

# Walpole Highway Community Primary School

## CONTENTS

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[Basic information about the school](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Main findings](#)

[Key issues](#)

[Inspection findings](#)

[Standards of achievement](#)

[Quality of education](#)

[Management and efficiency of the school](#)

[Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development](#)

[Implementation of the action plan](#)

## Basic information about the school

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Name of school:	Walpole Highway Community Primary School
Type of school:	Primary
Status:	Community
Age range of pupils:	4 to 11 years
Headteacher:	Mrs C Howard
Address of school:	School Road Walpole Highway Wisbech PE14 7QQ
Telephone:	01945 880329
Name and address of appropriate authority:	The governing body, address as above
Chair of governors:	Mrs J Humphrey

Local education authority area:  
Unique reference number:  
Name of reporting inspector:  
Dates of inspection:

Norfolk  
120887  
Mr P Brooker HMI  
10-11 November 2003

## Introduction

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1. Walpole Highway Community Primary School is situated in the village of Walpole Highway and serves the surrounding fenland area north-east of Wisbech. It is a very small infant and junior school with 52 pupils aged from four to 11, in three mixed-age classes. All pupils are of white UK heritage. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is above average. Two pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Need, and, at 23 per cent, the proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs is above average. Year groups are small and the pupils' overall attainment on entry varies from year to year. The school has recently entered a partnership agreement with the neighbouring Tilney St Lawrence Primary School, and has had a joint headteacher since September 2003.

2. The school was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in February 2002. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

3. The school was visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) in September 2002 and in January and May 2003 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of February 2002.

4. In November 2003, two HMI returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

5. Ten lessons or parts of lessons, two assemblies and four registration sessions were inspected. The pupils were observed at break and lunchtimes and samples of their work were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the three teachers, the chair of governors and a representative from the local education authority (LEA). Informal discussions were held with other staff and pupils. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was also taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

6. The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of February 2002 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.

## Main findings

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7. In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the

education for its pupils. The main findings of the inspection are:

- few pupils experience pre-school education and, on entry to the school, the basic skills of a significant proportion of pupils are underdeveloped. However, the pupils make a good start in the Foundation Stage and most achieve the appropriate Early Learning Goals for five-year-olds. The pupils now make good progress as they move through the school in Key Stages 1 and 2;
- small numbers of pupils in each year group cause wide fluctuations in annual results and make year-on-year comparisons unreliable. However, there has been a significant improvement in overall standards of attainment since the last inspection. Although the results in the end-of-Key Stage 1 tests in 2003 were below those seen nationally, they were in line with the school's targets. In the end-of-Key Stage 2 tests the proportion of pupils achieving the expected Level 4 increased substantially compared with the previous year. The school exceeded its targets and there was significant improvement across all subjects compared with previous years;
- the pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory and often good progress;
- the quality of learning was satisfactory in almost all lessons and good in over half. In a few lessons the pace of learning was too slow for higher-attaining pupils;
- the quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection and is good overall. It was at least satisfactory in all lessons observed, including two thirds where it was good or very good;
- class sizes are small and there is a good adult-pupil ratio. Classroom assistants provide sound and often good support for individuals and groups of pupils;
- the curriculum is broad and balanced and includes all subjects in reasonable depth, but there are limited opportunities for enrichment and extracurricular activities;
- suitable systems have been developed to assess, record and monitor the pupils' progress. Procedures for target setting have developed well in English and mathematics, and individual targets are sometimes used effectively to guide the pupils' progress in lessons. The best marking is diagnostic and clearly indicates the pupils' next steps for improvement;
- the headteacher provides clear and effective leadership and has carefully fostered an effective team to consolidate and accelerate the school's progress. She has been perceptive and resourceful in promoting further improvement;
- the role of the co-ordinator for literacy and special educational needs has developed well, but the responsibilities of other subject leaders remain underdeveloped;
- the pupils are well behaved and have good attitudes to learning. There are good relationships between adults and pupils, and between pupils themselves. Pupils of all ages co-operate sensibly and are happy to take responsibility. They take an interest in their work and sustain their concentration well;
- the school has a positive ethos. There is sound provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, although there are relatively few opportunities for the pupils' wider personal development;
- the pupils' attendance is good and has improved significantly since the time of the last inspection. Attendance over the last academic year was 96.2 per cent, with 0.17 per cent unauthorised absence. Both figures are better than the national average. The number on roll has remained steady since the last inspection, but there have been high levels of pupil mobility;
- the governing body has developed its role effectively and is well informed about the school. Suitable systems have been introduced to extend the governors' individual responsibilities and to ensure that a greater number are actively involved in monitoring progress;
- the LEA has provided sound support and guidance for the school through regular monitoring, advice and appropriate training. The one-year appointment of an acting headteacher from within the LEA and the establishment of a partnership arrangement have been fundamental in transforming the school and sustaining its further improvement.

## Key issues

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8. In order to improve the pupils' quality of education further, the governors, headteacher, senior managers and staff need to:

- continue to raise standards of attainment, notably in literacy;
- make better provision for higher-attaining pupils;
- improve subject leadership and management;
- provide pupils with a wider range of enrichment opportunities.

## Inspection findings

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### Standards of achievement

9. Very few pupils experience formal pre-school education. On entry to the school the basic skills of a significant proportion of pupils are underdeveloped. However, they make a good start in the Foundation Stage and most achieve the appropriate Early Learning Goals for five-year-olds. Analysis of the Foundation Stage Profile for reception pupils shows that they made good progress in 2003, notably in the areas of personal, social and emotional development, and in the acquisition of communication and literacy skills.

10. Small year groups cause wide fluctuation in annual results and make year-on-year comparisons unreliable. However, there has been significant improvement in overall standards of attainment since the last inspection. The pupils now make good progress as they move through the school in Key Stages 1 and 2. The results of the end-of-Key Stage 1 tests in 2003 were below those seen nationally, but were in line with the school's targets. Four of the five pupils achieved the expected Level 2 in reading and mathematics. Three pupils achieved Level 2 in writing. One pupil achieved the higher Level 3 in reading and in mathematics.

11. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected Level 4 in the end-of-Key Stage 2 tests increased substantially in 2003 compared with the previous year. The school exceeded its targets, and analysis of average scores indicates that there was significant improvement across all subjects compared with previous years. In mathematics and science the proportion achieving Level 4 was broadly in line with that seen nationally and well above that of schools in similar social contexts. However, results in English were well below average and the proportion of pupils achieving the higher Level 5 was very low. One pupil achieved the higher Level 5 in mathematics and science, but none did in English. When compared with their prior attainment at the end of Key Stage 1, most pupils made very good progress. Taken over time, standards of attainment in the end-of-Key Stage 2 tests have shown good improvement in recent years, and the school has successfully closed the gap on national levels of attainment. However, the standards achieved by girls remain significantly lower than those seen nationally, notably in English.

12. The pupils with special educational needs make at least sound progress through an appropriate mix of in-class support and well-focused individual support. Teachers use assessment information

effectively to plan appropriate work for pupils with special educational needs. Classroom assistants are well informed and are proactive in supporting the pupils' learning.

13. Overall standards of literacy remain low, notably in writing, although pupils make at least satisfactory and often good progress in English lessons. Speaking skills are often weak: significant number of pupils, notably younger children, struggle to articulate their ideas; weaknesses in vocabulary are reflected in the pupils' written work. However, standards of speaking, listening and reading have shown good improvement. There remains a disparity between standards of reading and writing. Many pupils arrive at the school having had limited access to reading resources at home, and the school provides opportunities for more-able readers to access a greater range of quality literature. Most pupils read with appropriate fluency, but their writing lacks complexity and breadth of vocabulary, and spelling is generally poor. The pupils' spelling of key terms and vocabulary is often inaccurate in subjects other than English and they lack the techniques to check or recognise errors in order to correct them. The pupils are given suitable opportunities for extended writing for a range of different purposes, and there is appropriate emphasis on improving the structure and accuracy of their writing. A number of steps have been initiated to improve standards of literacy: 'talk for writing' is now implemented across all classes; enhanced opportunities for extended writing are planned in English lessons and across other subjects; and greater time is allocated to reading activities. Displays of work model some of the pupils' best writing and encourage creative and extended work across a range of subjects.

14. Standards in numeracy are improving and are broadly in line with age-related expectations. On entry to the school, some pupils are unable to count or recognise digits, but they make good progress in the Foundation Stage. Pupils of all ages make good progress in mathematics lessons. Well-structured oral starter sessions systematically develop their mathematical skills by building their confidence in handling data and undertaking mental calculations. Some older pupils lack confidence but select and apply a range of formal and informal mathematical operations and can estimate and calculate with reasonable accuracy. In one lesson, pupils in Years 5 and 6 recognised a wide range of shapes and had good recall of the properties of different triangles. Good opportunities were presented in other lessons for pupils to consolidate their numeracy skills. In a science lesson for pupils in Years 3 and 4, for example, pupils were expected to accurately measure and then to convert their measurements from centimetres to millimetres and metres.

15. Standards in science are improving throughout the school and the pupils make satisfactory progress overall. In the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, the teaching of science covers a wide range of topics, such as materials, forces and environments. Reception and Year 1 pupils use resources to undertake simple scientific investigations. They learn to test, sort and record their findings and they demonstrate sound observational skills. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 have a basic understanding of the steps in scientific enquiry and the need for fair testing, and are able to make predictions to guide their investigations. Older pupils in Years 5 and 6 have a sound knowledge of a good range of facts and processes, but their investigational skills are often weak. Older pupils, for example spoke knowledgeably about the solar system and demonstrated a basic understanding of planetary orbits and features, but were less confident in designing or evaluating the reliability of their scientific investigations. Higher-attaining pupils are given too few opportunities to develop higher-order skills in science. An initiative last year made good use of the expertise of a visiting teacher to develop the investigational skills of Year 5 and 6 pupils through work on structures in science.

### **Quality of education**

16. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection and is good overall. It was at least satisfactory in all lessons observed, including two thirds where it was good or very good. Short-term planning is sound and appropriately addresses the wide range of learning needs within mixed-age classes. Lessons were suitably guided by learning objectives that were effectively shared with the

managed and well directed. The quality of questioning was good, with an appropriate balance of open and closed elements and expert handling of incorrect responses. Learning activities were well structured, with a good balance of teacher input and more active learning styles. Group and pair work were effectively used to promote interaction between pupils, to encourage the modification of ideas and to provide effective rehearsal for writing. Relationships between adults and pupils were very good. The classes were motivated to work hard and pupils co-operated well with one another. There were consistent and effective routines for managing behaviour. Praise and encouragement have established a very good learning environment in all classes and the pupils feel confident to contribute ideas. This good climate for learning has successfully raised the pupils' esteem and confidence over the last year and has promoted a positive ethos of achievement.

17. The pupils make good progress in lessons in response to good teaching and high expectations. The quality of learning was satisfactory in almost all lessons and good in over half. When the teaching was lively and engaging, the pupils enjoyed their work and were keen to participate. In parts of a few lessons the pace of learning was too slow for higher-attaining pupils. The pupils' work was effectively differentiated in a variety of ways with a good range of learning activities, but the pace of teaching was occasionally too pedestrian. In these sessions the higher-attaining pupils were able to consolidate their prior learning but did not make sufficient progress in acquiring new knowledge or applying their skills and understanding to new contexts. On occasions, short-term planning did not define sufficiently challenging learning outcomes to enable the higher-attaining pupils to make the progress of which they were capable.

18. Class sizes are small and there is a good adult-pupil ratio. Learning support assistants understand the needs of individual pupils and are able to provide well-focused support for individuals and small groups. Their roles have been well developed and their support is now more confident, flexible and proactive.

19. Suitable systems have been developed to assess, record and monitor the pupils' progress. Procedures for target setting have developed well in English and mathematics and individual targets are sometimes used effectively to guide the pupils' progress in lessons. The best marking is diagnostic and clearly identifies the pupils' next steps for improvement. The school has a policy of encouraging pupils to refer to their writing targets before they start any piece of writing, but this approach is not used consistently. Furthermore, these targets are not shared with parents in a way that enables parents to be involved with their children's progress.

20. The curriculum is broad and balanced and includes all subjects in reasonable depth. The curriculum map is evaluated and revised annually in response to the specific needs of each class.

### **Management and efficiency of the school**

21. Over the last year the acting headteacher has transformed the school's ethos by establishing good team work amongst the staff and by promoting a culture of achievement. Since September the partnership headteacher has fostered the school's excellent team spirit and has further developed the school's positive climate for learning. High expectations are communicated to the pupils, notably through assemblies. Weekly achievement assemblies have involved parents in the school's burgeoning achievement culture and addressed some issues of low aspiration. The headteacher has been perceptive and resourceful in promoting further improvement. She has used the physical and human resources of the two schools to share expertise and develop the roles of individual staff. Learning support assistants have been carefully allocated between the two sites in order to maximize their expertise and to develop their experience. The school is developing appropriate collaborative arrangements with its partner primary school. Joint sessions are planned, such as the information and communication technology (ICT) day for all Year 6 pupils. The headteacher has a suitable vision for the school's further improvement, but development planning is at an early stage and needs to be formalised.

22. The role of the literacy co-ordinator has developed well. Her analysis of assessment information has guided subject developments, such as target setting. She has monitored standards in literacy and has evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of the statutory and non-statutory tests. The development of these responsibilities has given her a clear view of the pupils' strengths and weaknesses and further curriculum developments are suitably guided by a subject action plan. She has also effectively fulfilled her responsibilities as co-ordinator for special educational needs: procedures have been revised and the pupils' progress has been properly guided, monitored and assessed. The roles of the co-ordinators for mathematics and science are comparatively underdeveloped. Procedures for monitoring and evaluating standards in these curriculum areas need strengthening. The partner schools have sought to develop management roles by allocating joint responsibilities, such as the management of ICT. This is a sound principle, and the schools need to develop and extend these management roles carefully in order to make best use of the teachers' expertise and time.

23. The governing body has developed its effectiveness by ensuring that a greater number of governors are actively involved in monitoring progress. They are well informed and their roles have been suitably developed.

24. The LEA has provided sound support and guidance for the school through regular monitoring and advice, and appropriate training. The one-year appointment of an acting headteacher from the county headteacher service was fundamental in transforming the school and the establishment of a partnership arrangement has sustained its further improvement.

### **Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

25. The school has a positive ethos. All staff work well as a team. Whole-school assemblies play an important part in the daily lives of the pupils and make a powerful contribution to the school's communal ethos and achievement culture, and to the pupils' personal development. They are well-organised occasions with appropriate opportunities for reflection and participation. Displays of pupils' work are good. They support the pupils' learning well and do much to foster their self-esteem and create an attractive learning environment.

26. The pupils are well behaved around the school, in lessons and at break periods. They are polite and friendly with adults and visitors, and show consideration towards one another. A small number of pupils have, in the past, presented challenging behaviour or unco-operative attitudes. However, they are managed sympathetically but firmly and do not disrupt others. Routines for managing behaviour are consistently and effectively applied. Class rules are agreed and pupils take their individual duties seriously. Pupils of all ages co-operate sensibly and are happy to take responsibility. For example, older pupils make arrangements for assembly by clearing and reorganising their classroom and take charge of the audio-visual equipment.

27. In lessons, pupils have good attitudes to learning and now show a much greater level of responsiveness. They take an interest in their work and most are keen to answer questions and offer ideas. During whole-class sessions they are patient and most sustain their concentration well. Pupils work well in small groups: they collaborate well and show respect for one another's views. Older pupils were particularly supportive when others made mistakes. Most pupils take care with their written work and take a pride in its presentation.

28. The pupils' attendance is good and has improved significantly since the time of the last inspection. Attendance over the last academic year was 96.2 per cent, with 0.17 per cent unauthorised absence. Both figures are better than the national figures. The school has suitable procedures for promoting good attendance and for monitoring absence. The number on roll has remained steady since the last inspection, but there have been high levels of pupil mobility.



29. There is sound provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school provides pupils with opportunities to learn about values and beliefs, including religious beliefs and the way in which they impact on peoples' lives. For instance, in religious education lessons, pupils in Years 3 and 4 have been asked to reflect on their views of Christianity, and those of others, by considering different artistic images of Jesus. In assemblies they are encouraged to reflect on their own values and to become aware of and respect the feelings of others. Maps, pictures, and displays of work and artefacts contribute positively to widening the pupils' cultural and geographical horizons. However, there is only a limited range of enrichment opportunities in the curriculum. There are few extracurricular activities or opportunities for pupils to participate in events outside the classroom or to have first-hand cultural experiences with visitors or through trips. The school is seeking to broaden this provision and to take advantage of collaborative arrangements with its partner school. The school pays close attention to the pupils' social development, notably when individuals have low aspirations and poor self-esteem.

### Implementation of the action plan

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#### **30. Key Issue 1: the governing body and the headteacher should develop strategies to raise standards in English, mathematics and science at both key stages**

The school has implemented a range of strategies to address weaknesses in standards in English, mathematics and science, although there remain significant weaknesses in writing and in spelling. The assessment system is now well established and short-term target-setting is sound. Achievement in the three core subjects is routinely assessed. This information is used to track the pupils' progress, to inform targets and to identify specific areas of weakness for additional support. The pupils' progress in English, mathematics and science lessons is at least satisfactory and often good. The school exceeded its targets in end-of-key stage tests in 2003.

Progress on this key issue has been good.

#### **31. Key Issue 2: the governing body and the headteacher should improve the quality of teaching and learning for children in reception and Key Stage 1**

The quality of teaching in Class 1 is good. The teacher demonstrates a good understanding of teaching and assessment methods for pupils in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 and manages the wide range of pupils skilfully. There is a very good learning environment, and most pupils make good progress in lessons. Activities for the reception group are appropriately planned, although they have only limited outdoor play facilities. Nonetheless, these younger pupils have made good progress over the last year, notably in areas of social and linguistic development. The school has addressed the training needs of the learning support assistant, and has strengthened classroom support.

The school has made good progress on this key issue.

#### **32. Key Issue 3: the governing body and the headteacher should improve the curriculum for the Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1 and 2**

Long-term planning for the three mixed-age classes is sound. The first year of the revised curriculum plan has been implemented and a few revisions planned. Short-term planning is sound and often good. Learning is well structured and suitably guided by learning objectives. Subject developments are guided by curriculum policies, for example newly-agreed policies on religious education, geography and history inform the teachers' planning and clarify the learning objectives of these subjects. A system for regular review of subject policies has been established. However,



there are too few enrichment opportunities to develop the pupils' wider cultural, sporting and personal experiences.

The school has made reasonable progress on this key issue.

**33. Key Issue 4: the governing body, headteacher and staff should improve the effectiveness of leadership and management**

The issue of school leadership has been successfully resolved by the new partnership arrangement. The very good leadership and management of the temporary headteacher have been successfully sustained by the substantive headteacher. Good systems have been established for evaluating the quality of teaching and learning, and for monitoring standards. These are suitably rigorous and have accelerated improvements in the pupils' progress. The role of the literacy and special educational needs co-ordinator has developed well, with suitable responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and standards. However, the roles of other subject leaders remain underdeveloped.

The governing body is well informed about the school's progress. Its work is guided by a governors' action plan, and clear procedures have been established for monitoring the school's progress.

The school has made good progress on this key issue.

**34. Key Issue 5: the governing body, headteacher and staff should improve levels of attendance**

Attendance levels for the last year have been above the school's target and higher than national figures. Levels of unauthorised absence are low.

The school has made good progress on this key issue.

**35. Additional issue: the governing body, headteacher and staff should improve the levels of resources available within the school**

A range of possible joint activities and shared responsibilities has been developed with the partnership school, and opportunities for cost savings and efficiency have been planned. The conversion of an outbuilding for flexible office and teaching space has been a good development.

The school has made good progress on this issue.