

Inspection of a good school: Highbury Infant School and Nursery

Standhill Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG4 9AG

Inspection dates:

1 and 2 November 2022

Outcome

Highbury Infant School and Nursery continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Children and pupils at Highbury are animated, inquisitive, kind and very well behaved. They develop these characteristics because teaching is interesting and adults themselves model fairness, kindness and good manners. Children and pupils feel secure and are safe. The playground is a lively place, but everyone gets on. When disagreements occur, pupils often sort it out amicably among themselves but know that an adult is always on hand to help, if needed. 'Feel Good Friends' are also available if someone is feeling lonely or sad.

Reading and mathematical skills develop very well. This starts in the Nursery and continues through to Year 2. Children and pupils learn a broad curriculum that meets all national requirements. However, in some wider subjects, expectations for the quality of pupils' work could be even more ambitious.

Support for children and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is a strength. Strong links exist with the nearby junior school, including shared staffing. This particularly helps pupils when they transition between Years 2 and 3.

School leaders and staff have thought carefully about the impact of the pandemic on children's and pupils' lives. Strategies to help them catch up quickly have been implemented with care.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Reading is at the front and centre of the school's priorities. Recognising that standards had dipped before the pandemic, additional support for pupils was put in place. Leaders also reviewed the school's reading strategy. After methodical research, they introduced a new phonics scheme for Reception to Year 2 in September 2022. Staff training for this has been thorough, and parents have been well informed through information meetings and online sessions.

Pupils' language and communication skills develop well in the Nursery and Reception classes. Adults' careful questioning, verbal interactions and regular use of rhymes and songs play an important part in this. When working together, children converse and show excellent social skills. At snack time, children are accustomed to serving themselves and showing good table manners when enjoying their milk and fruit.

In Years 1 and 2, phonics teaching is effective. Pupils enjoy reading. Books are available to read and borrow in every part of the school, including on the playground. The weakest readers are supported well. Constant informal assessment is effective in identifying who is struggling or who would benefit from additional work. Teaching is adapted in a way that enables everyone to cover the same learning, whatever their need or ability. Pupils with SEND and those who speak English as an additional language benefit especially. This approach also happens in mathematics. For example, a variety of different resources help all pupils to master the same addition and subtraction challenges. As Year 2 pupils become more confident in number work, they record their reasoning more formally in exercise books.

The new phonics scheme is still in its early days. Leaders would like to extend it into the Nursery when the relevant materials are published. Alongside some excellent practice, staff very occasionally use alternative teaching materials that are not as effective. That said, children and pupils still make good progress in learning to decode words and become fluent readers.

Other curriculum subjects and areas of learning have secure plans that ensure coverage of all nationally required content. Some of these are commercially bought schemes of work. Key stage 1 and early years leaders work closely together to ensure that curriculum thinking is joined up. Helpful guidance is provided, and class teachers diligently deliver well-organised sessions. However, sometimes the emphasis is more on completion of activities rather than on the quality of pupils' responses. Teachers are less practised in modelling, and correcting errors, for example in singing and rhythm work. Pupils' progress in music is also limited by the very small range of tuned percussion instruments available.

The school places great emphasis on pupils' well-being. Significant effort has gone into developing their confidence and resilience. Parents are overwhelmingly effusive about the way in which staff nurture and support their children. Pupils' positive behaviour means that learning takes place without interruption. 'Feeling Good Club' provides extra-curricular activities, including Spanish, computing and forest school. A new relationships policy was introduced in 2021 after full consultation with parents. Children and pupils have a clear understanding of matters such as turn-taking and asking permission. They are taught about other faiths, beliefs and cultures.

Leaders' prioritisation of well-being extends to staff, too. Staff are unanimously positive about leadership and management. They understand the need to work hard but appreciate the efforts made to rationalise assessments and reduce unnecessary administrative tasks. Regular continuing professional development is provided in safeguarding and the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Fewer opportunities are provided for subject-specific training in other areas of the curriculum.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Recruitment checks on adults are appropriately thorough, and these records are very well organised. Safeguarding case files are meticulous in detail. Liaison with other nurseries, schools and agencies is particularly strong. Shared staffing for SEND and safeguarding with the local junior school means that transfer of knowledge and information is particularly tight. Numbers of safeguarding concerns are few, but when they occur, action is taken promptly. This is because staff understand the signs of concern and know what to do. Pupils have a good, age-appropriate awareness of how to keep themselves safe.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- A new phonics scheme started in September 2022. Very occasionally, staff use materials that are not in line with the new scheme. Leaders should ensure that phonics teaching is completely consistent across the school so that pupils make even better progress in learning to decode words and become fluent readers.
- Although all subjects are planned thoroughly, in some areas teachers focus more on completion of the activity than they do on the quality of pupils' learning. Leaders should ensure that targeted continuing professional development is provided in the foundation subjects. This is so that staff have a better understanding of what makes for effective teaching and learning in these areas of the curriculum.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in June 2013.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	117113
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10241622
Type of school	Infant and nursery
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3 to 7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	214
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Tony Side
Headteacher	Helen Avey
Website	www.highbury.herts.sch.uk/
Date of previous inspection	28 March 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The only notable change since the last inspection has been the appointment of a new governing body chair.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Throughout the inspection, the inspector met regularly with the headteacher, including in her role as designated safeguarding lead. The inspector also discussed safeguarding with the deputy designated safeguarding lead and members of staff, looked at recruitment checks and records and sampled other safeguarding documentation.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and music. Each deep dive included meeting with subject leaders, visiting lessons, speaking with teachers and pupils and looking at pupils' work. The inspector also sampled plans and pupils' work from other areas of the curriculum.

- The inspector met with the special educational needs and disabilities coordinators, the chair and three other governors and a representative from the local authority.
- The inspector considered responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and parents. He spoke with pupils about their experience of school and their learning and he observed their behaviour in class and in the playground.

Inspection team

Mark Phillips, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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