

Hamilton Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114706
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	311672
Inspection date	2 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Helen Ranger

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	419
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev G Stevens
Headteacher	Mr C Reynolds
Date of previous school inspection	28 February 2005
School address	Constantine Road Colchester Essex CO3 3GB
Telephone number	01206 572362
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Introduction

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

- pupils' achievement and standards in English, mathematics and science;
- the standard of pupils' personal development and well-being and how they are promoted by the systems of care, guidance and support;
- the quality of the curriculum.

The inspector gathered evidence from records of pupils' progress, observations of lessons and breaktime activities, examples of pupils' work, discussions with pupils, staff and governors, and from questionnaires and letters from parents. The main documents used by the school in its monitoring were examined. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that most of 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

This large primary school serves an area of central Colchester. Its popularity with parents means that it is regularly oversubscribed. The great majority of pupils are from White British families. About seven % come from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds and almost all of these pupils speak fluent English. Levels of free school meals are low. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties or disabilities is considerably smaller than in most schools. When pupils start Reception, their attainment covers a wide range but, overall, is in line with the levels expected nationally of four-year-olds.

The school holds Healthy School and ActiveMark awards. It is currently part of a national pilot programme, 'Making Good Progress', which aims to ensure that every child does as well as possible throughout his or her time in school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Hamilton Primary School provides a high quality of education for its pupils. Its most significant strengths lie in pupils' excellent academic progress and the development of their extremely good personal qualities.

By the end of their Reception year, children's attainment exceeds nationally expected levels. Standards have also been consistently above average in recent years in the Key Stage 1 assessments in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2. Extremely good progress is made through Key Stage 2 also, resulting in exceptionally high performance each year in the Year 6 national tests. In English, mathematics and science, the proportions of pupils reaching Level 4 and Level 5 in these tests have been consistently much higher than the national average. The school's tracking of its current pupils indicates that academic standards continue at similarly high levels.

The curriculum has been developed to promote equally high standards in pupils' personal development. For example, a programme of 'core values' in all age groups focuses in turn on themes such as fairness, integrity and courage. School rules have been condensed effectively into a succinct code of conduct, 'Be Kind, Be Safe, Be Responsible'. Pupils respond extremely well to adults' high expectations of them. As a result of such provision, they are prepared exceptionally well for the next stage of their education and act well as young citizens. The school council is very active and is currently organising a charity week planned by pupils themselves. The older pupils tackle subjects such as discrimination and bias in a mature and thoughtful way. Incidents of bullying or racism are rare.

Attendance rates are much higher than national averages and reflect pupils' very considerable enjoyment of school. Pupils are lively and enquiring but know when they need to behave in a settled and mature way too. They have a very well developed understanding of safe behaviour. The accommodation is cramped for the numbers on roll but pupils are mindful of the needs of others when moving around their classrooms and the site as a whole. They have an excellent grasp of how to lead healthy lifestyles. The older ones run a healthy snack shop at breaktimes. Pupils speak highly of the opportunities for exercise and sport. The school does much to compensate for having limited play space on its site, including weekly bus journeys to a suitable games field, regular clubs led by staff, and partnerships such as those with the local secondary school and the town's football club.

Standards are high because teaching is extremely effective. The school's monitoring, including that by external evaluators, shows that lessons are almost always at least good and a significant number are outstanding. Teachers and teaching assistants work well together. Those who need extra help receive it and there is sufficient challenge for capable pupils, demonstrated by the large proportion who reach higher than expected standards for their age. Activities include a well-established programme for pupils with particular gifts and talents that exploits good links with neighbouring schools. The 'Making Good Progress' project has further developed teachers' assessment, tracking and support systems in the school's efforts to personalise the learning of each individual as effectively as possible. Staff are forging relevant links between subjects and pupils say they are finding lessons even more interesting and practical as a result.

Pupils report that they feel their views are important to the staff and that they are cared for very well. They feel confident of adult help with any problems. Pastoral support is mostly of high quality and pupils' welfare is safeguarded. Staff have made considerable progress in

involving pupils more in their learning, such as through 'learning conferences' with individual pupils and their parents. Pupils receive regular feedback on their work and targets, well established, for instance, in most teachers' marking in English. The feedback systems are not as strong or consistent in mathematics, so this remains an area for further development.

The school regularly surveys parents' views and these are generally very positive. A minority of parents feels that the school does not work closely enough with them. Their views have already been acknowledged by the school for action to strengthen links between home and school further.

Underpinning the pupils' successes are the outstanding efforts of staff and governors. The headteacher has high aspirations for how the school can continue to develop and there is a strong spirit of teamwork among adults. The governors give exceptional support while ensuring that the school is accountable for all it does. Monitoring by staff and governors is rigorously linked to the school's main aims and priorities. As a result, leaders and managers have a detailed picture of strengths and areas for further development and, most importantly, an excellent capacity to achieve their ambitions.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

A new staff team has settled very quickly into Reception. Leadership and provision are of high quality. The tracking of children's early achievements shows that they make rapid progress in all areas of learning. Progress is assessed in detail so that activities can be closely linked to individual needs. Teachers and teaching assistants work closely together. The accommodation for this age group is used to the full. Opportunities for learning are carefully planned to encourage a seamless transition of activities between the inside and outdoor areas. The staff are working successfully to ensure that aspects of this approach that are relatively new in this school become fully integrated into the work of the unit. Children's independence and confidence are encouraged very successfully. They settle quickly to school routines and demonstrate very positive attitudes to learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teachers' marking and feedback to pupils consistently enable all individuals to be even more aware of their progress and of their next steps in learning.

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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?	1
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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

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	1
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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
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?	1
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	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

3 July 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Hamilton Primary School, Colchester CO3 3GB

This letter is to let you know what I discovered about your school on my recent visit. Thank you for making me feel so welcome. Special thanks to the children who gave up some of their time to talk to me. They told me that they think your school is extremely good and I agree.

Your school makes sure that you do outstandingly well in learning important skills for your future lives. For example, the children in Year 6 reach very high standards in English, mathematics and science. Just as important, you learn how to get on exceptionally well together. Your parents told me how much you enjoy school and I was very impressed by your enthusiasm and politeness when I met you. The staff care for you very well as individuals and you and your parents appreciate that.

Your teachers make sure that you keep on learning very well throughout the school. I heard from you how you appreciate in particular the practical activities in lessons and how subjects have been linked together. You also greatly value the many clubs, sports, visits and extra activities such as the Film Week and the residential visit to Norfolk. You all receive regular, useful advice from adults about how you are getting on and what you should learn next. Some of your teachers mark your books extremely well. However, I have asked the staff to make sure that they mark your books in ways that give you even better information about your learning, especially in mathematics. You can help with this by taking time to look carefully at your teachers' comments and trying to put their advice into practice.

Many of your parents wrote to tell me how happy they are with your school. Some of them would like the school to work even more closely with your families. The staff are looking at ways they can do this. In general, the staff and governors are running your school really well and they have lots more plans to keep on improving it.

Best wishes to you all. Keep enjoying your time at Hamilton Primary and I hope that Year 6 pupils have a great time in their new schools next term.

Yours sincerely

Helen Ranger

Lead inspector