



Halfway Houses Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 118866
Local Authority Kent
Inspection number 291273
Inspection dates 6–7 March 2007
Reporting inspector Sheila Browning

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

Type of school	First	School address	Southdown Road
School category	Foundation		Sheerness
Age range of pupils	4–9		ME12 3BE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01795 662875
Number on roll (school)	397	Fax number	01795 889009
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	David Goddard
		Headteacher	G Wetherell
Date of previous school inspection	15 October 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Halfway Houses School is larger than most schools nationally. It takes pupils from the local area, which is recognised as one that has some significant social and economic deprivation. Most children are from White British families and a few from other ethnic groups are represented. The school is working with the challenge of falling numbers coupled with a local authority reorganisation of education on the Isle of Sheppey. Over a quarter of the pupils have learning difficulties and disabilities, but in some classes this is higher. Children join the school with skills much lower than expected for their age.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good and improving school. The school encourages pupils to develop caring attitudes and successfully builds their confidence and independence. Pupils are very happy, thoroughly enjoy school and parents overwhelmingly support the work of the school. As one parent commented, 'My daughter is always happy to go to school.' The Foundation Stage is well led and managed and children get off to a good start and make good progress. Teaching, learning and the curriculum are good. Consequently, most pupils achieve well and make good progress to meet challenging targets. Standards are broadly average which is good, given pupils' starting points. Over time results have been much better in mathematics than in reading and writing. Tracking and target setting help teachers to know how well pupils are getting on and to identify underachievement. As a result, the school is aware that throughout the school some more capable pupils do not achieve well enough in writing and there is some underachievement amongst younger pupils in reading. There are occasions in writing when insufficient attention is given to spelling, punctuation and the presentation of work.

The reason pupils make such good progress is because the curriculum is flexible to best meet their learning needs and consequently they are eager to learn. Learning experiences are interesting and lively, such as when Year 3 pupils used their knowledge from research to dress as Romans and Celts and made Roman jewellery and sandals. Pupils say they especially enjoy the many extra-curricular clubs and enrichment activities. Pupils' personal development and the care, support and guidance they receive are good. Pupils are courteous, polite and keen to talk about their work. The strong links with multi-agencies and integrated care combined with the well targeted support for those with learning difficulties and disabilities are strong features of how well the school meets their needs. The school is a friendly and safe place. Pupils are fully involved in the local community, are well prepared for the future and regularly take part in sporting and physical activities. Leadership and management are good. There is a clear focus on raising standards. The headteacher leads the school well and senior managers, staff and governors ably support him. Together, they have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and plan effectively for the future. Improvement since the last inspection has been good and the school has a good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the achievement of more capable pupils in writing throughout the school and of more capable pupils in reading in Years 1 and 2.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

In the Foundation Stage, children join the school with skills well below the levels expected for their age in most areas of learning. By the time they start in Year 1, most

are making good progress to work within the levels expected. This is because teachers ensure that children's learning experiences are interesting and relevant. This focus is extended into Years 1 and 2 and is one of the reasons why achievement and standards are rising. Test results for 2006 were broadly average and significantly improved on the previous year. Given pupils' lower starting points this represents good achievement, especially in mathematics. Nonetheless, some more capable pupils underachieve in writing throughout the school and in reading in Years 1 and 2. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress because their needs are identified early on and they receive good individual support. School data confirmed that the standards reached by the oldest pupils in Year 4 last year exceeded the expectations for their age. Similarly this year, school data and inspection evidence confirm that pupils in Years 3 and 4 make good progress and are well on course to achieve above average expectations for their age. Pupils demonstrate good information and communication technology (ICT) skills.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school has built a good partnership with parents. First day contact with families to check the reason for pupil absence is proving effective and attendance is now satisfactory. The spiritual, social, moral and cultural development of pupils is good overall; moral and social issues are developed very well. Pupils have a keen appreciation of the need to maintain healthy, safe lifestyles and many participate regularly in organised sports. Pupils enjoy school and develop good attitudes to learning, preparing them well for their future lives. One boy showed a mature attitude when he explained that 'although teachers try to make learning exciting, there are some things that you just have to learn'. Pupils are well behaved in classrooms and around the school. They have no significant concerns about bullying, recognising that good procedures exist to ensure their safety. Older pupils show a caring attitude towards younger ones. Some of the oldest pupils are trained to act as playground buddies, organising games at playtimes. The school has formed good links with the local community and pupils have been involved in numerous projects and competitions. The role of the recently formed school council does not yet support pupils' contribution to school life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Throughout the school, teachers are enthusiastic and work hard to engage the pupils' interest. For example, planning is detailed and methods are suitably varied. One pupil told inspectors, 'Lessons are fun and we get to learn lots of new things.' Teachers manage their pupils in a positive and friendly way and as a result relationships and behaviour are good at all levels. Teachers generally have suitably high expectations and match the work they set well to the needs of the pupils. In discussions, for instance,

questions are usually open-ended and challenging. This supports pupils' progress effectively. Sometimes, due attention is not given to spelling, punctuation and the presentation of work, which particularly affects the achievement of potentially more capable pupils. Teaching assistants have a significant impact on pupils' learning. In particular, they make an important contribution to the good progress being made by pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities. Most activities proceed at a good pace. In a small number of lessons, pace is too slow, which has an adverse effect on pupils' concentration and, consequently, their progress. Thorough systems are used to assess and track pupils' progress as they proceed through the school. Assessment for English is a particular strength.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Particular strengths are the strong focus on involving pupils in their own learning and the use of ICT. In a Year 3 'Our Island' photographic project, pupils and families worked together to produce a calendar. French is also taught. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is good. Participation in the sports liaison project and several extra-curricular clubs, productions, visits and visitors ensure pupils have good curricular enrichment. In the summer holiday fun club, over 80 pupils participated in creative and sporting activities. The personal, social and health education programme contributes appropriately to pupils' personal development and the school is working towards the Healthy School Status so it can better support pupils' understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles. The environment is used well to reinforce first hand learning opportunities through the adventure trail, allotment and gardening. The Foundation Stage curriculum effectively meets the needs of the youngest children, developing their independence skills and excitement for learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

This inclusive school is committed to ensuring that all pupils are well cared for. Appropriate procedures are in place to safeguard children. The good arrangements in the Foundation Stage for care and support ensure that children make a good start in developing personal qualities. Good links with pre-school settings and outside agencies ensure that pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are identified early. A good range of support and intervention programmes helps them achieve well. The committed team of teaching assistants ensures that all pupils receive the support they need to succeed in the classroom. Staff go out of their way to promote pupils' confidence and sense of well-being. Targets are used effectively to guide pupils towards the next stage of their learning. However, marking is not always used as effectively as it might be to help pupils understand what they need to do to improve their work further. Academic guidance is sufficiently robust to ensure pupils make good progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and the senior management team are highly committed to raising academic standards further while still giving a good level of priority to the care and welfare of the pupils. All senior members of staff have a clear view of the school's priorities and have a significant role in the achievement of these. Staff at all levels have been enabled by the school's leadership to lead initiatives and do this with enthusiasm. A recent example of this is the way that the curriculum provided in Years 1 and 2 has been redesigned to make it more relevant to the pupils and a more effective vehicle for raising academic standards. Management at the school has recently been restructured in order to more fully reflect current needs and there have been some changes in the personnel involved. These improvements are not yet seen in the standards pupils achieve. The governing body is well informed, supportive and proactive in monitoring the work of the school. Governors have received relevant training and challenge the school management when necessary. Governors do not yet have a specific focus when visiting the school to carry out monitoring activities. The governing body is aware of this and has recently adopted a new set of appropriate guidelines to support consistency.

Rigorous monitoring of provision and teaching by the headteacher and senior staff has been effective in supporting the school's self-evaluation and identifying areas for improvement, including standards in writing.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	2
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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

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	3
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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

Thank you for helping us when we visited your school recently. We very much enjoyed talking and listening to you and seeing your work. Your school is a good school and teaching is good.

These are some important things we found out about your school:

- You make good progress, especially in mathematics and ICT.
- The youngest children get off to a good start in their learning.
- We were pleased to see you all getting on well with each other and working hard.
- You told us how much you enjoy your work and the many extra-curricular clubs and activities.
- Those of you who find learning hard are well supported and you achieve particularly well.
- You are eager to learn and you behave well.
- You are looked after very well.
- The adults work really hard to make your learning interesting and lively.
- You know how to lead safe and healthy lifestyles and you are very involved in the local community.
- Your headteacher and all the adults who work with you want you to do your very best and you told us you appreciate the help you are given.

This is what we have asked the school to do to make it even better:

- For teachers to help those of you who are more capable to get better at writing, and those of you who are more capable in Years 1 and 2 to improve your reading.