

Powers Hall Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114957
Local Authority	ESSEX LA
Inspection number	311770
Inspection date	8 January 2008
Reporting inspector	David Speakman

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	285
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs S Sings
Headteacher	Mrs S J Bartley
Date of previous school inspection	2 June 2003
School address	Spa Road Witham Essex CM8 1NA
Telephone number	01376 513322
Fax number	01376 501363

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector who was in the school for one day. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school. The following areas were inspected in detail: achievement and standards, personal development and well-being and leadership and management. Aspects of the quality of education, especially teaching and learning and the curriculum were also inspected. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail.

The inspector found evidence that the school's assessment of some aspects of its work, as given in its self-evaluation, was modest, and the upgraded assessments have been included in this report where appropriate. Evidence was gathered from observations of lessons and pupils' work, discussions with the headteacher, senior staff, governors and pupils, the parental questionnaires and school self-evaluation documents.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average junior school, which also provides enhanced provision for ten pupils with speech, language and communication difficulties. The number of pupils identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is about average, but the number with a statement of special educational need is well above average. Attainment on entry to Year 3 is below average. Most pupils are White British, but a small number come from minority ethnic backgrounds; a few of which are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The school has gained a number of awards, including: bronze level Eco-School, Healthy School Status, the Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark, the Football Association Charter for effective sports provision and a local authority award for excellence in behaviour management.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Pupils at all abilities achieve extremely well in this outstanding school. The headteacher and deputy headteacher work together exceptionally well. They have achieved their goal of making Powers Hall an excellent school. They modestly judge its effectiveness as good, but this is because they have very high expectations of staff, pupils and not least of all, themselves. They believe it is always possible to improve and have established a very strong culture of high expectation, which is shared by all working in the school. Strong teamwork is a key factor in the school's success. The senior leadership team, subject coordinators and governors all have clear guidelines for their work and there is a very strong management structure. Governors' work exceptionally well with the school. They have very strong links, not only with the senior leadership team and headteacher, but also with subject coordinators. They regularly visit the school to monitor specific aspects of its work and use their own professional skills to add to the quality of education, for example by giving talks on citizenship. Consequently, governors are able to challenge the school but also support it very effectively. There has been strong improvement since the previous inspection and its rigorous self-evaluation gives the school an excellent capacity to improve further. Those with responsibility make significant contributions to the rigorous evaluation of the school's performance. Any weaknesses are identified quickly and remedial action taken. The school was disappointed with the performance of higher-attaining pupils in Year 6 national tests in mathematics in 2006 and in writing in 2007. Last year recovery in mathematics was evident, when above-average standards were attained overall, and the number of pupils reaching the higher levels matched the national average. Standards in English, and in particular writing, are above average once again, with Year 6 pupils well placed to meet the challenging targets set for them.

Assessment and tracking of individual pupils' progress take place frequently and are thorough. All staff are involved and their assessments are monitored closely by the senior leadership team, particularly the deputy headteacher, who has a clear picture of individual and year-group progress. This data helps staff to recognise quickly which pupils are not progressing as well as expected, and these pupils soon receive focused support to get them back on track. Pupils receive excellent academic guidance based on the school's accurate assessment information. They are aware of their own targets and know how well they are doing towards meeting them. They are involved in choosing their own personal targets, which express high expectations of their own performance. Consequently, pupils make rapid progress. Parents would however be grateful for more information regarding their children's progress in school. A very strong feature of the school is its approach to providing all pupils, whatever their personal or academic needs, with the best opportunity to achieve their potential as successful learners. The school endeavours to ensure that higher-attaining pupils are doing their best. However, higher-attaining pupils did not achieve as well as expected in 2007. Teachers have set challenging targets for high-attaining pupils in the 2008 and indications are that they are on track to achieve them. Work is targeted well to different pupils through teaching them in classes where they are grouped by ability. The school creates very effective opportunities for those with special gifts and talents. For example, provision is made for them to excel in a range of sports, music, information and communication technology (ICT), art, dance and drama. Those who receive enhanced provision are fully included in the life and work of the school. These and other pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given expert and well-focussed support and consequently achieve exceptionally well. Teaching is extremely effective. It has improved since the previous inspection and has helped raise standards since then. Teachers have high

expectations of what pupils can achieve and use assessment information effectively to set challenging targets. Work is focused accurately on pupils' capability and is matched well to individual learning needs. Similarly, learning methods match the needs of different pupils well. Those who find learning hard have a high level of support, whilst those capable of working independently, are encouraged to do so. Adults manage pupils' behaviour extremely well. This has been recognised in an award for excellence in behaviour management. Procedures are consistent from class to class and focus on positive support. Inappropriate behaviour is challenged in a firm and uncompromising way. Consequently, behaviour in lessons and around the school is exemplary and those parents who expressed concern have no need to worry. Teachers use ICT very well to assist learning, so pupils understand quickly and soon move onto the next steps. Teaching assistants are very effective in their work, especially in supporting pupils with learning difficulties or those receiving enhanced provision to support their disabilities.

The very well planned curriculum contributes significantly to pupils' excellent achievement. It gives pupils very good opportunities to use, consolidate and improve skills in literacy, numeracy, science and ICT. Pupils receive specialist teaching to learn core skills in science, ICT and physical education (PE) and, in these subjects, standards are high. The curriculum provides a rich breadth of learning. Consequently, pupils have an excellent awareness of healthy eating and take advantage of the many opportunities to stay physically fit through PE and games. They enjoy the many extra-curricular activities, which cater for a wide variety of preferences. Pupils find lessons enjoyable and interesting and they have a say in what they want to learn. In topic work, for example when comparing two contrasting localities, pupils choose which aspect they want to study in depth. The curriculum gives excellent support to pupils' cultural development, including raising their awareness of other cultures. Their social development is supported by learning about worldwide issues such as global warming and extinction of animal breeds. The curriculum is rich in the arts and art, design, music and drama have an important place. Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is excellent. Older pupils have developed very mature attitudes towards life in school and other pupils. They value the high level of care that they receive from adults, and this inspires them to care for others in turn. They take responsibility seriously and take on tasks, such as those of school councillors or peer mediators, with a determination to do them well. Consequently, pupils look after each other well and feel safe and secure in school. They greatly enjoy coming to school. Attendance has improved and is now above average.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make sure that pupils of higher ability consistently reach the higher levels in writing.

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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?	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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

9 January 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Powers Hall Junior School, Witham, CM8 1NA

I very much enjoyed the day I spent in your school recently. It was a very short time but I was really impressed by what I saw. I enjoyed meeting you and your teachers, visiting you in lessons, watching you work, speaking to you about your school and finding out how you help to make it successful.

The inspection shows that you go to an excellent school. All the adults working with you, under the excellent leadership of your headteacher and deputy headteacher, form a very strong team, which works very hard to provide you with a high quality education. You make a very important contribution by behaving extremely well, taking responsibility very seriously and trying hard to do your very best. Those of you I spoke to enjoy school very much and it is clear that you get on well together and look after each other. I was very impressed that you are sensible in the way in which you learn, make friends with other pupils and, most of all, care about each other. You help each other feel safe in school and enjoy being there. As a result, you all make excellent progress in your lessons and become sensible young people, very well prepared to go on to the next stage of your education.

There is very little that needs improving that your teachers have not already recognised and done something about. This is why your school is outstanding. I am asking the staff and governors to make sure that all of you who are capable of coping with harder work achieve your best, particularly in writing, in the Year 6 national tests.

I wish you all the best in the future.

David Speakman (Inspector)