

Inspection of an outstanding school: Hillside Community Primary School

Egerton, Tanhouse, Skelmersdale, Lancashire WN8 6DE

Inspection dates:

22 and 23 February 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Most pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), achieve well. This is because leaders have established an interesting and carefully considered curriculum. Starting in the classroom for two-year-olds, children learn many valuable new words. Many pupils, particularly those in upper key stage 2, learn to read well. However, some younger pupils do not learn to read as successfully as they should.

Pupils are very polite. They develop long-lasting relationships with their friends. Pupils learn successfully, for example by reading many high-quality books. Pupils gain new knowledge through their lessons in different subjects. They learn through their educational trips, for instance to study the statues on the beach at Crosby. They profit from their extra learning, for example through sessions in the school's woodland area or in the popular breakfast club.

Pupils behave sensibly in lessons and elsewhere in the school. They understand the high expectations that leaders have of them. Pupils said that they feel safe. Leaders act promptly and effectively to resolve any instances of bullying.

Pupils are ably supported by staff. However, leaders and governors do not engage well with staff about their workload and how they feel about their jobs. As a result, some staff have concerns about these aspects of their work.

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

Mostly, leaders have established an ambitious curriculum for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders identify the essential subject content and curriculum structure and provide well-ordered units of work that help teachers to deliver the curriculum successfully.

Leaders' approach to developing the curriculum includes linking children's learning in the early years with what comes next in key stage 1. Teachers know what essential information pupils should be able to remember, such as important new words. This successful teaching begins in the classroom for two-year-olds.

Teachers select learning activities that match leaders' intended curriculum. Staff enthuse pupils about learning. Staff make sure that pupils with SEND are supported to learn the same knowledge as other pupils. Teachers use assessment strategies carefully to identify whether pupils understand essential knowledge and concepts. Teachers and teaching assistants revisit key learning if pupils need extra practice. Pupils' learning deepens over time. Mostly, pupils remember their previous learning and achieve well.

Leaders have established a love of reading throughout the school. Teachers' sharing of high-quality fiction and non-fiction books is a central part of the curriculum in all classes, including in the Nursery. Pupils' avid reading is rewarded, leading to healthy competition and fun for pupils. Staff teach children about a wide range of different authors and their works. Older pupils talk with confidence and understanding about books that they have read. They are quick to recognise the works of a famous author or playwright such as William Shakespeare. Pupils in Year 6 achieve particularly well in reading.

Recently, leaders have introduced a new approach to teaching phonics. Leaders have provided staff with access to phonics training. However, some staff help pupils too much. Some staff say letter sounds incorrectly. Some books that staff provide to pupils to practise their reading do not precisely match pupils' phonics knowledge. This slows learning for some pupils who are at the early stages of reading. They do not read as confidently and successfully as they should.

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders and staff have worked with great determination and commitment to help pupils and their parents and carers. Leaders ensure that staff quickly identify and support any pupils who have SEND, starting in the early years.

Many pupils behave well at school. Low-level disruption in classrooms is rare, meaning that staff focus on teaching pupils. Some pupils miss days of learning and therefore some of the exciting and meaningful curriculum that leaders and staff provide. Leaders are taking extensive and decisive action to improve pupils' attendance and the picture is steadily improving.

Leaders and staff teach pupils to respect different people, families and communities. They prepare pupils well for the opportunities and responsibilities of life in Britain and the wider world.

Governors bring valuable expertise to their roles. They support and challenge leaders effectively. Mostly, leaders work successfully. However, some staff said that their workload is too heavy. They also said that leaders do not take enough action to help them to feel happy in their jobs. These issues risk undermining staff's well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff said they are often the first professionals to have contact with families due to the increased isolation for local people caused by the pandemic. They act promptly when they spot any safeguarding concerns. Leaders ensure that the necessary help for families is provided as early as possible.

Designated safeguarding leaders adequately review and improve the school's work. They are well informed about safeguarding issues that can affect pupils' lives. The safeguarding team makes sure that all leaders, governors and staff have access to a suitable range of safeguarding training. Staff help pupils to know how to act safely, such as when using social media.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders do not make sure that all staff teach phonics to pupils in the same, agreed way. Additionally, some of the books that staff provide to pupils are too difficult for them to read. These weaknesses hold back some pupils when they are learning to read, and their experience of success. Leaders should ensure that all staff have the knowledge and skills they need to teach phonics. Pupils' reading books should more closely match the letter sounds that they know.
- Leaders and governors have not engaged with staff well enough about their workload and well-being. Some teachers and teaching assistants have concerns about these aspects of their work. Leaders and governors should do as much as they can to resolve these issues.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. 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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in March 2017.

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	119298
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10256093
Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	177
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter O'Dowd
Headteacher	Angela Aspinwall-Livesey
Website	www.hillside-pri.lancs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	8 and 9 March 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Leaders provide part-time places for two-year-old children in a dedicated classroom. The separate Nursery class for three- and four-year-olds also operates part time.
- The headteacher, some other staff and the governing body are shared between the school and one other local school.
- Leaders do not use any alternative provision.
- Leaders provide a breakfast club for pupils.

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 his evaluation of the school.
- The inspector completed deep dives in early reading, mathematics and geography. He met with leaders of these subjects and reviewed leaders' curriculum information. He visited some lessons, including learning activities for two-year-olds. The inspector spoke with some pupils and reviewed samples of pupils' work with subject leaders.

- The inspector listened to some pupils from Years 1 to 3 reading individually to staff. He checked the provision of fiction and non-fiction books for pupils around the school and spoke with some pupils about reading.
- The inspector spoke with staff about their work at the school and reviewed staff responses to an Ofsted survey.
- To understand pupils' views of the school, the inspector spoke with groups of pupils, including some pupils with SEND. The inspector reviewed responses from pupils, in Years 1 to 6, to an Ofsted survey.
- The inspector considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. The inspector also spoke with some parents.
- The inspector met with four members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.
- The inspector spoke by telephone with the school's external adviser.
- To review safeguarding, the inspector spoke with leaders, staff and pupils. He reviewed the single central record of leaders' checks on staff and considered a sample of leaders' records about safeguarding pupils.

Inspection team

Tim Vaughan, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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