



Hamilton Infants' School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 123994
Local Authority Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number 292854
Inspection date 6 March 2007
Reporting inspector Joyce Cox

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

Type of school	Infant	School address	Barthomley Road
School category	Community		Birches Head
Age range of pupils	3-7		Stoke-on-Trent ST1 6NW
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01782 234420
Number on roll (school)	160	Fax number	01782 234421
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Pauline Taylor
		Headteacher	Chris Bloor
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector over one day.

Description of the school

This is a popular infant school serving a mixed residential area in Stoke-on-Trent. The majority of the pupils are White British with a very small number from minority ethnic backgrounds, including a very small percentage who speak English as a second language. An average number of pupils have learning difficulties or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need. Children start in the Nursery at three years old with knowledge and skills that are similar to the expected levels, but which are slightly lower in terms of their language and communication skills. As part of the school's continuous commitment to improvement, it has secured many awards for its work, including Health Promoting School status and an Investors in People award. It is currently participating in the Primary Leadership Programme to develop an effective senior management structure. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2006 and there are currently three members of staff on maternity leave.

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 where pupils of all abilities and backgrounds succeed and thrive. At the heart of the school's work is the belief that every child is special and staff successfully live out this aim. One parent, summing up the views of many, wrote, 'I cannot fault any aspect of the school, it is excellent and I believe it has provided a brilliant start for my children.' Others say that the staff are skilled and approachable. This ensures that children make good progress in their personal, social and emotional development and are well equipped for their future lives. It is obvious from the moment pupils, parents and visitors enter this attractive and bright school, where they are warmly met and welcomed by the administration staff, that this is a happy, safe and lively place where learning is fun. From an average starting point in the Nursery, all pupils achieve well and attain above average standards by the end of Year 2. Effective support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, together with a good and interesting curriculum, are key factors in the good progress made by all pupils. The quality of teaching and learning is good and teachers are provided with good assessment information which tells them how well pupils are achieving. However, not all staff involve the pupils sufficiently in evaluating how well they are doing. Children are given a good start to their education in the Foundation Stage. There is an effective emphasis on developing the early skills of literacy and numeracy, and children are successfully encouraged to select their own learning activities. Foundation Stage staff succeed in ensuring that all children make good progress and attain at least the expected levels on entry to Year 1. Pupils' behaviour is good. Pupils get on well with each other and enjoy taking responsibility by being school councillors. Parents recognise and appreciate the good standard of care provided for all pupils and, in particular, those with complex learning or medical needs. The learning mentor swiftly and sensitively supports parents with any problems they have concerning their children which ensures that all pupils can enjoy school. Excellent links with local secondary schools provide increased sporting opportunities. Leadership and management are good. The recently appointed headteacher has wisely built on the already existing highly effective practice within the school and has enhanced leadership and management further by providing staff with comprehensive ways to track pupils' progress. Subject leaders' involvement in monitoring and evaluating their subjects is good but has been somewhat curtailed recently due to staff absence. Good progress has been made since the last inspection, particularly in improving the number of pupils achieving high standards in writing. There is clear evidence of a good capacity to build on the school's many strengths. Governors provide good support to the school and are increasingly involved in evaluating its work.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the opportunities for pupils to evaluate for themselves how well they are doing.
- Re-establish a clear plan and programme for subject leaders to monitor and evaluate the work in their subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good. Children start Nursery with average skills when compared to others of their age. Due to effective teaching, all children make good progress in Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2, particularly in their communication skills, personal, social and emotional development and in learning to read and write. Since the last inspection, pupils have attained above average standards in assessments at the end of Year 2. In the 2006 assessments, pupils' attainment was above average in reading and mathematics and exceptionally high in writing. The school's very good focus on supporting pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities gives them increased confidence and enthusiasm for learning. Consequently, they achieve well. The very few pupils speaking English as an additional language are provided with good support, ensuring they achieve as well as their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The proud way in which Year 2 pupils talk of their contributions to school life epitomises the good personal development of all pupils. Pupils are very caring of each other, describe their school as 'happy' and 'great', and find it very difficult to think of anything they do not enjoy, or like, in their learning. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good and enables them to celebrate both their own work, and the achievement of others. Behaviour is good, and pupils feel safe from bullying and have confidence that adults deal fairly with this if it happens. Pupils' very positive attitudes towards school are not fully reflected in their attendance, which is only satisfactory and in line with the national average. However, attendance has improved as a result of the school's hard work over a number of years. Pupils contribute well to the school through the active school council, and to the community through fund raising for various charities. Pupils understand what a healthy lifestyle is, and try hard to put their knowledge into practice by bringing healthy food for school lunch. All these activities are helping to give pupils a better understanding of their future lives and economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good because teachers have high expectations and pupils respond well to the challenges set for them. A particular strength of the teachers, many of whom are new to the profession, is the excellent way in which they display pupils' work, creating interesting and highly stimulating classrooms to enhance pupils' learning. Relationships are very good and teachers know their pupils well and succeed in making learning fun by carefully matching activities to pupils' interests and abilities.

Tasks are explained carefully so pupils understand exactly what they have to do. Teachers' use of 'talk partners' enables pupils to discuss questions but as yet not all teachers give pupils the chance to evaluate their learning. Teaching assistants are talented and skilled at supporting pupils. On occasions, role play activities in the Reception class lack the stimulation provided in the Nursery, where high calibre teaching ensures children are enthused, engaged and challenged.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Children in the Foundation Stage experience a good curriculum and have daily opportunities to use the outdoor area. However, outdoor activities are primarily planned to promote children's physical development and not always to enhance the other areas of learning. Well planned, regular additional activities assist pupils with learning difficulties to reach personal goals. Information and communication technology (ICT) provision is used effectively by all staff and pupils have regular opportunities to practise their ICT skills in all subjects. Pupils enjoy a rich variety of extra-curricular activities that successfully promotes their enjoyment of school, and enhances their personal development. The school places strong emphasis on the importance of regular exercise and has established excellent links with outside providers to provide additional sports activities. Pupils' good understanding of healthy lifestyles and their clear knowledge of how to keep safe reflect the very good provision for personal, social and health education.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Parents speak highly of every aspect of the school's work and are delighted with the good care, guidance and support provided. One parent writes, 'The help, support and genuine kindness of the whole school is absolutely wonderful.' Staff make good use of the comprehensive assessment system to guide pupils on the next steps in their learning. They are vigilant in tracking pupils' progress and realise the next step is to get pupils to evaluate their own learning. Every care is also taken to make sure that pupils are kept safe at school. Risk assessments are thorough and health and safety matters receive immediate attention. The learning mentor provides an invaluable link between home and school and there are highly effective links with parents and a range of local agencies that safeguard the needs of all pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The new headteacher has successfully built on the clear vision and effective ways of working that were already established in the school. Consequently, staff go out of their way to ensure that all pupils, whatever their background, gender, ability or disability, achieve well and are included in all school activities. The school has good systems for checking how well it is doing and

how to get better still. However, due to staff absence, monitoring and evaluation by subject leaders is not as well established as the school would like. The headteacher has improved upon the assessment procedures, making it easier for staff to track pupils' progress throughout the school. He has also constructed a clear school improvement plan outlining priorities and how these will be tackled. Governors are very supportive of the school and increasingly involved in checking its performance and asking challenging questions about how well it is doing.

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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?	1
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	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 making me so welcome when I came to inspect your school recently. I enjoyed talking with you and seeing you at work and play. This letter is to tell you why I think your school is good and how it could be even better. I particularly like these things:
 - Your good behaviour and your enthusiasm for lessons and other activities.
 - The very good relationships you have with one another and with the staff.
 - The interesting and wide range of activities that you all enjoy.
 - The skilful way in which the headteacher and all the teachers make sure you enjoy learning and make good progress in your work.
 - Your attractive classrooms and the interesting displays.
 - The very caring way you are looked after and supported by adults in the school.
 - The fact you are aware of the importance of eating healthily and taking lots of exercise.
- The headteacher and other staff are very keen to make the school even better for you. I think that to do this they should ask you how well you think you are doing in your work. It would also be good if staff helped the headteacher to make your work even better in all subjects. It was good to learn that you are doing so well at school and that your parents are so very happy, too. Your headteacher, governors and teachers have good plans to make the school even better. You can play your part by continuing to work hard and look after each other. I wish you all the very best for the future.