

Hillshott Infant School and Nursery

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117123
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	312500
Inspection date	21 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Geof Timms

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	3-7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	218
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Paul Bunyan
Headteacher	Mrs Joanne Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	19 January 2004
School address	Ridge Avenue Letchworth Hertfordshire SG6 1QE
Telephone number	01462 621212
Fax number	01462 621213

Age group	3-7
Inspection date	21 April 2008
Inspection number	312500

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

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

- How well pupils make progress and what the school is doing to help girls' achievement.
- How well the curriculum helps different groups of pupils learn, especially those with learning difficulties.
- What impact the school's leadership structure has on raising standards and improving progress.

The inspector gathered evidence from observations of lessons, samples of pupils' work, discussions with pupils, staff and the chair of the governors, and from the parents' questionnaires. The main documents used by the school in monitoring and strategic planning were examined. 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 provided in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The school is of broadly average size and serves an area to the east side of Letchworth. An above average proportion of pupils are entitled to free school meals. The proportion of pupils who are from minority ethnic groups is above average and they represent a very wide cross section of different heritages. The proportion of pupils with English as an additional language is broadly average. The school has a designated resource base for ten pupils with speech and language difficulties. Because of this the proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties is above average and a very high proportion have statements of special educational need entitling them to extra support. There is one looked after child. Attainment on entry is often well below that expected. The school has gained Investors in People status and received a Healthy School award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Hillshott Infant School and Nursery is a good school. It provides pupils with a very effective start to their schooling that they respond to very positively. It is very popular with most parents. One wrote that 'The school has a very welcoming, happy and inclusive ethos and takes a strong interest in individual pupils.' This is supported by the evidence of the inspection, and by the school's accurate self-evaluation of its strengths. It is evident in the outstanding provision for those with learning, medical or behavioural difficulties, and in the extremely caring nature of the school staff towards pupils of all abilities.

Many of the children start school in the Nursery with skills that are well below those expected. Others have significant emotional or social difficulties. Children make good progress through the Nursery and Reception classes, although by the time they leave Reception many have skills that are still below those expected and very few achieve above that level. The good progress continues through Years 1 and 2, and by the time pupils reach the end of Year 2 they are achieving standards broadly in line with those expected. This was the case in 2007, in reading, writing and mathematics, as shown in the national assessments. In some years, when the results of those with speech and language difficulties are taken into account, the standards of the majority of pupils rise above the national average. The school identified a weakness in writing skills recently and the work put in to improve this has had a significant impact. This illustrates how well the school evaluates its performance and works to improve provision. An inspection focus on the standards attained by some girls revealed that, in relation to their prior attainments, they made good progress and had met the targets set for them. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are now good and reflect the excellent progress made since the last inspection. The progress of the pupils at an early stage of learning English is also good due to the support and help that they receive.

The provision for the pupils looked after through the speech and language base, and for those others with a wide range of learning, emotional and medical needs is outstanding. The base is very well managed; the teaching, including the work of learning support and teaching assistants, is of high quality and the pupils make excellent progress given their capabilities. As one parent said, 'They always put the children's needs first.' The school has recognised the need to improve its facilities to provide even better nurturing of the neediest pupils.

The school provides an excellent curriculum that gives pupils interesting and exciting opportunities to learn. Swimming, French, gardening, maypole dancing, sports and musical activities are among extras built in to the programmes of work, and the school is developing some excellent cross-curricular links. Pupils particularly appreciate the themed weeks, such as the recent one based around animals and designed to develop a wide range of scientific skills. The school makes excellent use of the local area through visits and visitors and this helps bring pupils' learning to life.

The excellent curriculum underpins the good teaching and learning which have some outstanding features. Staff enjoy excellent relationships with pupils and this supports good personal development, excellent behaviour and good learning. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and in their planning, make very effective use of information about their prior learning. Adults know the individual children, their backgrounds and needs well. This helps them use methods that support all learners more effectively.

Pupils are very well looked after through excellent pastoral care that ensures all statutory requirements are met, especially regarding arrangements for safeguarding pupils and ensuring their health and safety. In addition, excellent academic support is provided through the detailed tracking of individual pupils' progress and the marking of pupils' work so that it helps them to understand what they need to do to improve. The high quality care results in good personal development and an excellent understanding of how pupils can keep themselves healthy and safe. They are happy to talk about how much they enjoy school. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and the basic skills they learn in literacy, numeracy and ICT prepare them well for the next stage in their education.

The success of the school, and the major improvements made since the last inspection, are the result of the headteacher's dynamic and passionate leadership. She has developed outstanding leadership structures that reflect her high expectations and these are having a very positive impact on provision and higher standards. The senior staff who monitor and evaluate the work of colleagues do so very effectively, and have brought about significant improvements. Staff show no complacency, they work very well together and are willing to innovate. Plans are in place to spread existing good practice to develop teaching quality further by working more closely together and supporting each other's practice. There are excellent links with a range of outside agencies, which extend the expertise available to support and help pupils. Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and are supportive, building good links with subject leaders. Where the school has had weaknesses these have been quickly recognised and addressed and, together with the improvements made since the last inspection, this shows that the school has an outstanding capacity to improve even further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Staff in the Nursery and Reception classes work very hard to overcome the extremely wide range of social, emotional, learning and medical needs that many children have, as well as providing activities that are sufficiently challenging for the most able. Even though there have been a number of staff changes recently, the success of the provision is evident in the good progress made by the vast majority of the children. The school has developed the outdoors to create some well-resourced and effective learning environments. These are used effectively to give children some interesting and exciting activities such as those linked to the story of the Gingerbread Man. Teaching is good and staff are well prepared for the introduction of the new framework for the early years curriculum next term.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide further opportunities for teachers to spread good practice and learn from each other.
- Set up even more opportunities for pupils with learning and emotional difficulties to be withdrawn with trained adults to help their social and emotional development.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
---	----------------

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	1

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	1

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	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?	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	2
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

22 April 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Hillshott Infant School and Nursery, Letchworth, SG6 1QE

I am writing to thank you for your help when I visited your school recently. I really enjoyed talking to some of you, and watching you in lessons and at playtime. I especially enjoyed meeting the group of you in Year 2 and those from Reception who I sat with for lunch. You told me how much you enjoy school and that you think your school is a good one. I agree and I want to tell you what I think is good about your school.

Firstly it is obvious how hard Mrs Wilson and all the other adults work to help you learn but it is also obvious how much they enjoy doing so. They help all of you in different ways depending on what is best for you and because of this you make good progress, especially in reading, writing, mathematics, art and design and using computers and other technology.

You help the teachers because you behave so well in lessons and you are so interested in your work. You told me how much you enjoyed the visits and extra things teachers provide through the excellent curriculum. The adults all care for you extremely well and work hard to keep you safe and help you learn.

To help the school get even better I have suggested that teachers continue to work closely together to share good ideas and help each other learn new things, and that the school develops somewhere some of you can go for some quiet time or to talk to an adult about anything that is worrying you.

Once again, thank you for your help. Enjoy your time at Hillshott and keep working hard!

Yours sincerely

Geof Timms

Lead inspector