

# Houghton Conquest Lower School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	109458
<b>Local Authority</b>	Bedfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	309990
<b>Inspection date</b>	6 March 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Keith Sadler

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	First
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–9
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	66
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Bryan Leaper
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Maralyn Napier
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	10 February 2003
<b>School address</b>	High Street Houghton Conquest Bedfordshire MK45 3LL
<b>Telephone number</b>	01234 740202
<b>Fax number</b>	01234 740202

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspection evaluated how well the current Year 4 pupils are achieving and whether they are on course to achieve standards as high as those of the 2007 cohort; and how the school ensures that the wide differences in ages are catered for in lessons, particularly in the Foundation Stage/Year 1 class. Evidence was gathered from records of pupils' attainment, samples of pupils' past work, observations in lessons and around the school, meetings with staff, governors and pupils, and an analysis of the responses to the parents' questionnaire. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail.

## Description of the school

This very small lower school serves the village of Houghton Conquest. Most pupils come from the village though a small proportion are from surrounding areas. The social circumstances of most pupils are similar to those typically found. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is average. Almost all the pupils are of White British heritage. The school has gained the following awards: Investors in People, National Healthy Schools, Basic Skills Quality Mark and Sports Activemark.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Houghton Conquest is a good school that prepares its pupils well for the next stage of their education. It is regarded well by parents and pupils who thoroughly enjoy school and learning. One parent said, 'We run to school each morning - not because we are late, but because we are so eager to get there'. Because the quality of leadership and management is good and the staff work closely together as a team with a good focus on raising standards, pupils achieve well in both their academic and personal development. Their personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good and pupils respond well to what one parent described as, 'A happy and secure environment'. As one pupil said, 'Our school is small and we all know and help each other. We don't have trouble picking out friends and we know everyone'. Behaviour is good and attitudes are positive. This is reflected in the pupils' good attendance. Pupils have a good understanding of staying safe. 'Our school helps us to 'think safe'', said one pupil. They are also proud of the Healthy Schools award and pupils say it has helped them to have a good understanding of the importance of aerobic exercise and healthy eating. Pupils enjoy taking responsibility. They take their membership of the school council seriously, and are enthusiastic in recounting the many positive changes that have been made as a result. Pupils also take pleasure in helping younger ones to learn to play playground games. Their proactive charity work raises money for local and national charities and includes money raised from cakes made by pupils. One parent commented that, 'The school is at the heart of the village community with many events organised for the whole village'. In addition, pupils take part in local music and drama festivals. During the inspection, at a celebration assembly, many parents and pupils were transfixed when pupils who won choral speaking prizes performed their poems.

Pupils' academic achievement is good and, starting from skills and abilities similar to those typically found when children enter the Foundation Stage, they progress well. Standards in national tests for pupils at the end of Year 2 are significantly above average. They continue to make good progress in Years 3 and 4 and, by the time that they leave the school, standards are high in comparison to expected levels. It is the school's effective provision that is the key to the pupils' good progress. The quality of teaching and learning is good in all classes. Relationships are positive and classrooms provide a calm and purposeful atmosphere. Work is planned carefully to ensure that the mixed aged classes and the widely divergent learning needs of pupils are met. The interesting range of activities leads to pupils concentrating well. The recent focus on strengthening pupils' learning is paying dividends because pupils know their targets well and they have a good understanding of what they need to do to improve. The quality of the curriculum is good and its effectiveness has improved since the previous inspection. There are now some outstanding features. Subjects are linked together well to help to make learning more meaningful for pupils. In addition, information and communication technology (ICT) is used well to strengthen achievement in many subjects. However, there is a weakness because outdoor learning is limited for the Foundation Stage children.

Staff take good care of the pupils and support them well. Care is taken to ensure that all current regulations for safeguarding and protecting pupils are met. In addition, there has been a considerable strengthening in the arrangements for checking and tracking pupils' progress and this has improved the staff's academic guidance for pupils. Because of this, vulnerable pupils and those at risk of under-achieving are identified early and effectively and good programmes of support are put into place. As a result, these pupils' achievement and progress are good.

The school's good overall effectiveness is the result of the strong focus on strengthening pupils' progress and improving provision that is led well by the headteacher. She has a clear vision for the school, is supported well by the deputy headteacher and other members of staff, and is committed to further improvement. The school knows itself well. Planning for further improvement is good and superior to that at the time of the previous inspection. Appropriate areas for development are identified and are linked to the school's evaluation. Taken together, this demonstrates a good capacity for further improvement. Governance is satisfactory. Although governors support the school well and are committed to its further improvement, they are over-reliant on the headteacher for information because they do not have a sufficiently thorough system in place to visit the school or discuss progress and achievement with other members of staff. As a result, they are not in a good position to question the school's effectiveness or improvement.

### **Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage**

#### **Grade: 3**

Children in the Foundation Stage are settled, secure and taught well in the classroom by both the class teacher and support practitioner. Relationships are good and children make good progress because they enjoy the good range of activities provided in the classroom. The youngest children are provided for well because their needs are carefully considered and good opportunities are provided for them to work separately and also with the Reception children. The curriculum for indoor learning is of good quality. It is well planned and an effective balance is maintained between adult directed learning and activities that children choose for themselves.

However, there is a significant weakness. Opportunities for outdoor learning are severely limited. Although there is a designated space it is neither welcoming nor used to good effect. Resources are barely sufficient and badly organised. In addition, there is no cover to enable children to learn outdoors in inclement weather. As a result, the class teacher does not plan for outdoor learning and this has a negative effect on children's progress because they are not given a broad opportunity to develop and apply skills in all areas of learning in a different environment.

#### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Extend the outdoor learning resources for children in the Foundation Stage, and ensure that there are plans in place to make good use of them.
- Strengthen the role of governors by establishing suitable systems for them to learn for themselves about the school's provision and pupils' achievements.

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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
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?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
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	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**

7 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Houghton Conquest Lower School, MK45 3LL

Thank you for welcoming me to your school when I visited you recently. I enjoyed meeting you and watching you learn and play. I was pleased to hear that you thoroughly enjoy school and learning.

Yours is a good school. You told me that you feel really safe in school and I can see that this is because the staff take good care of you. The adults work hard for you and the teaching is good. Your behaviour is good and you take care to make sure that all pupils enjoys it as much as you do. I was impressed with your levels of concentration and your good learning in lessons and how well you know your targets and how to improve your work. As a result you achieve well and reach well above average standards.

I have asked your governors, headteacher and teachers to do two things. First, to make sure that the outdoor learning space for the Foundation Stage children is made more attractive and inviting for the youngest children. Second, that your governors should come into school to see how well you are doing.

You can help by continuing to work hard to meet your targets.

Best wishes for the future.

Keith Sadler Lead inspector