

The Howbridge Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114951
Local Authority	ESSEX LA
Inspection number	311769
Inspection date	19 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Marianne Harris

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	4-7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	250
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Toni Angelico
Headteacher	Mrs Sandra Herring
Date of previous school inspection	8 November 2004
School address	Dengie Close Howbridge Road Witham Essex CM8 1DJ
Telephone number	01376 512153
Fax number	01376 512153

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school. The inspector looked particularly at the progress made by boys and other groups within the school. The steps taken to support vulnerable pupils and the part subject leaders play in raising standards were also explored. The inspector met with staff, governors and pupils. Parts of some lessons were observed, parents' questionnaires and a sample of pupils' work were examined and school information, including self-evaluation, was scrutinised. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

This is an average size infant school where most pupils come from a White British background. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties is below that usually seen, although the numbers that have a statement of special educational need is close to that normally found. These needs cover a range of difficulties, but are mainly for communication difficulties and for emotional and social needs. When they join the school children have skills and knowledge that are below those usually seen. The school has gained Investors in People status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school where pupils of all abilities make good progress. Standards in national tests are average in reading, writing and mathematics and the school's own accurate data shows that standards are rising, with more pupils than previously seen already reaching the higher levels. Pupils with speech and communication difficulties have effective specialised programmes to help them make good progress and pupils with emotional difficulties receive good support so all can participate in lessons. The staff have set challenging targets for the pupils and there are high expectations of all making good progress. This is evident in lessons where work is well planned with appropriate tasks for pupils of different abilities in each class. Teaching is good. There are positive relationships throughout the school and pupils say that they particularly enjoy mathematics because there are lots of practical activities. Most lessons move at a brisk pace with many activities to keep pupils interested. The curriculum is well organised and there are many activities both in and out of lessons that enrich learning. There are a wide range of clubs for pupils of all ages, and there are many visits into the local community. Several after-school activities are of a sporting nature and there is also an active recorder group in the school. There are many visitors to talk to the pupils and share their knowledge and experiences.

Much emphasis is put on encouraging pupils' personal development and many parents comment on how successful this is. Consequently pupils' personal development and well-being are good, with pupils having a clear understanding about keeping healthy and safe. Pupils enjoy being in school and they behave well. The school council is most proud of the work they have carried out to improve facilities in the playground and how much money they have raised for national and local charities. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education as they begin to learn about the rights and responsibilities of being in the school community. The school plans many activities to support pupils' cultural development. This includes African drummers and Indian dancers, where pupils learn to celebrate cultural diversity. Staff take good care of all pupils. Child protection procedures are robust and pupils say that they feel safe in school. They know that there is always an adult they can turn to if they have a problem.

The school is well led and managed. The headteacher and her team work well together and have been successful in raising standards and promoting pupils' personal development. The evaluation they have made of their work is accurate and provides a good basis for school improvement. The task of implementing these improvements has fallen to the head and her deputy as the senior leadership team has been diminished due to recent resignations. The school acknowledges that this has been a barrier to moving forward at a fast pace. Staff have made a start on finding links between subjects in their lessons, but have been unable to fully implement this because there is no established senior leadership team to coordinate improvements. There has been much success in setting up a thorough tracking system that identifies what each pupil has achieved and how much progress they have made. This data is carefully analysed so that pupils who are falling behind are quickly identified and given good support so that they can soon catch up. Targets for each class are set, based on these assessments. Each class has a display of these targets and they cover reading, writing and mathematics.

However, when asked about their targets, the pupils were unsure of what they were, or how they would help them reach higher standards.

Governance of the school is good. Governors discharge their responsibilities well and ensure that all legal requirements are met. There has been good improvement since the last inspection and, despite the lack of an established senior leadership team, there is good capacity to improve further. This is because all staff and governors are fully committed to the school and have a very accurate view of the further improvements needed. The school works effectively with other agencies so that the transition into and out of the school is smooth and pupils feel secure. The school has worked particularly well with health and other professionals to support pupils with speech difficulties and to encourage all pupils to attend regularly.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision for children in the Foundation Stage is good. Good leadership and management has led to effective induction procedures. There are good relationships between staff, children and their parents that enables children to settle into school quickly and enjoy learning. Children make good progress during their time in the Reception year, particularly in their personal development. They quickly become confident and learn to work together. Many children join with communication difficulties and staff work effectively together to support these children so that they can make good progress. Planning is good. It results in all areas of learning being covered in the well-organised classrooms. There is a good balance of activities that are chosen by the children and those where the adults take a lead. The outside area is used effectively so that children not only learn to be physical and begin to understand about keeping healthy, but can also explore all areas of learning. By the time they leave to join Year 1 their skills and knowledge are a little below those normally seen, and the children are eager to learn.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that pupils know their targets and how these can help them reach higher standards.
- Establish a senior leadership team to more effectively support future improvement.

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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?	2
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	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	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?	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	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

20 March 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of The Howbridge Infants School, Witham, Essex, CM8 1DJ

Thank you very much for welcoming me into your school recently. I am now writing to let you know what I found out.

I enjoyed talking to many of you and hearing about your good school. I particularly enjoyed listening to the recorder group in assembly and celebrating the birthdays with you. I also liked hearing about your good work and how kind you are to each other. I noticed that you all behaved well and were very friendly. Many of you said 'Hello' to me as I went round the school and all of you smiled. The school council told me they enjoyed school and I can see why.

There are many things for you to do and many clubs for you to attend. Mrs Herring told me about the visitors you have in school and I saw some lovely pictures of some of your trips. Your lessons are interesting and fun. There are targets on the wall to show how your work can be improved, although some children told me that they were unsure of what they were. I have asked your teachers to help you make even more progress by reminding you of your targets, and I am asking you to try and remember them.

When I spoke to your teachers they told me that they wanted to make lessons even more interesting for you by having more activities. They said that this was not always possible because there was no-one taking charge of this. I have asked Mrs Herring and the governors to make sure that there is someone responsible. This will mean that you can possibly do more art and music along with English and mathematics.

Thank you once again for being so kind when I visited you. I wish you good luck in the future.

Marianne Harris

Lead inspector