

Highwood Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114869
Local Authority	ESSEX LA
Inspection number	311734
Inspection dates	7–8 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Milton

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	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	54
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Janet Young
Headteacher	Mrs Louise Hourihan
Date of previous school inspection	8 July 2002
School address	Loves Green Highwood Chelmsford CM1 3QH
Telephone number	01245 248200
Fax number	01245 249336

Age group	5–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Highwood Primary is a very small village school with three mixed-age classes. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals fluctuates from year to year and is currently above average. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds and no pupil speaks English as an additional language. About one fifth of the pupils are from Traveller communities. About one third of the pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the most common of which are speech and language difficulties. High proportions of pupils join or leave the school at other than the normal times, and a significant proportion of those joining the school have speech and language difficulties.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Highwood is a good school with a few outstanding features as well as some areas for further improvement. Parents are very supportive of the school. Pupils value the one-to-one working with teachers and the fact that the school is so friendly. They feel safe and know how to stay safe in a variety of circumstances exceptionally well. One parent wrote, 'Highwood School is a lovely, friendly place,' while another commented, 'Learning is geared towards the individual child.' The headteacher provides excellent leadership and the staff work well as a team to help all pupils make good progress in a school that provides varied, enjoyable learning opportunities. One parent wrote, 'The school has strong leadership from the headteacher whose enthusiasm and passion shine through in everything the school does.'

Pupils' attainment on entry varies because of the small size of each year group. They make consistently good progress in each part of the school and, by the end of Year 6, their standards are broadly average in English, mathematics and science. Pupils' standards in applying their mathematical knowledge and skills are lower than in other aspects of mathematics. Most pupils from Traveller communities and those with speech and language difficulties also make good progress. They do so because of the effective teaching, outstanding curriculum and their exemplary behaviour and enthusiasm to learn.

Pupils' personal development is good. Many aspects are outstanding but, despite the school's best efforts, the overall attendance rate is below average. Pupils work exceptionally well in groups and respect and value others. They live particularly healthy lives at school. The good teaching provides pupils with class displays, which help them to learn, and teachers' ongoing assessments of progress are used well to plan pupils' next steps of learning. Pupils have good individual targets for improvement but some pupils are not sufficiently familiar with these. Marking is consistently good. Pupils assess their own progress but do not have enough opportunities to mark their own work against agreed measures for good work.

The outstanding, broad curriculum includes the teaching of French and thinking skills in each class, and provides opportunities for all pupils to succeed. There is very good enrichment through a wide range of well-attended clubs, and visits and visitors linked to lessons. The outstanding care, guidance and support include high quality care for vulnerable pupils, so that they can make good progress. Adults know all pupils very well and are sensitive to their personal and academic needs. The thorough process for monitoring the progress of each pupil in English, mathematics and science is used very effectively to address any underachievement.

Leadership and management are good. The school sets challenging targets for each pupil's progress and these are usually achieved. There is good governance, and members of the governing body find out for themselves how well the school is working. The school has made good progress in improving the effectiveness of subject leadership but this is not consistently good. The school's capacity for further improvement is good because its self-evaluation is highly accurate and frank, pupils make good progress and it has a good recent track record of making improvements.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

In some years children join Reception with the expected skills and knowledge for their ages. The knowledge and skills of most who joined in 2007 were below national expectations. The

current Reception children are making good progress and are on track to meet the national goals for children entering Year 1. The learning needs of Reception and Year 1 pupils alike are met because the teacher makes very good use of the teaching assistant, the curriculum is carefully planned, and each child's progress is thoroughly assessed. There is a good balance between child-initiated and adult-led activities, and effective use is made of the classroom and outside learning area, although this is not fully equipped. Learning resources are usually used effectively and there are often enjoyable activities which capture the children's interest and imagination. Children had great fun as they prepared a Chinese meal with noodles for their Teddies and learnt some mathematics at the same time. There are very good relationships between adults and children, and adults interact effectively with children to extend their learning, although occasionally instructions are not clear enough.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the attendance of the small number of pupils with below average attendance.
- Secure consistently good progress from pupils in applying their mathematical skills.
- Improve pupils' knowledge of their personal short-term targets and extend their assessment of their own learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The current Year 2 pupils had skills typical of children nationally when they started in Year 1, and have made good progress. They are on track to attain above average standards in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 2. Pupils now in Year 6 had below average standards at the end of Year 2 but have made good progress since then and are on track to reach average standards in English, mathematics and science by the end of the school year. However, pupils' standards in using and applying their mathematical knowledge are not as good as in other aspects of mathematics. Two thirds of the current Year 6 pupils have joined the school since Year 2, and they are making good progress because their starting points are assessed accurately, they settle quickly into this friendly school, and they receive the individual support they need. Most pupils from Traveller communities make good progress because they are exceptionally well integrated into the life of the school and attend regularly. Pupils with speech and language difficulties make good progress because of the school's good provision for their learning needs and the very effective use of the range of outside agencies to help pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' social, moral, cultural and spiritual development is outstanding. Pupils think it is important to reflect on their own feelings and experiences, and have plenty of opportunities to do this. They have an excellent understanding of how to keep fit, healthy and safe. They learn about the richness and diversity of cultures in Britain through the personal, social, health and citizenship course and from visitors who, for example, teach African drumming and Indian dancing. Pupils' rates of attendance have improved but are still below average. They are well prepared for the next stages of their education because of their strong personal development and good progress with key skills in literacy and numeracy. Pupils respond exceptionally well to the opportunities to contribute to the school and wider communities. For example, the active school council is improving aspects of school life, pupils are involved in harvest and Christmas services in the parish church, and they sing at the local supermarket and Chelmsford Cathedral.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Common strengths of all teaching are effective class management and very good relationships. Lesson planning is based on the ongoing assessment of pupils' progress, so that work is well matched to pupils' differing learning needs. Teaching assistants are used effectively during all parts of lessons to help pupils learn, and some have developed specialist teaching skills. As one parent said, 'Learning is geared towards the individual child.' There are common teaching approaches, which include practical activities and group work that pupils enjoy. The very good marking gives pupils clear feedback, but pupils have few opportunities to mark their own work. Pupils' progress towards their personal targets is carefully monitored, although some pupils are not sufficiently familiar with the content of their targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is very well planned to ensure that pupils' learning in the mixed-age classes progresses logically. The very wide range of clubs caters for pupils in all classes and adds to pupils' great enjoyment of learning. Pupils learn a wide range of sports taught by qualified coaches. The enriched curriculum, plus links with two secondary schools, provides specialist teaching including music, drama workshops, swimming, English, mathematics and science, as well as many sporting opportunities. There are very good links between subjects and, for example, a topic on water for older pupils includes global awareness raising and education for environmental sustainability. There is good provision for pupils who find learning difficult that includes effective support from teaching assistants in class and special lessons for pupils with dyslexia or who have speech and language difficulties.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils feel exceptionally secure and confident because of the high quality of care and support and, as a result, tackle their work most positively and are not afraid to make mistakes. Procedures for safeguarding pupils meet requirements. There are extensive procedures for promoting regular attendance that have resulted in improvement. Pupils appreciate the very effective system of rewarding them for their achievements during the weekly good work assembly. The very good marking gives pupils clear feedback about what they have achieved and what they need to learn next. The school has exceptional links with parents. A significant number have attended courses in numeracy and literacy at the school, so for example, that they can help their children at home.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school's highly accurate self-evaluation involves parents, pupils, staff and governors. It is used to identify the correct key priorities for improvement that are included in the well-written, rigorous improvement plan, which focuses on raising pupils' achievement. There are good systems to evaluate assessment information, lessons and teachers' planning but relatively little

evaluation of the progress pupils make in their recorded work. Staff work hard to improve provision, as shown by the consistently very good displays in each classroom to support pupils' learning. There is good leadership of some subjects, such as mathematics, and the school has an appropriate rolling programme to secure good leadership for all subjects in the future. All aspects of the school's work contribute to providing high quality care and a good education for all pupils, and the school provides effective support for any pupils who face difficulties in learning. The governing body is involved in deciding the school's priorities for improvement and then effectively monitors the school's progress against these 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	3
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	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	3
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	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?	1
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	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	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

9 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Highwood Primary School, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 3QH

I really enjoyed visiting your school last week and meeting you and the staff. It was interesting to hear that you value the one-to-one guidance from your teachers. You find the school friendly, that the targets you are set are helpful, and that the traffic lights system of self-assessment builds your self-confidence as well as helping your teachers. The visit to the Danbury Outdoor Activity Centre sounded great fun, especially for those who camped overnight.

You make good progress in English, mathematics and science right through the school because the teaching is good. You have interesting things to learn, and your progress is carefully assessed so that teachers know what they need to do to help you learn even more. Also, your excellent behaviour and keenness are very important in helping you to achieve well. You do not achieve quite so well in applying your mathematics skills as you do in other parts of mathematics, and the staff are taking actions to help put this right. Many of you attend the very wide range of clubs and enjoy taking part in many different sports.

All adults take great care of you at school. It is really good that you have individual targets displayed in your classrooms but some of you do not know these as well as you could and I have asked the school to look at this. Your work is really well marked by teachers. You do not have enough opportunities to mark your own work and I have asked the school to consider ways of helping you to do this.

Although the school has done as much as it can to encourage your attendance, the overall attendance rate is not as high as it could be. You can help by coming to school as regularly as you can.

With best wishes for the rest of the school year.

Mike Milton

Lead inspector