

Holmwood School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110392
Local Authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	310283
Inspection date	25 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Sean O'Toole

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4-7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	150
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Mark Howell
Headteacher	Mrs Janet Newman
Date of previous school inspection	9 December 2002
School address	Kensington Drive Great Holm Milton Keynes MK8 9AB
Telephone number	01908 260596
Fax number	01908 260596

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated how well pupils, especially boys, achieve in reading, writing and mathematics, how teachers make sure that skills are developed consistently and how leaders and managers keep a check on progress. He gathered evidence from lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work and documents. Parents' questionnaires and discussions with parents, children, governors and staff also contributed to the judgements. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail.

Description of the school

Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds which are mostly advantaged. One in ten pupils speak a language other than English at home. A below average proportion have learning difficulties, although in some year groups there are far more pupils with learning difficulties than in others. For the last year the school has been part of a federation and shares its headteacher with another local school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Parents think highly of this good school and express warm appreciation for the hard work and sensitivity of the staff. The excellent way that staff care for the pupils is one of the main reasons why the pupils enjoy school so much and make good progress. As one parent said, 'It's obvious the teachers and assistants enjoy teaching and love children.' Another reason for the school's success is the way that the headteacher and senior staff identify the academic needs of the pupils, match work to their ability and keep track of their progress. This has brought improvements in standards, raised the expectations of teachers and helped pupils to be well prepared for the future.

Pupils thrive in the calm and purposeful environment where all are valued and encouraged to succeed. They are confident learners who listen attentively, share ideas and take pride in what they do. Their behaviour is exemplary. When taking turns as 'playground friends' they learn how to resolve conflict and to support others. Pupils' excellent awareness of healthy living is partly the result of the new garden and environmental project, and the super opportunities to play on challenging equipment and take part in lots of physical education lessons and extra curricular activities.

In the last year, senior staff have recognised the need to raise standards. Because of the extra support for pupils and additional training for staff, standards are now above average in reading and mathematics. Standards in writing are average but pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to use what they have learned in English lessons in their writing in other subjects. Staff are ambitious for the pupils' success and readily adopt new ideas that benefit the pupils. The well focused and child-friendly individual education plans for those with learning difficulties contribute much to their growing levels of confidence and good learning. Teachers' thorough planning, skilful use of technology and careful marking contribute much to learning. Lessons include plenty of challenge and there is always good support for the less confident. Sometimes explanations take too long and this limits the time available for pupils to get on and produce good quantities of work. Nonetheless, pupils are keen to please their teachers and greatly enjoy the opportunities to discuss their work with their partners. Several boys, when asked what they liked most about school, commented that, 'Kids Read is great, it's lots of fun.' By promoting such positive attitudes and enthusiasm for learning the staff have enabled the pupils to improve their reading skills significantly.

The headteacher has been very successful in creating a single-minded team with a focus on improvement. Their good track record of success bodes well for the future. Plans for development are comprehensive and focus strongly on enhancing pupils' experiences and enjoyment. Senior staff recognise the need to sharpen up some aspects of these plans to include more measurable goals so that they and the governors can keep better track of improvement and extend their challenging targets. A particular success is the way that leaders have kept parents informed of and involved in the changes brought about by the federation of the two schools.

Because the staff are receptive to ideas from the pupils and their parents and work very effectively with other schools and agencies, they have developed an interesting curriculum which is underpinned by excellent provision for personal, social and health education. A good variety of trips, special events and visitors to the school give insight to the pupils on the way different communities live. High levels of parental involvement through workshops and an excellent range of social and fund-raising events contribute much to pupils' learning. Because

of the focus on meeting the needs of individuals, the pupils enjoy their time at school. As one parent wrote, 'My daughter loves Holmwood and really dislikes weekends as they keep her away from school.'

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Right from the start, children feel at ease. The new system of induction, which includes home visits, means that children start school confidently. The children quickly settle into the school's routines and play happily together. Most of them start school with secure skills for their age and make good progress. They are especially good at improving their personal, social and emotional qualities because the staff provide them with good opportunities to make choices, work in small groups, receive individual support and explore new challenges in a safe environment. By the end of the Reception year most are working at levels that are in advance of those expected for their age. Staff keep a close eye on how well the children are making progress and conscientiously record any key successes. They plan activities that are matched to the children's needs. Parents are encouraged to be involved. Many of them spoke highly of the ways in which their children were helped to make a good start.

What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate pupils' progress in writing by providing more opportunities for them to apply their writing skills in different subjects.
- Increase the pace of some lessons so that pupils become more productive.
- Sharpen up the school's plans to include challenging and measurable targets.

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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	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ 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?	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	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?	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	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	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

4 October 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Holmwood School, Milton Keynes, MK8 9AB

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school. I enjoyed my time with you and was impressed by how hard you work and how well you get on together. Lots of you told me that you really enjoy school. It was good to see how well you are learning to read and your new library is smashing.

You go to a good school and because you behave so well and show much care for each other you make it a special place to learn. I know that your parents and teachers are really proud of you. The teachers are really good at caring for you and try hard to find ways to make learning fun. They think carefully about what they want you to do and provide lots of help so that you can succeed. I have asked them to help you to write more when you are doing your topic work and sometimes to give you a bit more time to finish your work. You can help by working a bit more quickly.

Everyone at the school really wants you to do well and in the last year there have been many improvements. These have helped you to get better at reading and mathematics. I have asked the teachers and governors to find ways to keep a check on all the changes so that they will know what to do next to help you.

I know that you really like Holmwood and I hope that you will always be as happy at school.

Best wishes

Sean O'Toole

Lead inspector