

Highfields Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124211
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	292923
Inspection dates	28–29 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Susan Walsh

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	255
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Bryan
Headteacher	Helen Poole
Date of previous school inspection	20 May 2002
School address	Elder Lane Burntwood WS7 9BT
Telephone number	01543 510445
Fax number	01543 510447

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is slightly larger than average. It serves the local neighbourhood but is starting to take pupils from a wider area. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is low, as is the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds with a small proportion from minority ethnic backgrounds.

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 with many good features whose improvement is starting to accelerate. A wind of change is sweeping through the school and staff are eagerly embracing new ideas. They work well as a team and have a clear commitment to improvement. Although leadership and management are satisfactory they have improved substantially. The recently formed leadership team is working very well together. Improved monitoring and evaluation mean it knows where the school needs to improve. Effective plans are in place to address areas of weakness. These have improved achievement in English and are starting to impact on achievement in mathematics. This demonstrates the school's satisfactory capacity to improve.

There are very effective links with parents, the community, external agencies and other education providers that are helping to improve the opportunities available to pupils. Parents are very pleased with what the school has to offer, typically saying, 'Staff are professional, approachable and friendly'. They are especially complimentary about the dedication of the headteacher, recognising her tremendous commitment to the school. Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. One pupil commented, 'It's a fun school, yet we learn'. There is a very real sense of pride in the school and pupils are keen to contribute to the school community. Relationships are very good. Pupils are supportive of each other and work well together. They know how to keep healthy and safe. Care, support and guidance are good. Pupils are looked after very well. Improved systems for checking pupils' progress have resulted in the early identification of pupils at risk of underachieving. This has allowed support to be more effectively focused.

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are average. Pupils get off to a steady start in the Reception class. They settle quickly because of very effective induction procedures. Their progress is satisfactory and, when they join Year 1, most are at the expected levels for their age. Pupils continue to make satisfactory progress through Years 1 to 6 reaching average standards by the end of Year 6. Pupils make better progress in English than they do in mathematics and science because of good teaching in English. Pupils' progress in mathematics is starting to accelerate but progress in science is still too slow in some classes. Higher achieving pupils are not making sufficient progress particularly in mathematics and science.

Teaching is satisfactory overall but there are significant variations in the quality of teaching and achievement is not always maximised. The pace of some lessons is too slow causing a few pupils to switch off and teachers' expectations are sometimes too low. While teachers have a good understanding of how to promote good learning in English, there are weaknesses in their subject knowledge and confidence in teaching mathematics and science. This slows pupils' progress in these subjects. The curriculum is satisfactory, although important improvements have been made to the way English is being taught, and topic days and weeks are making the curriculum more enjoyable.

What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate the progress of higher attaining pupils, particularly in mathematics and science.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by increasing the pace of lessons, raising teachers' expectations and improving their subject knowledge in mathematics and science.

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 average. Children start in the Reception class with levels of skills and knowledge in line with those expected. By the end of Reception, most reach the expected goals for learning for children of this age. Although children have improved many of their skills, they are a little behind in mathematics. Pupils make satisfactory progress through Years 1 and 2 reaching standards that are broadly average. The proportion of pupils in Year 2 reaching the higher Level 3 in reading and writing has improved in 2007 since the introduction of an improved curriculum for English. Too few pupils reached the higher Level 3 in mathematics. Pupils make good progress in English through Years 3 to 6 and their progress in mathematics is accelerating; but not enough pupils are reaching the higher Level 5 in mathematics. Pupils' progress in science is too slow in some classes because pupils do not complete enough work in lessons. There are weaknesses in pupils' skills in recording scientific experiments and the accurate use of scientific vocabulary.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils really enjoy school and a typical parental comment was, 'Children do not just like school, they love it'. Pupils have positive attitudes to their work and their behaviour is good. Good attendance is an indicator of how much pupils enjoy school but some pupils take too much holiday in term time and miss important work. In lessons and around the school, pupils behave in a mature fashion. Pupils' spiritual, social and moral development is good. Pupils express their feelings and emotions confidently. They develop empathy and respect for one another. While they are aware of White British culture some have a limited perception of other cultures. Pupils develop a good understanding of healthy lifestyles. They make healthy choices of food and participate well in sports and after school clubs. Pupils know how to keep safe and are confident to approach staff with any concerns. The school council takes an active role in making suggestions about how the school can be improved, for example by agreeing school rules for lunchtime and promoting safety in the school. Pupils take a proactive role in contributing to the wider community through participating in fund raising activities for charitable causes. Confidence and positive attitudes to learning combined with average standards in basic skills ensure that pupils are adequately prepared for their next stage of education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

There is an increasing proportion of lively lessons that use a full range of strategies, including drama, to ensure that pupils are interested, involved and learn well. However, the quality of teaching is inconsistent. Although the pace of lessons is often brisk, in the occasional lesson when it is not, pupils lose interest and this limits their learning. The teaching of literacy is often good and ensures that pupils make good progress, particularly in reading. Teaching assistants provide valuable support for lower attaining pupils and those with learning difficulties and

disabilities, particularly in the teaching of literacy. Teachers are rapidly developing their confidence and skills in teaching mathematics but occasionally there are still weaknesses in subject knowledge and teachers' expectations. Better assessment procedures have helped to ensure that work is being more closely matched to pupils' needs but occasionally higher ability pupils are not effectively challenged. There are weaknesses in the teaching of science because teachers are not clear enough about exactly what they want pupils to learn in the lessons and some have limited subject knowledge.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory but is improving and enables pupils to make satisfactory progress. There is a good range of activities available to children in the Reception class that make learning enjoyable. In Years 1 to 6, the curriculum is broad and balanced. It is enriched through the use of themed days. For instance, whole-school topic weeks have focused on creativity by highlighting famous artists such as Lowry and Picasso. Improvements to the teaching of literacy, including a strong focus on phonics, have resulted in better outcomes for pupils in English, and the mathematics curriculum is developing well. Although there are more opportunities to learn through practical experiences in science the success of this is being restricted by a lack of a scientific approach and limitations in the way pupils record their work. The curriculum is successful in making learning accessible for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities but sometimes it does not provide enough challenge for higher attaining pupils. Many pupils enjoy the wide range of extra-curricular activities, such as golf, gardening and athletics. An effective partnership with the local secondary school has widened pupils' opportunities particularly in sport, design and technology and science.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are very well cared for and helped through any learning or personal difficulty. Consequently, they are very happy in school and are able to make satisfactory progress. Secure procedures to protect and safeguard pupils from harm are in place and thorough risk assessments are carried out. Vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties receive good personal support. The checking of pupils' learning is much improved. Pupils at risk of underachieving are now identified at a much earlier stage and effective support is put in place. This has resulted in pupils making better progress, particularly in English. Targets are being used well by many teachers and the marking of English work is of a high quality and tells pupils exactly how to improve their work. Marking is sometimes less effective in mathematics and science.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The new leadership team works very well together and has brought a renewed sense of vigour to the school. There is both a vision and a determination to improve many areas of the school's work. The monitoring of teaching and learning is thorough and this has allowed senior leaders to pinpoint where improvements need to be made. The school has worked well with the local authority and this has led to improvements in the quality of teaching, especially in mathematics. Although self-evaluation is generally accurate it can be over-positive because of a tendency to analyse data using local rather than national comparisons. Teachers are becoming increasingly

involved in the checking of standards and achievement but the inclination to focus on standards rather than achievement limits teachers' expectations of the higher attaining pupils. Governors are supportive and are starting to challenge the school.

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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	3
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?	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.

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	2
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	3
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

30 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Highfields Primary School, Burntwood, WS7 9BT

Thank you for being so friendly and polite when we came to inspect your school recently. We really enjoyed talking to you and listened very carefully to what you had to say. I am writing to tell you what we found out. Your school is satisfactory but it is getting better all the time.

Both you and your parents told us that you really like school and get on well together. We were pleased to see that you all behave well and work hard in class. Your attendance rates are getting better but the school is concerned that some of you miss important things at school because you are on holiday. You know how to keep fit and healthy and you enjoy your physical education and sport. You have interesting things to do at school and it was clear that you enjoyed your art week. We liked looking at all the paintings. You have some very good artists in your school.

You are making satisfactory progress but you are doing better in English than in mathematics and science. The standards you reach are very similar to those reached by pupils in other schools but we know that some of you could do even better. Your standards in English are getting better and you are starting to improve your work in mathematics. We have asked your teachers to make sure that higher ability pupils do the best they can. Some of you do not complete enough work in your science lessons.

Teaching is satisfactory but it is better in some lessons than others. We have asked teachers to make sure that all your lessons are interesting and keep you involved. You told us that staff look after you very well and we agree. The people who run your school do a satisfactory job. They are working very hard to try and make your school a better place. You could help by making sure that you come to school every day and try your hardest in every lesson. I am sure you will.

I wish you well for the future.

Yours faithfully

Susan Walsh Lead inspector