

Highwoods Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114846
Local Authority	ESSEX LA
Inspection number	290056
Inspection dates	11–12 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Nick Butt

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	326
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr P Wood
Headteacher	Mr N Hookway
Date of previous school inspection	22 April 2002
School address	Tynedale Square Highwoods Colchester Essex CO4 9SN
Telephone number	01206 845887
Fax number	01206 851634

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This larger-than-average school serves a mixed residential area. New families are moving into the locality and numbers are rising. Nine out of ten pupils are from White British backgrounds. Very few speak English as an additional language. The number eligible for free school meals is below average. Almost a fifth of pupils have learning difficulties or disabilities, an average proportion. The headteacher has been in post for six months. There have been several other changes of staff this year. The school has awards for promoting sport and healthy lifestyles. It works closely with other schools on a range of initiatives to improve educational provision.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school that is emerging confidently from a period of transition and offers satisfactory value for money. The new headteacher, an effective catalyst for change, is accepted and respected by the whole school community. He communicates his vision well to pupils, parents, staff and governors. The school's own evaluation of its performance is sound. Achievement is satisfactory, although some of the older pupils do not do as well in science as in English and mathematics because there are gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Standards are broadly average by the end of Year 6, but well below average in science. Provision in the Foundation Stage is good and children achieve well because of the well planned activities that fire their imaginations. Pupils enjoy school and have good attitudes to learning. Their good personal development and well-being are supported by strong levels of pastoral care. Good enrichment of the curriculum helps to make school interesting and encourages pupils to work hard.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The classrooms have attractive displays of pupils' work. Teachers share what they want pupils to learn clearly and tell them what they are looking for by the end of the lesson. There is plenty of information available about what pupils know and can do, but currently this is not best used to plan work that is matched exactly to pupils' needs. The satisfactory curriculum is broad and balanced. The academic guidance given to pupils is satisfactory. They have targets but do not always understand how these will help them to improve.

Pupils have a good understanding of how to live healthily and keep safe. They take plenty of exercise. As one pupil said, 'PE (physical education) keeps you going and it's fun!' They know about what to do in an emergency. Pupils make a valuable contribution to the school community and the wider area, as school councillors and 'buddies' and in helping to improve the local environment. They leave the school with the expected basic skills and are ready for their move to secondary school.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. There is a satisfactory capacity to improve, as the new headteacher has brought in changes that are already having an impact in improving the school's accommodation and resources. It is too soon, however, for the changes to have a major effect on pupils' learning and achievement. Parents value his willingness to listen to their views and pupils like the way he drops into their classrooms to see them. He is ably supported by the deputy and an enthusiastic staff, who work together well as a coherent team. Their commitment to change means that the pace of improvement is beginning to accelerate. A strong governing body supports and challenges senior leaders well.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make better use of assessment information to set tasks that meet the needs of all pupils.
- Ensure that all pupils cover the full range of the science curriculum in Years 3 to 6 so that standards and achievement rise.
- Make sure that pupils know exactly what they have to do to improve to meet their targets.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next Section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are broadly average. Children enter the school with skills and abilities that are similar to those normally expected. They get off to a good start in the Reception class, where the teaching is good and children are engaged in a wide range of purposeful activities that promote their learning well. Progress in Years 1 and 2 is satisfactory, with pupils making particularly good gains in reading. By the end of Year 2, standards are above average in reading and average in writing and mathematics. Satisfactory achievement is maintained in Years 3 to 6. The pace of progress is uneven because of some variations in the quality of teaching and some staff absences. It is also affected by the significant level of inward mobility as new pupils join the school. By the end of Year 6, standards are broadly average, except in science where pupils do not achieve so well. Boys' writing has improved, which has narrowed the gap with girls. Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities make satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral and social development, are good. Pupils are well behaved. They are proud of their roles as playground 'buddies', school councillors and helpers in the school office and dining hall. They appreciate the support offered by adults. However, their awareness of other cultures, especially those reflecting the complex nature of Britain's multi-ethnic society, is less developed. Pupils like school, and their attendance is good. They especially enjoy the focus weeks, when they engage in activities such as organising a medieval banquet and a French cafe. They take an active role in the community, singing in the local church for parents and friends, and supporting charities at home and abroad. They have a clear idea of how to keep safe. They say that bullying is extremely rare and, when it does occur, is dealt with effectively. They understand the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Healthy food at lunchtime is proving popular. A pupil said, 'School dinners have improved so much. They're really, really delicious!' Pupils' average literacy and numeracy skills provide a sound basis for their future education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers provide attractive displays in their classrooms to engage the pupils' interest. Relationships are good and this means that pupils feel secure and ready to learn. They are sometimes encouraged to assess their own and one another's work, and this helps them see how they can improve. The quality of day-to-day assessment is inconsistent and does not always ensure that work is matched effectively to pupils' different needs. This sometimes hinders their learning. The support for pupils with learning difficulties is satisfactory. However, teaching assistants are not always informed clearly about the roles they are expected to play and, as a result, they are more effective in some classes than others.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. There are appropriate opportunities for pupils to use their literacy, numeracy and computer skills in different subjects. The curriculum helps all groups of pupils to learn satisfactorily. Suitable 'catch-up' programmes are organised for those who are struggling with their literacy and numeracy skills. However, when attending these groups, pupils sometimes miss other important lessons such as science, and gaps develop in their knowledge. The school has begun a review of curriculum organisation to ensure it meets the needs of its growing pupil population. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development. They learn, for example, about the dangers of drugs through their science work. Pupils enjoy the wide variety of lunchtime and after school clubs on offer. These develop pupils' skills in areas such as sport and music. A diverse programme of visits and visitors, for example artists and sports specialists, make learning more interesting and exciting for the pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. The school is a happy and friendly place where pupils feel safe and the pastoral care is good. As one parent wrote, reflecting the views of many, 'The school has a real community spirit, which promotes a caring and considerate ethos.' A wide range of good quality support is offered to pupils, including play therapy, a social skills lunchtime club and counselling. There are good links with outside agencies that provide advice and support for needy or vulnerable pupils and their families. All safeguarding procedures meet requirements. Good provision is in place to develop pupils' understanding of healthy lifestyles and their awareness of keeping safe. Academic guidance is satisfactory. However, marking is inconsistent across classes. It is stronger in literacy books, where the focus is on key learning points and includes helpful comments. Pupils are unclear exactly what their targets mean or how they relate to National Curriculum levels. The provision for pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is satisfactory, although the school has identified a need to make targets on their individual education plans more specific.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory with a strength in the good leadership of the new headteacher. He has listened carefully to pupils, parents, governors and staff and come to a consensus about the priorities for improvement. These accurately reflect the main issues facing the school. A parent commented, 'Children (and parents) feel very involved, are included in decision making, and pupils are encouraged to have responsibility and take pride in their school.' The headteacher has introduced a new momentum, and has made some practical changes to the accommodation that have had an immediate impact. Monitoring has become more rigorous, with lesson observations giving teachers clear points for development that are followed up later. Middle managers now have time to check provision in their subject areas and possess a clearer understanding about standards and achievement. There is sharper tracking of pupils' progress, which clearly shows how well they are doing. However, these developments are at an early stage and the impact so far is satisfactory. There are improvements in writing, especially

by boys, as a result of the increased use of information and communication technology to inspire them. Governors provide good support and keep well informed. They monitor the work of the school closely and hold leaders to account well.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

13 July 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Highwoods Community Primary School, Colchester, CO4 9SN

Thank you very much for making us so welcome at your school. We enjoyed meeting you and finding out about your views. Yours is a satisfactory school that is getting better all the time. Here are some of things we especially like about it.

- The youngest children get off to a good start in the Reception class.
- You take plenty of exercise and know all about healthy living.
- You have a good understanding about keeping safe.
- You look after one another well and help out in the local community.
- You enjoy school and your attendance is good.
- You behave well and work hard in lessons.
- You do a lot with other schools in sport and the arts.
- There are plenty of clubs, visits and visitors, which make your learning fun.
- The school cares for you well and helps you if you have a problem.
- Mr. Hookway has made some good changes and is steering the school in the right direction.
- The governors are very involved in the life of the school and keep a good check on how well it is doing.

We are pleased that you find your lessons interesting. Occasionally, they are too easy for you and we have asked the teachers to use the information they have about how well you are doing to make sure the work is just right for you. You know what your targets are, but we think it would be helpful if they were clearer and your teachers told you exactly how you could improve your work. It is good that standards are rising in writing, but we feel the older pupils need to cover more in science so that you know everything you are supposed to.

Thank you once again for your help. Our best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mr N Butt Lead inspector