

Houghton Regis Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109459
Local Authority	Bedfordshire
Inspection number	309991
Inspection dates	10–11 December 2008
Reporting inspector	David Speakman

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	215
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Graham Morgan
Headteacher	Mrs Jean Gamble
Date of previous school inspection	20 September 2004
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	St Michael's Avenue Houghton Regis Dunstable Bedfordshire LU5 5DH
Telephone number	01582867487
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Age group	3–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This average size school mainly serves children in the locality. Approximately 15% of pupils come from outside the school's immediate area. Children start in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) part time in the Nursery at the beginning of the term after their third birthday. They transfer into Reception in the September of the year in which they are five. The percentage of pupils receiving free school meals is above the national average. Many children enter school with attainment that is well below that usually seen in children of this age, particularly in their communication skills. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average and the proportion with a statement of special educational need is similar to that found in most schools. Identified learning needs mainly include specific and moderate learning difficulties. Most pupils are White British with a small number coming from a range of different cultural backgrounds. A few speak English as an additional language, but none are at the early stages of learning English.

There is a breakfast club and after school care, which is the joint responsibility of the governors of this school and a nearby lower school. It is held in the other school's premises. The school has achieved the Active Schools Gold Award, recognising the quality of provision for physical activity in the curriculum and after school clubs, the Basic Skills Quality Mark and has recently gained Healthy Schools Status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Each individual child is valued and helped to progress well in this good school. As one parent wrote, summing up the views of many parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire, 'Houghton Regis Lower School is simply a wonderful place for children to learn.'

Starting from a low baseline, pupils achieve well and standards at the end of Year 4 match those nationally expected for their age. Attainment in reading, writing and in mathematics at the end of Year 2 is broadly average but standards achieved by girls in reading and writing are significantly higher than those reached by boys. Pupils' personal development is good. Pupils of all ages show positive attitudes to learning and enjoy lessons best when they are fully involved in discussion or investigation work, and when they can see a real purpose in completing tasks. Most pupils enjoy school and look forward to it every day; they feel very safe and know they can talk to friends, their teachers and other staff if problems arise. Pupils have an excellent understanding of healthy living; they choose healthy options at lunchtimes and take part in a great deal of physical activity.

The quality of education provided by the school is good. Teaching is good and promotes effective learning. Teachers use assessment information well to match tasks to the pupils' individual capability so they become confident learners and progress well. The curriculum is constructed thoughtfully so that pupils find the themes and topics interesting and learning meaningful. The quality of care and guidance provided for pupils is outstanding, the school providing an exceptional level of both academic and personal guidance.

The impact of leadership and management on the work of the school is good. The level of community cohesion is good. Any issues, such as pupils' learning needs, or issues arising from religious affiliations, are dealt with sensitively so that there is a strong sense of community. The headteacher works tirelessly with the senior leadership team, which includes all core subject and phase leaders, and the governing body to monitor and evaluate continuously the impact of the school's work on both pupils' academic achievement and their personal development. Self-evaluation is searching and rigorous and takes account of the views of staff, governors, pupils and parents. It means that the school is fully aware of areas that need attention, such as the relative attainment of boys and girls. It also means that the level of improvement seen since the previous inspection is good. Because of this, the school has a good capacity for continued improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children enter the EYFS with attainment that is well below that typical for their age, especially in their ability to communicate effectively. Children achieve well throughout the Nursery and Reception classes because of good teaching, excellent care and high quality assessment of their progress. However, as a result of their low starting point, standards often remain below the goals nationally expected at the end of the Foundation Stage, particularly in communication, language and literacy. Latest assessment data shows that there are significant differences in both achievement and standards of boys and girls in language development and in personal, social and emotional development. Girls perform much better than boys do. The Foundation Stage leader provides good leadership and management and this results in the creation of an effective learning environment that is well equipped and organised. Adults work in close

collaboration with each other. All are deployed effectively, are knowledgeable and fully involved in the ongoing assessment of each individual's progress. Consequently, they know what each child's needs are at any time, and meet them well; for example, engaging children in conversation during free-choice activities. Staff take great care to ensure that children feel safe and happy in school, and this is evident in the confident and purposeful way in which children engage in the wide range of learning opportunities, quickly settling in at the beginning of each day. There is a good balance of teacher-led activities and those children choose for themselves. Activities are set into themes so learning is interesting and engages children in periods of sustained concentration. Transition between the Nursery and Reception is thought out extremely well, with children from both groups mixing freely in outdoor activities. This eventually includes indoor activities so that nursery children are familiar with the whole unit by the time they are ready to move into Reception.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make sure that boys achieve as well as girls in the EYFS and in Years 1 and 2 so that standards in their personal, social and emotional development and in their communication skills match those of the girls.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

End of Year 2 test and assessment results are average, showing good progress through Key Stage 1. Good progress continues through Years 3 and 4. In 2008, standards at the end of Year 4 were broadly in line with those nationally expected for this age. This represents good progress for this group as attainment at Year 2 in 2006 was below average. Samples of pupils' work show that progress at Key Stage 2 is currently good. There are some samples of good writing in English and in other subjects, such as topics. Pupils who find learning more difficult achieve well, both in the lesson objectives and against the targets in their own education plans. Artwork and samples of information and communication technology (ICT) on display around the school show standards are good in these subjects. The quality of singing and performance, for example in the Christmas productions, is good.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good with some outstanding elements. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good; pupils talked confidently and with pride about their learning and school. Pupils make a good contribution to the school community by reliably performing duties around school, including 'playground friends' and assembly monitors. Members of the school council put their own business and decision-making skills into practice very successfully as they plan and organise fund-raising events throughout the school year. Pupils' behaviour is good because it is managed well by all staff. Pupils get on well with one another and are sensitive to the needs of others. They report that bullying is quite rare and they feel safe and happy in school. Attendance is broadly average in relation to schools nationally, but improving steadily and higher than local averages. Pupils are very enthusiastic about the range of after-school clubs, including sports, drama and music clubs. Pupils talked excitedly about trips out of school. Their positive attitudes to work, good academic achievement and their ability to work collaboratively ensure they are well prepared for the next phase of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers have high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour. Good behaviour management supports the calm and effective learning environment evident around the school. Pupils are mostly clear about the purpose of each lesson. Teachers share lesson objectives at the beginning of lessons, although there is sometimes a lack of clarity regarding the expected outcomes. Work is matched very well to each pupil's needs. Assessment information is used effectively to provide pupils at all levels of attainment with challenging tasks so that they make good progress. Teachers and teaching assistants work effectively together. Teaching assistants are deployed efficiently, supporting individuals and groups of pupils well. Consequently, pupils who find learning difficult receive good support, progress well and because they are fully included in class activities, gain confidence. The best teaching seen had pupils actively involved, they had lots of independence, were challenged effectively and encouraged to use a range of different learning styles. The pace of learning was rapid, but in less effective lessons this slows down with children sitting and listening for too long.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum fulfils all statutory requirements and promotes good progress for pupils, but requires further refinement to ensure it consistently meets the needs of both boys and girls. The emphasis on personal development is effective and pupils are taught how to respect and value each other. Philosophy lessons effectively encourage pupil debate and decision-making skills. The standards in ICT are good and a range of skills are taught with cross-curricular links, for instance, healthy eating databases. There is a themed approach to learning established in Key Stage 1, which meets pupils' needs very well by linking subjects to enhance understanding. In Key Stage 2, there is a topic-based approach to the curriculum, although most subjects are taught separately in order to help prepare pupils for the transition to subject-based teaching at their next school. A number of enrichment days are arranged throughout the year and particular effort is made here to ensure that those deemed gifted or talented receive extension activities. Curriculum enrichment is good and includes musical tuition, a modern foreign language, school productions, visits and visitors. The range of extra-curricular activities offered and a variety of sporting opportunities promotes a healthy lifestyle whilst developing pupils' skills and self-esteem.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Children are valued and everyone is treated as a special individual by the staff. Pupils consequently learn in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. Relationships with parents and carers are generally very positive and those who responded in the parental questionnaires overwhelmingly feel that the school responds promptly to any concerns they may have. They spoke highly of the care and support provided by the school and the dedication shown by the headteacher and her staff. Statutory requirements to safeguard pupils are in place and all staff vigilantly ensure the welfare of pupils. There are many initiatives, both formally and informally, to support pupils and their families, many through the school's excellent links with the community and support agencies.

The school works very successfully to identify and provide support to pupils who find learning more difficult. Class teachers and teaching assistants work closely together to support pupils' needs. Academic guidance and personal support given to pupils is excellent. Assessment and tracking procedures are fully in place and include exceptional detail; with each pupil's progress being systematically and thoroughly monitored to help improve their work and set targets. Pupils' involvement in self-assessment has led to improvement in the quality of their extended writing. Significantly, all pupils are tracked with regard to their personal development. This focus on the 'whole-child' in addition to academic achievement is a real strength of the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The excellent procedures the school has to evaluate its own performance provide leaders with a clear vision for school improvement. This is used to set challenging targets for pupils, which supports good achievement. Progress towards targets is closely monitored, so that leaders are aware of the effectiveness of the school's work. They are aware, for example, that boys did not perform as well as girls this last year, but still have to manage improvement in this area. The headteacher and senior leadership team hold teachers to account for the progress of pupils in their classes in regular progress review meetings. There are very effective links with the local community and the school is now raising pupils' awareness of the global community. Governors are highly effective in their work. They are well organised, know the school well and provide high levels of support and challenge. They have a wide range of relevant expertise, which they use very well in helping improve the school. They played a major role in the provision of the Nursery classroom and the before and after school care.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which 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 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

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	1
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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

12 December 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Houghton Regis Lower School, Houghton Regis, LU5 5DH

Thank you for making us welcome when we came to your school recently. We enjoyed very much the time we spent meeting you and your teachers, visiting lessons to watch you learn, and speaking to you to find out what you think about your life in school.

It is clear that you enjoy school and that it is helping you get more and more confident. Those of you we spoke to said how much you enjoy school and find it interesting. You go to a good school. All the adults work well together to provide you with a good education. Teaching and opportunities for you to learn are good. The care and concern that all adults show for both your progress in lessons and your welfare is excellent. Teachers have an extremely clear picture of how well each of you is doing and how to help you learn at a good pace. You all make good progress in lessons and reach average standards in your work. We have noticed, though, that girls do better than boys in reading and writing in the lower part of the school.

You help by behaving well and trying hard to do your best. We were very pleased by the sensible way in which you make friends and care about each other. You help to make others feel safe in school. You are well prepared to go on to your next schools.

There are many good and excellent features about your school, but it could be even better. We have asked staff and governors to look at ways of helping younger boys to do as well as girls in developing reading and writing skills. We are sure that you will all help your teachers achieve this for you.

We wish you all the best in the future.

David Speakman

Lead inspector