



**Office for Standards
in Education**

Inspection report
New Hall Junior and Infant School

Birmingham Education Authority

Dates of inspection: 25-26 February 2004

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act

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Basic information about the school

Name of school:	New Hall Junior and Infant School
Type of school:	Junior and Infant with Nursery
Status:	Community
Age range of pupils:	3 to 11 years
Headteacher:	Mrs M Pickering
Address of school:	Langley Hall Drive Sutton Coldfield West Midlands B75 7NQ
Telephone:	0121 464 5170
Name and address of appropriate authority:	The governing body, address as above
Chair of governors:	Mr D Wilson
Local education authority area:	Birmingham
Unique reference number:	103395
Name of reporting inspector:	Mr R Hubbleday HMI
Dates of inspection:	25-26 February 2004

Introduction

1. New Hall Junior and Infant School is situated in Sutton Coldfield, a district in North Birmingham. It is housed on two sites, half-a-mile apart, both serving a similar mix of rented and owner-occupied housing on a former council-run estate. There are 283 pupils on roll, including 39 who attend the nursery. Numbers have fallen significantly in recent years and are set to drop further. Nearly all the pupils are of white UK origin and none speak English as an additional language. Forty per cent of the pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is well above average. There are 54 pupils identified by the school as having special educational needs, including three who have a formal Statement of Special Educational Need. There are large variations in the pupils' attainment when they enter the nursery but, overall, the level of skills and experience they bring is broadly average. However, approximately a third of the pupils go on to other schools when they leave the nursery, and attainment at the beginning of the reception year is below average. During the inspection, the headteacher was on compassionate leave and the school was led by the deputy headteacher, who had been acting headteacher for several weeks prior to the visit.

2. The school was inspected in May 2002. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

3. The governors drew up an action plan to address the key issues from the inspection of May 2002. The school was visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) on four occasions to monitor the progress being made.

4. In February 2004 one HMI and an Additional Inspector inspected the school, assessing the standard 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 May 2002.

Main findings

5. In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils. The main findings of the inspection are:

- except in mathematics, the results of the 2003 national tests were disappointing. Attainment was well below average at the end of Key Stage 1, and below the scores for similar schools. The results were worse than those of the previous year and reflected the higher number of pupils with special educational needs and the disruption caused by staffing changes mid-year. The end-of-Key Stage 2 results were comparatively better but still below average overall. There was a significant improvement in mathematics, with the school matching the national figures and exceeding those for similar schools, but a decline in English. Attainment in writing was particularly poor;
 - the outlook for the 2004 tests is much better. The pupils are beginning to make good progress in most lessons and standards of attainment are rising
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convincingly. They are close to the age-related expectations at the end of Key Stage 1 but remain below them at the end of Key Stage 2. Attainment in mathematics continues to be strongest and many pupils are working at or beyond the nationally expected levels for their age. Attainment in writing still lags behind but recently the pupils have begun to make substantial gains and standards are rising quickly;

- the pupils have good attitudes to work and respond enthusiastically to stimulating teaching. They behave sensibly in lessons and around the school and are welcoming to visitors. Attitudes and behaviour were satisfactory or better in all but one lesson, including 12 in which they were good or very good;
 - attendance, at 92.2 per cent for the academic year so far, is well below average and has not improved despite the tightening of procedures. Many parents take their children out of school for holidays, which, on top of other frequent absences, means that too many pupils have attendance below 80 per cent. These levels of absence have a direct, negative impact on attainment;
 - the school makes good provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Assemblies are relaxed and joyful occasions which provide an appropriate act of worship and offer opportunities to reflect on serious themes. The school has high expectations of the pupils' behaviour based on mutual respect. Extracurricular activities have grown in number and variety;
 - the quality of teaching is good overall. It was satisfactory or better in 16 lessons, including nine in which it was good or better. Lessons were well planned and interesting, with plenty of opportunities for the pupils to participate actively. The teachers make realistic demands of the pupils based on a thorough knowledge of their level of understanding. The teaching was unsatisfactory in two lessons at Key Stage 2. In these lessons, expectations were not pitched accurately and the pupils did not make enough progress;
 - there are suitable schemes of work for the Foundation Stage and the National Curriculum at Key Stages 1 and 2. Long and medium-term planning is well devised and draws intelligently on nationally produced guidance. Assessment information is gathered regularly and held in a manageable format. It is used well in English and mathematics to determine the level of work appropriate for different groups in each class and to track progress and identify potential underachievement. Less use is made of the information in science and the foundation subjects;
 - the school has been vigorously led and managed since it went into special measures. An acting headteacher provided strong and clear direction from an early stage, and the momentum was continued by the substantive headteacher when she was appointed in January 2003. In her absence, the recently appointed deputy headteacher has effectively maintained the school's focus on improvement. The co-ordinators for the core subjects have grown in
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confidence and strength. They provide knowledgeable and incisive leadership and have had a direct influence on the raising of standards. They have played a major part in monitoring and evaluating teaching, standards and lesson-planning. The school knows its strengths and weaknesses and has shown resolve in taking action where necessary;

- the governing body is supportive of the school and well intentioned. The chair of governors provides energetic and knowledgeable leadership. Meetings are better managed than before and more focused on essentials. However, the governing body has not fully engaged with its role in taking responsibility for the school. Several challenges await, not least balancing the budget in the context of a falling roll. The finance committee has not been pro-active in discussing future actions and the curriculum committee has not met regularly;
- the split-site accommodation is unsatisfactory. It hinders whole-school initiatives, dilutes the impact of the senior staff and is inefficient;
- the local education authority (LEA) has supported the school well. It has brokered helpful partnerships with other schools and has provided relevant training and advice. Financial support to monitor the budget and to help tackle a potential deficit have been well judged.

Key issues

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

- raise standards in writing;
- improve attendance;
- remove the remaining weaknesses in teaching;
- develop the role of the governing body.

Inspection findings

Standards achieved by the pupils

7. The results of the 2003 national tests were well below average at Key Stage 1, and below the scores for similar schools. In reading and writing, around a third of the pupils failed to achieve the minimum level expected for their age, and few pupils reached the higher Level 3. In mathematics, the results were slightly better, with three quarters of the pupils achieving the expected Level 2 and a fifth reaching Level 3. The results were worse than those of the previous year and reflected the higher number of pupils with special educational needs and the disruption caused by staffing changes mid-year.

8. The Key Stage 2 national test results were below average overall but there was a strong rise in mathematics, with the school matching the national figures and exceeding those for similar schools. A third of the pupils reached the higher Level 5 in this subject. Attainment in science was below average but maintained the improvement seen in 2002. The results were broadly in line with those of similar schools, with 87 per cent of the pupils achieving the nationally expected Level 4 or better and 25 per cent reaching Level 5. However, there was a decline in the English results, which were well below average, and well below those of similar schools. Just over a third of the pupils failed to achieve Level 4, and very few reached Level 5. There was a marked discrepancy between the results for reading and writing. Only 28 per cent of the pupils achieved Level 4 or higher in writing, while the figure for reading was 76 per cent.

9. Despite the disappointing outcome in the writing tests, value-added data based on the overall results for 2003 indicates that the pupils made satisfactory progress from the levels they achieved when they were in Key Stage 1. There has been further improvement during the current year and, across the school, the pupils are beginning to make good progress in most lessons. The school is confident that the results of the 2004 national tests will reverse last year's setback at Key Stage 1 and build on the relative success at Key Stage 2. Standards of attainment in lessons confirm that this aspiration is realistic.

10. The pupils make a good start in the Foundation Stage, building effectively in the reception classes on the skills and knowledge gained in the nursery. Most pupils in the reception year are on track to reach the levels expected for pupils of this age. They read simple sentences, know that writing is based on patterns of letters representing sounds, use numbers to 20 confidently and know the names of two-dimensional shapes. They also develop a broad and appropriate knowledge in other areas of learning.

11. At the end of Year 2 and Year 6, standards in English are below the levels expected for the pupils' ages largely because of weaknesses in writing. However, the recent introduction of a new approach to teaching writing is already having an effect on the quality and standards of the pupils' written work in literacy lessons and other subjects. The pupils have developed greater insight into the use of vocabulary, connectives, openings and punctuation as tools to improve the quality of expression. They are becoming enthusiastic writers and, in a very short period, there is evidence of improved standards in all year groups. A very high number of pupils in Year 6 have moved up one or more sub-levels within two months and many have already achieved or exceeded the targets set for them. Nevertheless, at both key stages, most pupils still struggle to write non-fiction, and younger pupils and those with special educational needs require high levels of support.

12. Throughout the school, the pupils' listening skills are satisfactory but their speaking skills are underdeveloped and many have a limited vocabulary. In a Year 1 literacy lesson, the pupils used poor grammar such as "...them things what..." and "dunno" when explaining their work. However, these skills are being fostered through the effective use of activities such as group and paired discussions, and the emphasis placed on teaching the pupils the vocabulary of the different subjects.

13. Standards in reading vary, but most pupils read at the levels expected within each age range. The younger pupils use strategies such as picture clues and segmenting words to

help them make sense of what they read, and they show an interest in books. In Year 1, the pupils were able to identify the author and illustrator of the books they were looking at, and understood features such as titles and the content and index pages. In Key Stage 2, most pupils read with reasonable accuracy and a degree of fluency appropriate for their age, although limitations in the range of their vocabulary has some affect on their comprehension.

14. Standards in mathematics are broadly average at the end of each key stage, and the pupils are making sound, and often good, progress in lessons. In Year 2, the pupils made good gains in understanding multiples of numbers and were tackling with increasing confidence word problems using relevant strategies. Good and very good progress was made in mathematics lessons in the Year 6 classes, where expectations of the pupils were high but appropriate for their abilities. The higher-attaining group demonstrated a clear understanding of the relationships between fractions, decimals and percentages, and were using this knowledge to solve problems using numbers, measurements and measures. The pupils in the lower group rounded decimal numbers to the nearest whole number, found fractions of a number and could match equivalent fractions.

15. Standards in science are below average overall but the pupils' understanding of scientific method has improved significantly. At both key stages, the pupils tackle an appropriate range of topics and learn essential facts and terminology. They develop investigative skills and insight through frequent opportunities to devise their own experiments. In Year 3, for example, they drew valid conclusions about the properties of magnets by seeing how they behaved in different configurations. In Year 6, the pupils conceived simple methods of comparing the behaviour of light when it meets a variety of shiny and dull surfaces. However, few pupils in either class were achieving higher than the nationally expected levels. In Year 6, even the most-able pupils neglected to control all of the variables involved in their tests. Their observations and recording of results did not entail making accurate measurements, and work completed earlier in the year has not required them to present data in graphical formats.

16. Attainment in information and communication technology (ICT) has risen strongly, and in several year groups the pupils' work is in line with age-related expectations. In Year 4, the pupils made good progress by rehearsing their understanding of controlling a programmable toy before applying their skills within a more complex computer program. In Year 6, the pupils have developed suitable insights into aspects of control technology by writing simple programs to operate roadside lights.

17. The pupils who have special educational needs receive appropriate support and generally make satisfactory progress towards the targets in their individual education plans. Nevertheless, many remain well adrift of the standards expected for their age and require significant levels of support from adults to enable them to participate effectively in mainstream lessons.

The pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

18. In all but one lesson, the pupils' attitudes and behaviour were satisfactory or better; they were good or very good in 12 lessons. The pupils have good attitudes to work and respond enthusiastically to stimulating teaching. These traits are well established during the pupils' time in the Foundation Stage and are built on successfully in all parts of the school. In

the nursery, the pupils made excited observations about what they could see when fruits were cut in half and took great care when handing them round the group. At Key Stage 2, the pupils were alert and ready when asked to tackle problems and tried hard to complete tasks within tight deadlines. The one exception was in a Key Stage 2 lesson where the teaching was weak; the pupils showed less enthusiasm than in other classes, wasted time and took too little care with the art work on which they were engaged.

19. Behaviour around the school was good. The pupils lined up sensibly when required, walked quietly through corridors and clearly knew the boundaries of what was considered acceptable. They routinely showed courtesy to visitors and took obvious pleasure from helping them, for instance, by holding doors open. Behaviour in assemblies was very good and, at Key Stage 1, was exceptional as the pupils listened attentively to an outside speaker at the end of the day. In lessons, the teachers were able to rely on the pupils' ready and willing compliance with instructions. On many occasions, they were required to collaborate in small groups and did so with maturity. There have been no exclusions.

20. Attendance, at 92.2 per cent for the academic year so far, is well below average. Many parents take their children out of school for holidays, which, on top of other frequent absences, means that too many pupils have attendance below 80 per cent. These levels of absence have a direct, negative impact on attainment. The school employs a part-time administrative assistant to follow up unexplained absences, and the educational and social welfare department is involved with specific families. A beginning has been made on highlighting this issue by rewarding good attendance and the school is about to participate in a scheme co-ordinated by the LEA. The governors have very recently decided that the school should not authorise absence for holidays. Despite these moves, attendance has not improved and is worse than at the time of the school's inspection in 2002.

21. The school makes good provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Assemblies are relaxed and joyful occasions which provide an appropriate act of worship and offer opportunities to reflect on serious themes. At Key Stage 1, for instance, the pupils learnt about the experiences of disabled pupils and reflected on the similarities and differences in people's lives. Many lessons in science and geography offer the pupils opportunities to marvel at natural phenomena. In English and mathematics lessons, the teachers and pupils enjoyed discovering unknown facts and spontaneously celebrated insights shown by others. The consistent emphasis being given to using adventurous vocabulary or "wow" words frequently elicited genuine excitement and wonder.

22. The school has high expectations of the pupils' behaviour based on mutual respect and good relationships. Relevant social and personal issues are explored in a suitable programme of personal, social and health education. There are a few opportunities for the pupils to undertake responsibilities, such as helping in assemblies and with routine tasks in classrooms. A school council has been established to promote learning in citizenship. Cultural development is pursued largely through music, art and history lessons, which have continued to be important parts of the curriculum even when the school was focusing most of its energies on raising standards in the core subjects. In addition, extracurricular activities have grown in number and variety and include sport, art and computer clubs. A yearly residential visit is organised.

The quality of education

23. The quality of teaching is good overall. It was excellent in one lesson, very good in one, good in seven, satisfactory in six and unsatisfactory in two. There was significantly more good teaching in the Foundation Stage and at Key Stage 2 than at Key Stage 1. The very good and excellent teaching was at Key Stage 2. Across the school, the strongest teaching was successful because the teachers were confident in their own knowledge, had the highest expectations of the pupils' potential to think for themselves and adapted their explanations to match the pupils' understanding. Questioning was rigorous but supportive and encouraged the pupils to contribute. In a Year 3 English lesson, the teacher's enjoyment and enthusiasm of the subject was transferred to the pupils through the lively and imaginative way in which explanations and instructions were given. The pupils lapped up new vocabulary and thrived on the challenge offered. Similar features were evident in mathematics and science lessons in Year 6, in ICT in Year 4 and in mathematics in Year 2.

24. In the Foundation Stage, the teaching was well focused on precise learning objectives that were set within meaningful and stimulating contexts for the pupils. There were very good relationships between the adults and pupils and particularly good use was made of nursery nurses and teaching assistants to lead the teaching of small groups of pupils. The teaching was well paced and interesting, with a strong emphasis on requiring the pupils to articulate their ideas. In both the nursery and the reception classes, the planning and organisation of activities struck a good balance between direct teaching, often to groups at similar stages of development, and opportunities for the pupils to work and play independently.

25. Throughout the school, lessons were well planned and interesting, with plenty of opportunities for the pupils to participate actively. There was an urgency and sense of purposefulness in nearly all of the teaching, with the teachers making realistic demands of the pupils based on a thorough knowledge of their level of understanding. However, in several English lessons at Key Stage 1, the teaching was satisfactory rather than good because the teachers were trying to use new techniques and approaches that asked more of the pupils than they were able to give. The unsatisfactory teaching occurred in two classes at Key Stage 2 where expectations were not pitched accurately and the pupils did not make enough progress. In both cases, the teachers' knowledge of what they were teaching was weak and resulted in confusing explanations and a lack of direction and guidance to the pupils about the quality of their work.

26. There are suitable schemes of work for the Foundation Stage and the National Curriculum at Key Stages 1 and 2. Long and medium-term planning is well devised and draws intelligently on nationally produced guidance. The school invested heavily in reviewing its curriculum when it first went into special measures. The process resulted in a clear framework of what needed to be taught and a strong sense of ownership by the teachers. Lesson-planning formats were also revised to provide a sharper focus on identifying learning objectives. As a result of recent in-service training, the school has successfully implemented a system called "Big Writing". This entails an intensive focus on extending the pupils' use of vocabulary, connectives, openings and punctuation to enable them to improve the quality of their writing. The teachers and pupils have taken to this with marked enthusiasm. Each

week, a session of uninterrupted time for the pupils to apply their skills on an extended piece of writing is an integral part of the curriculum.

27. Assessment information is gathered regularly and held in a manageable format. It is generally used well in English and mathematics to determine the level of work appropriate for different groups in each class and to track progress and identify potential underachievement. The teachers are clear about the progress they expect each group of pupils to make and regularly monitor and record how they are doing. Marking is constructive and frequently includes formative comments to help the pupils see how to improve. In the Foundation Stage, the adults regularly spend time observing groups of pupils working in different areas of learning. Pertinent evidence of progress is noted and used to inform future groupings and lesson-planning. Across the school, less use is made of assessment information in science and the foundation subjects and, consequently, higher-attaining pupils are not always stretched by the work they are given.

28. The provision for special educational needs is generally good but the co-ordinator has not analysed the overall progress of pupils receiving extra support. Individual education plans are well constructed and include precise targets, teaching and learning strategies and an indication of progress since the last review. Teaching assistants are well deployed to support the pupils in short, intensive sessions focusing sharply on the pupils' targets. Teaching assistants are also available to support the pupils in their mainstream classes. Work is generally set at a suitable level but, on occasions, the teachers overestimate these pupils' capacity to cope with new skills.

Leadership and management

29. Leadership and management are good at all levels. The school has experienced many changes of senior personnel but has been vigorously led and managed throughout its time in special measures. An acting headteacher provided strong and clear direction from an early stage, and the momentum was continued by the substantive headteacher when she was appointed in January 2003. She quickly established her expectations and ensured that the strategic course already mapped out was adhered to. Staff were left in no doubt of her commitment to making New Hall a school of which all would be proud. While dealing well with day-to-day issues and the business of securing rapid improvement, she also set out an ambitious vision for the school in the longer term. In her absence during the spring term 2004, the recently appointed deputy headteacher has effectively maintained the school's focus on improvement. Although inexperienced as a headteacher, she has prioritised well and made sure that the school's energies have not been dissipated.

30. One of the first actions of the original acting headteacher in 2002 was to emphasise the importance of having good subject leaders. She brought to the fore three talented and committed teachers and empowered them through training, support and her belief in their potential. They have grown in confidence and gone from strength to strength as co-ordinators for the core subjects. Their own teaching provides a model of good practice and they provide knowledgeable and incisive leadership that has had a direct influence on the raising of standards. They have played a major part in monitoring and evaluating teaching, standards and lesson-planning. The school knows its strengths and weaknesses and has shown resolve in taking action where necessary.

31. The governing body is supportive of the school and well intentioned. The chair of governors provides energetic and knowledgeable leadership. Meetings are better managed than before and more focused on essentials. However, the governing body has not fully engaged with its role in taking responsibility for the school's future. Several challenges await, not least balancing the budget in the context of a falling roll. After a promising start when the governing body was reconstituted and committees were established, the governors have slipped back on relying too heavily on the chair, the headteacher and the LEA. The finance committee has not been pro-active in discussing options and the curriculum committee has not met regularly.

32. The split-site accommodation is unsatisfactory. It hinders whole-school initiatives, dilutes the impact of the senior staff and is inefficient. Each of the headteachers has worked hard to have a presence on both sites but having to travel by car presents insurmountable logistical problems and is wasteful of time and energy. It has been even harder for the co-ordinators to exert sufficient influence at the infant site where they are not based. To complicate matters, the nursery is separate from the main building at the infant site, presenting further difficulties in fostering good liaison between staff.

33. The LEA has supported the school well. It has brokered helpful partnerships with other schools and has provided relevant training and advice. Financial support to monitor the budget and to help tackle a potential deficit have been well judged. Discussions about moving the school to one site are ongoing.

Implementation of the action plan

34. The inspection report of 2002 required the school to address five key issues. These principally related to: raising standards; improving provision in ICT; securing effective leadership and management; tackling weaknesses in the teaching; and providing a more stimulating curriculum. Overall, the school has made good progress.

35. The LEA and the school's co-ordinators for the core subjects have maintained steady pressure on the teachers to improve their knowledge and day-to-day practice. A significant investment of time and energy on establishing schemes of work, allied with much higher expectations of the teachers, has enabled the school to raise standards. Attainment in writing has been slowest to improve but the school is focusing vigorously on this area. Provision for ICT is good at the junior site, where the teachers have the use of a well-equipped cyber café next to the library. The teachers' confidence and expertise have grown, enabling them to match work more effectively to the pupils' potential. However, the lack of a computer suite at the infant site restricts developments for the youngest pupils.

36. The school benefited greatly from the strong leadership provided by an acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher who were seconded to the school shortly after its inspection. They brought much-needed clarity and expertise, and quickly devised an effective way forward. Central to their plan, was the empowerment of senior staff to lead the core subjects. These co-ordinators have continued to drive improvements in an impressive manner. The early appointment of a substantive headteacher, soon followed by a permanent deputy headteacher to replace the original postholder who had resigned, enabled the school to maintain its momentum.

37. Most staff were keen to embrace change and to lift their performance. They have responded well to the demands made on them. There have been several changes of staff and there is now a stable structure of experienced teachers throughout the school. The teaching has many strengths but the school is not complacent. The curriculum has become far more stimulating and the teachers routinely provide opportunities for the pupils to learn through practical investigations, discussions and meaningful contexts.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

The school was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in May 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.

The school was visited by HMI in December 2002 and March, July and November 2003 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of May 2002.

In February 2004, one HMI and an Additional Inspector 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.

Eighteen lessons or parts of lessons, two assemblies and two registration sessions were inspected. The pupils were observed at break and lunch times and samples of their work were inspected. Meetings were held with the acting headteacher, senior staff, the chair of governors and a representative from the 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.

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 May 2002 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.

Notes

