these cater for a wide range of interests.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors bring a wide range of skills and experience to their role. They have a clear understanding of the school's work, but have not made the improvement of teaching their priority. Governors have been fully involved in ensuring that the transition which takes place with the infant school is effective. Governors know that pay is linked to performance and that awards are not automatic. They are aware of how school leaders are tackling underperformance. Governors are also aware of how the school's achievement information compares to national figures.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Governors and staff have attended recent courses to increase their effectiveness and update their knowledge. Safeguarding policies and procedures are fully in place and rigorously applied. Parents wholeheartedly agree that the school is a safe place for their children.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Some teaching has not been strong enough to ensure good progress in all subjects. The teaching of writing and spelling are in the most urgent need of improvement. Work in pupils' books indicates that not all teachers have high enough expectations for pupils in these respects.
- Too much of the work provided for the most-able pupils lacks challenge. Teachers do not extend pupils'

thinking and knowledge enough. A few parents say that their children are 'bright but not challenged'.

- The teaching of phonics for some of the youngest pupils is a regular part of their learning. This teaching is systematic and confidently led by well-trained teaching assistants and is leading to improvements in younger pupils' reading skills. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 enjoy their 'reading miles' challenge and talk about it with great enthusiasm.
- The use of classroom assistants and other adults to support learning is planned well across the school. In most lessons, their support focuses on pupils' learning. Where this is most effective, all the adults have a clear view of the purpose of their work and are able to support pupils of all ability effectively.
- Some of the teaching is very effective and there is clear evidence that leaders are steadily improving practice. However, expectations are not yet high enough in all classes to ensure tasks set are appropriately demanding or require pupils to think hard. Where teaching is at its best, good planning means that no time is wasted. Teachers know what the pupils need to do in order to improve and provide activities that match their needs. They expect a great deal of the most-able pupils and set them exciting challenges. In one such lesson, where the progress of the most-able pupils was very strong, pupils explored an unusual method of calculating three-, four- and five-digit numbers as well as numbers including decimals. One pupil commented: 'I can't wait to go home to try this out with my mum.'

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Older pupils value the opportunity to be appointed as sports leaders at playtimes. They know that their role is an important one and their aim is to make sure that 'no one is ever lonely or sad'.
- Most parents agree that their children enjoy school and feel safe. Pupils say that they feel very safe in school. They have a clear understanding of the different forms of bullying, including through mobile phones and emails.
- Relationships between staff and the school leaders are unwaveringly positive. Many staff comment that they feel valued and well supported to improve.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Attendance continues to be above the national average for primary schools. Leaders check pupils' attendance rigorously, promptly following up any concerns that may arise. As a result, there is very little persistent absence.
- The vast majority of parents have positive views about behaviour in the school. Pupils respond well to the expectations set for them to be kind, courteous and respectful. Their good behaviour is seen in classrooms, both in and on their way to assembly, at lunch and breaktimes. Parents speak very positively about the 'catch me cards' which they agree 'are a great way of rewarding children who always behave well'. Pupils hold these in high esteem.
- Pupils' good behaviour and their willingness to become involved in their lessons mean that learning is rarely disrupted.
- Pupils know who to go to if there is a problem with bullying. They are confident that any incident would be resolved quickly by adults in the school.
- The level of pupils' enthusiasm for their learning is directly linked to how well their teacher matches the work to their needs and abilities. Where teachers fail to provide enough challenge, some pupils lose their concentration and their attention wavers. In contrast, where teachers provide work which closely matches pupils' needs, they work very hard and apply themselves wholeheartedly to their task.

Outcomes for pupils require improvement

- The school's assessment information, moderated externally, indicates that the majority of pupils enter the school with skills and knowledge below those expected for their age. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 dipped at the end of the recent summer term. Inspection evidence, including analysis of pupils' books and the school's assessments, shows that progress is improving in mathematics and reading. However

this is not yet consistent across all subjects and particularly when pupils are writing.

- Teachers' expectations of pupils' handwriting and presentation are higher than those for the content of their written work. These expectations are presented as non-negotiables for all pupils. Not all teachers encourage pupils to use and apply the tools for writing, such as spelling, across a wider range of subjects. In some books, pupils do not apply their knowledge of grammar accurately enough and this is not corrected when learning is evaluated, for example 'I done ...'.
- The most-able pupils are not given the opportunities to extend their learning or respond to searching or detailed questions.
- The teaching of phonics is improving. Well-trained teaching assistants are enabling younger pupils to read well in small groups. Pupils confidently use their knowledge of letters and sounds to read words they cannot recognise immediately. This is an area for regular review of impact as pupils move through the school.
- Lower-attaining pupils, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress from the beginning of Year 3. Their progress is regularly assessed and this information is used to make sure they are given more effective help and guidance across the school.
- The progress of pupils who are disadvantaged is improving in relation to other pupils nationally in reading. Effective and well-organised support has led to good progress in writing and some outstanding progress in mathematics.

School details

Unique reference number	137245
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10001933

This inspection 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	304
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Eileen Bull
Headteacher	Alison Waite
Telephone number	01268 734649
Website	www.hilltopjuniorschool.sharepoint.com
Email address	admin@hilltop-jun.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	10–11 September 2013

Information about this school

- This school is a larger-than-average primary school.
- Most of the pupils are White British.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above average.
- A below-average proportion of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in the care of the local authority and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 17 lessons across all age groups in the school; some lessons were jointly observed with the headteacher.
- Inspectors also made other visits to classes, looked at pupils' work in books and listened to them read.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, subject leaders, an external consultant, pupils and governors. Inspectors talked informally to pupils at lunch and breaktimes and observed them in assembly and around the school.
- Inspectors met informally with parents at the beginning of the school day. Inspectors took account of the 41 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) as well as individual communications from parents. The responses to 32 staff questionnaires were also considered.
- A number of documents were evaluated, including the school's information about pupils' progress and the school's evaluation of its own work. Checks on teachers' effectiveness and records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding were also made.

Inspection team

Gay Whent, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Kay Leach	Ofsted Inspector
Karen Heath	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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