

Higham Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118262
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	312859
Inspection dates	1–2 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Jane Chesterfield

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	226
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	30
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Malcolm James
Headteacher	S A Greenfield
Date of previous school inspection	13 September 2004
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	School Lane Higham Rochester ME3 7JL
Telephone number	01474 822535
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school serves a rural community of mainly owner-occupied housing. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The number of pupils from minority ethnic groups is also below average, and there are no pupils learning English as an additional language. About a fifth of the pupils have learning difficulties or disabilities, which is in line with national figures. These difficulties are mainly speech, language and communication. A below average number of pupils have statements of special educational need. The school offers Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision in its Reception class. An advisory headteacher and an acting deputy headteacher currently lead the school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Higham Primary is a satisfactory school. It has been through a period of turbulence recently but is now stabilising and ready to move forward. Parents have been understandably concerned about the changes of headteacher the school has had over the last two terms, but are supportive of the school and want it to do well by their children. As one parent commented, 'I feel that in the last few months the school has made a huge turnaround.' The new advisory headteacher has made a good start, immediately focusing on the most urgent priorities in her strategic planning and winning over staff and governors. She has been very capably supported by the acting deputy headteacher, who has provided the school with much needed stability over the last year.

Pupils' achievement at the school is satisfactory. Most enter the Reception class with a level of skills which is broadly as expected for their age. By the time they leave the school, they reach standards which are broadly average, although there are encouraging signs of improvement. Pupils enter Year 1 with above average skills for their age, and for the last two years their standards by the end of Year 2 have been above average. This wave of improvement moving up the school is also apparent in Years 3 to 6, where standards have risen over the last year. Progress is now satisfactory and any legacy of underachievement has been eradicated. This is thanks to the school's good assessment and tracking systems, which have been well used to identify pupils' needs and give them the support required in targeted groups. Pupils' standards in English at the end of Year 6 are now above average, but the school has identified that there is more work to be done to raise standards in mathematics to a similar level, by ensuring that all teachers have the same expectations for what their pupils can achieve.

The picture of teaching and learning in the school is also an improving one. Teaching and learning are satisfactory at present, but school monitoring, borne out by the findings of the inspection, show that there is an increasing proportion of teaching which is good. Teachers are giving lessons pace and energy, and give pupils good opportunities to develop their speaking and listening skills. The new topic based curriculum has been designed to ensure that boys as well as girls are motivated by their learning, and this is beginning to work well. Sometimes, though, lessons are not well planned to interest and challenge all pupils, so that some, particularly boys or higher attaining pupils, do not learn as well as they might.

Pupils enjoy coming to school because pastoral care is good and they feel happy and secure in their surroundings. One pupil commented that, 'all the adults are really nice', and relationships in the school are good. Pupils show consideration for others and behave well in lessons so that everyone can learn. Sometimes their behaviour around school and in the playground can be rather lively and boisterous, but they are always willing to listen to staff and do as they are asked.

The school recognises that the next stage in its development depends on the ability of its leadership and management to improve provision and accelerate pupils' progress. The senior leadership team is very new to its role and subject leaders have had limited opportunities to develop theirs, but all are ready to face the challenge under the clear direction of the advisory headteacher. Systems for monitoring the work of the school and tracking pupils' progress are securely in place. Governors are behind the school and the local authority is providing good support. In these circumstances the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children get off to a good start in the EYFS where they make good progress. This is because they enjoy a bright and stimulating environment with plenty of different activities, well planned to develop their skills in all areas of learning. Particularly good use is made of the outside area, which is popular with the children. During the inspection, there was great excitement when a shower meant children could dress up using wellingtons, jackets and umbrellas and go exploring in the rain. Relationships between adults and children are good, and this has meant that the children have settled quickly into their new surroundings. Staff have made every effort to forge good relationships with parents too, and this is very valuable in making sure that any concerns are quickly shared. Good attention is given to promoting children's welfare, and children are given good guidance on how to work and play safely. The provision is well led and managed, and the staff, who are new to the EYFS, are being well supported in developing their expertise and improving their practice still further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement and standards in mathematics by ensuring that all teachers have consistent expectations for pupils' learning and progress.
- Ensure that all teachers plan to meet the needs of all pupils, particularly higher attaining pupils, and also to meet the interests of all pupils, particularly boys.
- Develop the leadership roles in the school by ensuring that all leaders have the skills and opportunities to take full responsibility for their areas.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory and they reach standards which are broadly average, though this is an improving picture. By the end of Year 2, pupils make satisfactory progress. They have reached standards which are above average in reading, writing and mathematics for the last two years, though there was a dip in mathematics this year. The school has been successful in reversing a downward dip at the end of Year 6, particularly in English, where standards are now above average. Good tracking systems have identified that pupils needed more support in understanding and explaining the texts they read, and this support is already beginning to have an impact. Pupils with speech and language difficulties are given effective support, so that they make similar progress to their classmates. Mathematics has been identified as the next priority area, in order to ensure that pupils reach standards which are securely above average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Assemblies give pupils the chance to reflect on issues that affect them and imagine what it feels like to be in someone else's shoes. They have numerous opportunities to develop their social skills through working with partners or in groups to get something done. Their awareness of other cultures in Britain is satisfactory. Pupils behave well in lessons, although

some are a little boisterous around the building and during break and lunchtime. This is because staff do not always make their expectations for behaviour at these times clear.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and their attendance is above average. They understand how to keep themselves safe and follow healthy lifestyles, and they say that they feel safe in school and trust adults to sort out any problems they have. Older pupils make a good contribution to the school community, as play leaders and house captains, but there are fewer opportunities for younger pupils to do so. Members of the school council take seriously their role in improving the school community. Pupils are adequately prepared for the next stage in their education. Their basic literacy, numeracy and computer skills are satisfactory and their social skills are good.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The impact of the school's regular monitoring is apparent in the common good qualities found in many lessons. Teachers make imaginative use of resources and deploy support staff well. They ensure that pupils understand lesson objectives clearly and constantly refer back to the purpose of their learning, using questions skilfully to check pupils' understanding. Their focus on role play and developing vocabulary is paying dividends in pupils' progress in English. Sometimes, though, provision for higher attaining pupils is to give them extra work, rather than planning different work for them. On other occasions tasks are not always geared to interest boys, and this can mean that they are not always motivated to learn. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and well, particularly in English where they make helpful comments for improvement, but this is not always the case in mathematics.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school has recently introduced a more creative approach to curriculum planning, linking different subjects together. This is working well, increasing pupils' enthusiasm and motivation, and leading to better progression and continuity in their learning. Special events add excitement to the curriculum. The Africa afternoon during the inspection was a good example of this, helping pupils broaden their understanding of the global community. A number of extra-curricular activities enhance pupils' personal development, but at the moment the range is not wide enough to attract many pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

There is a strong ethos of care in all aspects of school life. Child protection and health and safety routines are in place and known by staff, and requirements for safeguarding pupils are robust. Pupils with learning difficulties are given clear targets, and staff ensure their progress matches that of their classmates. The school works very well with other agencies so that pupils benefit from specialist help when needed.

Academic guidance is good. Systems to track pupils' progress work well, and most teachers make good use of their assessment information to plan to meet the needs of their pupils, although sometimes the higher attaining pupils are not challenged sufficiently. All pupils have

targets and understand what they have to do to reach them. Most have a clear idea of how well they are doing and how to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Despite the many changes to the leadership structure in recent months, senior staff are positive and enthusiastic about the work they have to do and eager to bring improvement and stability to the school. There is a strong sense of teamwork and unity. The school strategic development plan is good, identifying the most pressing priorities for the school and setting challenging targets for improvement. The school makes a satisfactory contribution to community cohesion. Senior staff have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, though it is too soon for their changes to have had an impact. Governors fulfil their role satisfactorily. They understand the challenges facing the school and are optimistic about working with the school as it moves forward.

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
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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?	3
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?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

3 October 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Higham Primary School, Higham ME3 7JL

Thank you for being so helpful and friendly when we visited your school recently. We really enjoyed meeting you and talking to you. We found that your school is giving you a satisfactory education at the moment, and that the staff are working hard to improve it by trying to be sure that in future you all do as well as you possibly can.

We know that you like going to school because everybody gets on well together. We thought you all behaved well in lessons, but some of you need to be quieter and more sensible around the school and in the playground. The staff look after you well, and those of you who need extra help are well supported.

Your school is led and managed satisfactorily, and your headteacher and her staff know what needs to be done to improve it. We have agreed that your teachers are going to make sure that you all do as well as you can in mathematics this year. They are also going to make sure that the work in all your lessons is right for you. You should all be getting work that challenges and interests you without making you struggle to understand it. Finally, some teachers are going to be given extra responsibilities in the school.

You can do your bit by letting your teachers know if the work they give you is too hard or too easy, and telling them if there is anything that you don't understand in your mathematics lessons. You can also help by always being quiet and sensible in the corridors and the hall.

Well done to you all and best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Jane Chesterfield Lead inspector