

Halton Community Combined School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110391
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	310282
Inspection dates	22–23 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Bernice Magson

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	99
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr R Allen
Headteacher	Mrs S Scrimshaw (Acting)
Date of previous school inspection	12 January 2004
School address	Tring Road Halton Aylesbury HP22 5PN
Telephone number	01296 622264
Fax number	01296 623490

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a small primary school, situated adjacent to RAF Halton. The pupils from these military families move schools frequently. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and a few from minority ethnic groups including Travellers. Pupil numbers have reduced significantly over time. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is above average, and these mainly include pupils with social, emotional and behavioural needs, and moderate learning difficulties. The school has experienced considerable turbulence in staffing, and in leadership and management. A permanent headteacher has been appointed for September 2008.

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 an improving school, which provides a satisfactory quality of education. The leadership team and governing body are providing the school with a clear and purposeful sense of direction in which learning is fun, efforts are rewarded, and achievements celebrated. Pupils are valued as individuals and their interests are supported well. Parents are positive in their support of the school and appreciate efforts to improve the learning environment and raise standards. One parent commented that the, 'School is going from strength to strength under the new leadership', and many others agreed.

Pupils enjoy school and have positive attitudes to learning. Behaviour is good. Pupils are keen to be involved in school improvement, such as through the school council. They have a good understanding of wider world issues, and organise many events in support of charities, such as a pencil collection for a needy school in Kenya.

Pupils with learning difficulties participate fully in school activities, because of sensitive care and support. Parents describe arrangements for their pastoral care as 'second to none'. Pupils from transient families have been identified as not making as consistent progress as other pupils. The school has recognised the need to improve further the induction and support systems for these pupils. An extensive review of their needs is underway.

Achievement is satisfactory. Teacher assessments indicate an improvement in standards, and more pupils are achieving their targets in literacy and numeracy. Daily sessions of intensive support in all classes are helping pupils to learn basic skills more rapidly. The full impact of this support is still developing and is not yet reflected in national tests, where attainment in mathematics and writing are broadly average by Years 2 and 6. In science, pupils respond well to the many practical activities and make good progress to reach average standards. The current Years 2 and 6 are on course to achieve predicted grades and with increased numbers achieving nationally expected levels.

Pupils are motivated to learn because of the strong focus on practical experiences in the curriculum. Enrichment opportunities are extensive. Teaching varies in quality, but is satisfactory overall. In some lessons, teachers do not use assessment information sufficiently to match the learning tasks to pupils' needs. This holds back progress in subjects such as writing and mathematics. Teaching assistants give valuable support to pupils who find learning more difficult. Efforts to encourage pupils to assess their own learning are developing well. There is a need for teachers' marking to provide more guidance to pupils about the next steps they need to take to improve.

Leadership and management are good. Leaders and managers know the school's strengths and weaknesses well, because self-evaluation is good. There is a good commitment to achieving challenging targets. The systems for monitoring, evaluating and development planning are carefully planned. However, the cycle is not yet complete because it has been only recently established. The school's success in establishing a strong leadership team, their effectiveness in improving the quality of education and in raising standards demonstrates a good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The Reception class provides a good start for children's education. The classrooms are calm, relationships are warm and friendly, and the management of children is firm but fair. As a result, children behave well. They make good progress in personal development, because teachers are good role models. When working with adults, children are eager to succeed, and are learning to take turns. Teaching is good. Activities are planned effectively to interest and challenge children. They are making good progress in learning the basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy. Each day children are encouraged to make decisions about their play, and access equipment responsibly. Children find it more difficult to achieve when working independently, because of an over reliance on adult support. With help they concentrate well and persevere on difficult tasks; this includes the many children with significant social and emotional needs. Sensitive support is provided, so that children always succeed. As a result, children achieve well, and reach expected goals in most areas of learning, although early reading, mark making and personal development remain below expectations for their age.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing and mathematics by making greater use of assessment data to ensure that learning is matched appropriately to pupils' abilities.
- Develop teacher marking and assessment procedures so that pupils know the next steps to take to bring about improvement in their learning.
- Extend arrangements to support pupils from transient families so that they progress similarly to other pupils.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is satisfactory, but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspection before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Results in national tests vary considerably over time, because of the small cohorts of pupils. Additional factors restrict pupils' performance, and affect their results in national tests. Owing to the nearby military base high numbers of pupils join or leave the school each year, above average numbers have specific learning needs, and the attendance of some pupils is inconsistent. As a consequence of recent improvements in performance, the pupils who remain in school over time are making expected rates of progress. All pupils have an improving knowledge of basic skills in literacy and numeracy and use them with confidence in practical activities. There are some strengths in science standards, where most pupils attain nationally expected levels. In 2007, a quarter of Year 6 reached the higher levels in national tests in science.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils say that they enjoy coming to school and feel safe and secure. They have a good understanding for their age of cultural differences and wider world issues. In assemblies and drama, they explore their feelings and beliefs well. Pupils show good trust and respect towards others and are active in their support of others. Pupils have organised a Tudor Fayre, for example, and funds are earmarked to support a national charity. To help protect the environment,

recycling takes place and gardening activities are popular. Pupils understand the importance of healthy lifestyles and participate enthusiastically in sporting teams. The recently elected school council is beginning to influence school development with their ideas. Pupils could develop further as independent learners if they more consistently checked their work. Good development in personal qualities, and sound progress in basic skills, is preparing pupils satisfactorily for their later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Although teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, there are examples of good teaching in all year groups. A review of teaching has led to a greater emphasis on defining what learning is to take place and on effective methods to motivate pupils. Improvements to the environment have enhanced opportunities for pupils to undertake independent tasks. For example, they can work in the newly developed school library or under the canopy of the outdoor play area in the Foundation Stage. There are good opportunities for pupils to explore the world around them, often through interactive displays, which encourage learning by doing. In some lessons, however, pupils are not challenged enough. This is because teachers do not make sufficient use of assessment data in planning lessons and tasks are not always matched appropriately to pupils' abilities. The school recognises that a review of arrangements is needed to involve pupils in assessing their own learning, as the process has insufficient challenge for the more able.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is organised in a two-year programme of activities. It includes a good range of imaginative and creative experiences, taught through a topic approach. Good activities are provided to develop cultural cohesion and resources are chosen to reflect the cultural heritage of all pupils, such as the Irish heritage of Traveller children. Links between subjects are good. For instance, in a mixed class of Years 5 and 6, pupils enjoyed a science topic on flight. They participated enthusiastically in a drama, which included simulated sounds of an aeroplane flight and crash and, later, undertook an activity about Icarus and the Ancient Greeks, linking well with history. Planning of the curriculum is good, although pupils of differing abilities are not always challenged enough, for example in writing. A substantial number of visitors and visits are used to enhance the curriculum. Out of school clubs are popular. The school has recognised a need to develop the curriculum further so that pupils have a greater involvement in assessing their learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are well cared for and supported. Staff know pupils well and establish good relationships with them. Systems for health and safety, risk assessment, first aid and child protection are securely in place. There is good monitoring of attendance and punctuality. Induction arrangements are excellent, and pupils' achievements are celebrated well as they leave the school. Pupils experience a smooth transition to their next stage of education, because of good links with other schools. Academic progress is tracked well, although systems for pupils to assess their own learning are at an early stage of development. Good provision is in place to

support pupils with learning difficulties and those with social, emotional and behavioural needs. The school is reviewing its provision for pupils from military families, so that their needs are fully supported, and they progress consistently.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The governing body have managed the recent turbulence in leadership well and been instrumental in establishing a new leadership team. Staff and governors are committed to raising standards, and have introduced good measures to bring about improvement in provision, for example in the re-organisation of classes. They have successfully negotiated a smaller admission number, because of fewer pupils in the locality. Self-evaluation is well established and roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and effective. The school now needs to undertake a review of recent changes to ensure their effectiveness in raising standards.

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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?	3
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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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 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	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?	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.

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	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	3
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

09 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Halton Community Combined School, Aylesbury, HP22 5PN

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school. I enjoyed seeing all the interesting things you are doing. I could see that you enjoy your new playground, and it looks very inviting to read books in your new library. I think that you have a satisfactory school, but one that is improving all the time.

Here are the things that I liked about your school:

- you are friendly and very welcoming
- you work hard in lessons and your standards are improving
- you enjoy doing practical activities, such as the topic on flight in Years 5 and 6
- your teachers provide a good range of interesting things for you to do and see
- your headteacher and all the adults are working hard to make your school even better
- your parents and carers are glad that you go to this school.

To make your school even better I have asked your headteacher, staff and governors to do three things. Firstly, I think that teachers could use the information that they collect about your work to set you more challenging tasks, particularly in writing and mathematics. I have also asked the teachers to improve their marking in your exercise books and provide more time for you to check your work, so that you understand how to improve. Lastly, I have asked the teachers to find more ways to help you in lessons so that you all learn more rapidly.

I am sure that your school will continue to improve, especially with your good help.

Yours sincerely

Bernice Magson

Lead Inspector