

Hillstone Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103361
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	308289
Inspection date	8 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Doris Bell

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	3-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	340
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tony Cole
Headteacher	Gill Sparrow
Date of previous school inspection	24 November 2003
School address	Hillstone Road Shard End Birmingham B34 7PY
Telephone number	0121 6753573
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

pupils' progress this year, especially in writing

the match of teaching to pupils' learning needs, especially in writing, and how well topic work supports writing

pupils' personal development and well-being, and the provision for pupils with learning difficulties.

Evidence was gathered from observations, from looking at children's work, from discussions with staff, governors and children, from parents' questionnaires, and from documentation provided by the school. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail. However, the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Most children start this large primary school with skills well below the levels expected for their age. The proportion of pupils receiving free school meals is well above average, as is the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic or mixed ethnic backgrounds is similar to that found in most schools. A very small proportion of these pupils is at the early stages of learning English.

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. Strong and effective leadership and management, supported by excellent teamwork amongst the staff, successfully ensure that pupils achieve well. Standards are average in Year 6 and just below average in Year 2. Provision and progress are good in the Foundation Stage. All of this happens because the headteacher keeps staff firmly focused on constantly finding ways to improve pupils' learning and personal development.

The school chose wisely from a number of initiatives aimed at improving writing, the area where test results were weaker last year. As a result, teachers are now focusing on building pupils' speaking and listening skills, and using fiction and non-fiction texts plus content from other subjects to give pupils lots of ideas for their writing. This added the extra dimension needed to help all pupils, especially boys, put pen to paper, using different styles to suit different audiences and purposes. Pupils apply their learning well as they write in different subjects, and teachers help them to consolidate their writing skills by marking their writing well, wherever it occurs. Subject leaders contribute very effectively to this because they identify clearly where writing can be promoted in each subject.

The pupils' close involvement in assessing their own learning also assists their progress. Teachers make clear to pupils what they are expected to learn in lessons, check their work and mark it well, and give them good advice on how to improve. Pupils know their targets and what they need to do to reach them. Activities following whole-class introductions are usually well matched to pupils' different ability levels. However, more-able pupils do not always have enough opportunities to take their own learning further. Where this does happen, as was observed in an excellent literacy session, they rise to the challenge and take their learning beyond even what the teacher expected of them. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress, often reaching nationally expected standards by Year 6. Well-briefed support staff help less able pupils to gain confidence in themselves and in their ability to learn.

The two-year rolling programme of well-planned topics, which the pupils help to select, incorporates a large number of worthwhile learning experiences. This helps to stimulate pupils' interest and meet their different learning needs. However, the curriculum is not yet fully effective in ensuring the best possible progress for more-able pupils at all times. Visits and visitors, the opportunity to learn several different modern foreign languages, and a vast range of well-attended clubs and activities greatly enrich the curriculum and broaden pupils' learning and personal development. Good provision is made for pupils to learn information and communication technology skills, and pupils are beginning to use computers to aid their learning in other subjects. However, there are still too few opportunities for them to do this as a natural part of learning in the classroom. The school knows this and is looking at ways to improve this situation.

Pupils thoroughly enjoy school. They want to do well, and are immensely proud of their achievements. They say learning is fun because teachers make it so by teaching them in different ways and showing them different ways to learn, and they are right. Apart from a small number of families, with whom the school is working closely, attendance is good. Behaviour is excellent and children feel very safe in school. Play times and lunchtimes are sociable occasions for the pupils. Prefects and playground 'buddies' contribute well to making them so. Pupils very much appreciated the recent anti-bullying week, and said they would turn to the nearest adult for help if they had any concerns, because any one of the staff would help them. Pupils are friendly

and polite, and relationships are excellent throughout the school. Parents praise the school highly for what it does for them and their children. Comments such as 'I always feel welcome', 'All of the staff are friendly' and 'They give up a lot of their own time for the children' were typical.

Pupils make healthy food choices. They have an excellent understanding of how important it is to keep themselves fit and healthy. They know their views are highly valued. They make an excellent contribution to the school and wider community, for example, through their work as school councillors, by taking part in community events, and by raising money for different charities. The school provides them with many opportunities to understand what being a good citizen means. Links with schools across Europe contribute very effectively to their good understanding of the importance of respecting different cultures and beliefs in Britain and the wider world. Pupils leave the school well prepared for their future. All of this is a result of the very high quality care, guidance and support pupils receive, and the excellent links the school has with external agencies.

The headteacher has an exceptionally good understanding of the needs of the pupils and their parents. Staff and governors share her very strong determination to ensure that pupils do well in all aspects of their learning and that parents get the support they need to help their children learn. The senior management team is a cohesive group that, supported very effectively by subject leaders, makes rigorous checks on teaching and learning. The class books and the pupils' 'learning logs' are highly effective tools in this, providing valuable evidence about pupils' progress in all subjects. The school's own evaluation of its work is accurate and well founded. It knows what it does well, is very clear about what it needs to do to improve, and sets challenging targets for staff and pupils to keep them on track. All of this, together with very strong teamwork and very well-developed assessment procedures, gives it excellent capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children are given a good start in the Foundation Stage, although few reach the standards expected by the end of Reception in all six areas of learning. Their good progress is the result of good leadership and management, the staff's good understanding of the children's needs, and the well-planned curriculum that helps to meet those needs. However, this does not often enough include opportunities for spontaneous access to outdoor or independent learning. The school is aware of this and has it in hand.

The strong emphasis on personal, social and emotional development successfully brings children from a point where they find difficulty talking to and interacting with others to a point where they listen carefully and begin to work and play amicably alongside each other. Nursery children find it difficult to sit and listen for any length of time, but the staff are skilled at finding ways to keep them interested.

By the end of Reception, a significant minority of children begin to write legibly, forming letters and numbers correctly, sometimes also constructing simple sentences using the correct punctuation. Many more find difficulty doing these things but staff find imaginative ways to help them, for example, encouraging them to write in sand, to listen carefully to vocal sounds, and to speak clearly at all times. All of this, plus the good partnership with parents, contributes to the children's good progress and prepares them well for their work in Year 1.

What the school should do to improve further

- Give more-able pupils a wider range of challenging opportunities to pursue learning for themselves.
- Give pupils more opportunities to use computers as natural tools for learning across different subjects.

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Annex A

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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
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?	1

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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Hillstone Primary School, Birmingham B34 7PY

Thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave me when I visited your school yesterday. I particularly wanted to find out how well you can write, and how effectively your teachers plan writing to help all of you make as much progress as you can. I found that yours is a good school. This is because your headteacher leads and manages it really well. She and the other teachers who have responsibility for different things in school make sure that you are taught well and make good progress. The work they have done to improve your writing has been particularly successful. Your teachers think carefully about how best to teach you, and what and how you should learn. You told me that they make learning fun for you, and you really enjoy school because of this. This was very evident when I visited the Year 6 class as they learned how to select the right sort of language for an advert.

Something else I wanted to find out was whether the care, guidance and support the school gives you helps you to grow into mature young people, who enjoy learning and know how to keep yourselves safe, fit and healthy. I am delighted to say that your school does these things exceptionally well. Your excellent behaviour shows how you very much appreciate and keep the school rules. Many of you contribute really well to the school and wider community, for example, as school councillors, and playground 'buddies', and you clearly enjoy the opportunities you have to learn foreign languages and take part in sporting activities. You know how to improve your work, and you use the opportunities you have to assess your own learning really well. Your parents clearly appreciate very much what the school does for you and how it helps them to help you learn.

I have asked the school to do two things to help you learn even faster. They are:

- make sure that those of you who are capable of doing so get more opportunities to find things out for yourselves
- give all of you more opportunities to use computers to extend your learning in all subjects.

You can help by continuing to work hard and by taking more and more responsibility for your own learning. I hope that by doing so, you will come to value learning as a means of improving yourselves for the rest of your lives.

Yours sincerely

Doris Bell Lead inspector