



Helmdon Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 121827
Local Authority Northamptonshire
Inspection number 292230
Inspection date 2 November 2006
Reporting inspector Alison Cartlidge

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Station Road
School category	Community		Helmdon
Age range of pupils	4-11		Brackley NN13 5QT
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01295 768126
Number on roll (school)	120	Fax number	01295 768126
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Cecil Harrold
		Headteacher	Susan Blackburn
Date of previous school inspection	1 June 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is smaller than most other primary schools. Pupils come from the village and surrounding area and no pupils take free school meals. Most pupils are of White British heritage with just a few coming from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is broadly average. Pupils are taught in mixed-age classes. There have been several changes in teaching staff over the last three years.

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 school. A wide range of interesting activities, including creative subjects like art and drama, are strong elements of the school's good curriculum. Colourful displays of pupils' work and stimulating resources ensure that the school is a colourful and interesting place to be. As a result, pupils enjoy school and are keen to learn. The strong relationships between adults and pupils demonstrate the school's good quality care, guidance and support and contribute well to pupils' good personal development. Consequently, pupils behave well and they are friendly, polite and helpful. Pupils' achievement is good so that, by the end of Year 6, standards are well above average. Well structured planning, lively discussion and good teamwork among members of staff are strong features of the school's good teaching and learning and ensure pupils' interest is maintained. Progress accelerates significantly in Years 3 to 6 because lessons in these classes are brisk and closely focused on pupils' differing needs. These good qualities are not as developed in Years 1 and 2, where more able pupils in these year groups are not always challenged to do their best in mathematics. Initiatives to improve reading across the school have been especially successful, but writing has not been improved to the same degree because pupils do not always have enough opportunity to practise their writing skills in other subjects. Provision in the Foundation Stage is good and, by the start of Year 1, most children are meeting or exceeding the expected levels for their age, especially in their personal and creative skills. Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and governors are passionate about the school. They want to do the best for the children and there is a strong focus on raising standards. There are good procedures for finding out how well the school is doing and, as result, there is a clear understanding of strengths and areas for development. Whilst all members of staff share in the analysis of test information, the headteacher has responsibility for managing too many subjects and this makes it difficult to ensure that all areas for improvement are developed as quickly as possible.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide greater challenge for more able pupils in Years 1 and 2 in mathematics.
- Increase opportunities for pupils to practise their writing in other subjects.
- Improve management by sharing responsibility for leading and managing subjects more equitably.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' achievement is good and, by the end of Year 6, standards are well above average in English, mathematics and science. Attainment on entry to the school is slightly above average, but varies from year to year because year groups are relatively small. Children make good progress during the Reception Year, especially in personal and creative development. Standards are generally above expectations by the time they start in Year 1. Pupils continue to make good progress from their different starting

points across Years 1 to 6, especially in reading, where the impact of recent initiatives can be seen in significantly improved test results at the end of Year 2 and Year 6. Those with learning difficulties and disabilities also achieve well. Progress is generally quicker in Years 3 to 6 than it is in Years 1 and 2 because activities in these older year groups are more closely matched to pupils' needs, particularly those of the more able. The school has tackled this discrepancy and the success of its initiatives is evident in the improvement in the most recent Year 2 tests on the broadly average results of previous years. Most significantly, improvement was particularly evident at the higher Level 3. Nevertheless, the school is aware that it must still do more to help pupils in Years 1 and 2 reach the higher levels in mathematics. Another school priority has been writing because, throughout the school, pupils' progress in writing is not as rapid as it is in reading. Although pupils complete a good range of written work during English lessons, a lack of opportunities for pupils to write purposefully in other subjects sometimes slows the pace of progress in this aspect of English.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school and their enthusiasm and above average attendance are significant strengths underlying their good progress. One pupil summed up their considerable enjoyment of the school's variety of exciting activities by saying 'Helmdon rocks'. Children settle into the Reception class quickly and become confident and keen to take part in the wide range of interesting activities. In Years 1 to 6, pupils work at a good pace in most lessons and cooperate well with each other. One pupil said: 'This is a great place because everyone lets you join in.' Occasionally, a few pupils become quietly inattentive when discussions are too lengthy, and this limits the extent of their learning. Pupils reach good standards in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils behave responsibly and safely and there have been no recent exclusions. They are well mannered during class discussions and are keen to take on duties that involve them in the life of the school and local community. School council members discuss significant developments and conscientiously sound out the views of other pupils on issues such as what types of snack to allow at playtime. Pupils' economic understanding is well developed, for instance, through fund-raising initiatives such as running a healthy restaurant and food stall. These activities also contribute well to pupils' good understanding of healthy and safe lifestyles.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teamwork among staff members is a particular strength. Teaching assistants work closely with teachers and give pupils with learning difficulties good support by encouraging them to talk about their ideas during discussion. Voluntary helpers also make a good contribution by hearing pupils read. Teachers have good relationships

with pupils and successfully encourage them to play a full part in lively and thoughtful discussions. Pupils' interest is held especially well through practical activities and the use of stimulating resources, including computer software. Marking and end-of-lesson reviews are used well to praise success and check pupils' understanding. In the Reception class, members of staff use questioning skilfully to engage the children's interest and provide sensitive support to those who lack confidence. Teaching is best in Years 3 to 6, where brisk and well focused lessons lead to pupils making consistently good progress. Tasks are successfully adjusted for pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities. In Years 1 and 2, pupils are not consistently provided with work that is closely matched to their differing needs in mathematics. This shortcoming sometimes constrains the learning of more able pupils in these year groups.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a well balanced and stimulating curriculum. The emphasis on creativity is a major strength of the school, with excellent results in art and design and design and technology. Pupils vividly recall past experiences that impressed them, including drama performances and 'when the whole hall was turned into a rainforest'. Older pupils learn French and this helps to prepare them well for when they move to their secondary school. The school's good resources, including those for information and communication technology, are used well to support learning. There is a good range of out-of-school clubs, particularly for sport. Visitors, including parents and governors, contribute well to the curriculum. For example, one governor gave an interesting talk that increased pupils' knowledge and understanding of life in the Amazon. In the Reception class, there is a good balance between learning directed by members of staff and activities that children have chosen themselves. In Years 1 to 6, there is an appropriate emphasis on teaching basic skills in English and mathematics, but there are missed opportunities to develop writing skills in other subjects, such as science. This slows the pace at which writing skills can improve. In Years 1 and 2, the curriculum is not always adapted sufficiently to meet the needs of more able pupils in mathematics.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The strong personal relationships between members of staff and pupils and high expectations of pupils' personal conduct are significant elements of the school's good care, guidance and support. There are clear procedures for dealing with any incidents of bullying. Pupils feel safe and know who to turn to when they are worried. Children are supported well when they first start school and their progress is monitored carefully in all areas of learning. Methods of assessing and checking pupils' progress in other classes are good. Priority is given to English and mathematics, with targets for improvement set for each pupil. Pupils' ability to remember their targets is impressive. Older pupils are increasingly involved in evaluating their progress and setting their

own targets, although those set for more able pupils in Years 1 and 2 are not always sufficiently challenging in mathematics.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides strong leadership and has managed the recent staffing changes well so that all adults work together as a strong team. Selfevaluation is good and focuses closely on improving standards and achievement. There are clear educational priorities based on a thorough analysis of strengths and weaknesses in standards and provision. Frequent monitoring of teaching and learning helps senior managers to support colleagues and there have been many useful recent initiatives. For example, developments in literacy with the 'Helmdon Monopoly' have increased pupils' interest in reading and led to a good improvement in reading standards. The Foundation Stage has improved significantly since the last inspection and children now make good progress in their first year at the school. These improvements demonstrate the school's good capacity to improve further. All members of staff are actively involved in analysing test data to see whether pupils are doing well enough, but responsibilities for leading and managing particular subjects are not shared well across the staff. Consequently, the headteacher has a heavy work load and has not been able to give equal attention to all subject areas, and particularly to improving provision in mathematics. Governors are very supportive of the school and ask challenging questions about the school's performance and effectiveness.

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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	2
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	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	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	3
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 welcoming us to your school and for showing us your work. You were very polite and friendly. You attend a good school and your headteacher and governors are leading the school well. What your school does best
- Good teaching helps you to do well throughout the school.
- The school gives you interesting things to do and you produce some very good artwork.
- Your teachers are caring and look after you successfully.
- Members of staff know what needs to be done to make the school even better.
- You get on well with your teachers and each other. What we have asked your school to do now
- Help more able pupils in Years 1 and 2 to do better in mathematics by making sure that your work is always hard enough.
- Give you more opportunities to practise your writing in science and topic work.
- Involve more teachers in being responsible for looking after subjects. We thoroughly enjoyed listening to you and watching you learn. We wish you all well for the future. You can help the school by continuing to work hard and always paying attention during class discussions.