

Hilltop Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118473
Local Authority	Medway
Inspection number	312952
Inspection dates	8–9 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Mike Capper

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)	415
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Carol Whetton
Headteacher	John Allen
Date of previous school inspection	1 July 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Hilltop Road Frindsbury Rochester ME2 4QN
Telephone number	01634 710312
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Most pupils come to this larger than average primary school from the local community, although over the last two years an increasing number have been coming from further afield. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. Most of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties. Nearly all pupils are of White British heritage. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) are taught in two Reception classes.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

In this good school, pupils learn to become responsible citizens who develop good attitudes towards learning. Pupils are happy and sociable and behave well.

Good teaching means that pupils achieve well, although progress is slower in the EYFS than elsewhere in the school. After making a steady start in the EYFS, where teaching and learning are satisfactory, pupils then make good progress in the rest of the school. There is an upward trend in standards in Years 1 to 6, and they are above average by the end of Year 6 in English, mathematics and science. Throughout the school, standards in writing are not quite as high as those in reading. This is because the curriculum does not include enough opportunities for pupils to practise and improve their skills by writing independently in different subjects. Academic support is satisfactory. Pupils are given targets in writing and they find these help them understand how to improve. However, practice of setting targets is not yet consistent across the school or different subjects, and marking does not always do enough to show pupils the next steps in their learning.

The pastoral support given to pupils is good. Members of staff place a high priority on safeguarding the pupils' well-being and they tackle worries sensitively. Pupils are rightly confident that they will get help when they need it and this ensures that their personal development and well-being are good. Pupils work hard and very happily take responsibility. The school council is well organised and carries out its role very conscientiously. Councillors are diligent in their work and they play a good part in improving the school. Nearly all pupils enjoy school, with several commenting on the exciting way that visits and visitors help to make learning fun. Creativity is fostered imaginatively, with provision in music being especially strong. For example, pupils sing beautifully in their Christmas performances. The school ensures that pupils learn about life beyond Rochester and this has ensured that its contribution to community cohesion is good. Pupils take a good part in local events such as literacy festivals and sporting competitions and have a good knowledge of life in multicultural Britain.

The school is well led and managed. The good work of senior leaders is helping the school to move forward. There is a strong sense of teamwork across the school and subject leaders are keen and enthusiastic. They provide good support to colleagues and make effective use of data to identify what needs improving in Years 1 to 6. Self-evaluation by senior leaders is generally good. However, a lack of expertise in the Early Years' curriculum means that leaders' monitoring of EYFS provision lacks rigour, resulting in some evaluations being overgenerous. Nevertheless, the school has shown in the way that standards have risen in Years 1 to 6 that it has a good capacity to improve further and leaders are already receiving extra help from the local authority to support them in developing EYFS provision. The school has good links with a range of partners, including other schools, a children's centre and parents. Most parents are very happy with the school, with one summing up the views of many by commenting that, 'My child has flourished at Hilltop due to the good teaching and the supportive, nurturing ethos.' A Year 6 pupil, talking about her time at the school, said, 'I have had fun, made lots of new friends and learnt a lot.' Comments such as these accurately capture the essence of this successful school.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

When they start school, most children are working at the expected levels for their age. Children's achievement and progress are satisfactory and although there is some variation from year to year, standards are generally broadly average by the start of Year 1.

Children's personal development is satisfactory and is supported by sound systems to ensure their welfare and safety. There are good procedures to help children settle when they first start school. Children especially like having a Year 6 'buddy' who helps them at different times during the school day. Teachers encourage children to work together safely, although some rough play is not picked up quickly enough. Teachers plan an interesting range of activities both indoors and outdoors, giving children good opportunities to make choices about where they are going to work. However, children do not always concentrate well enough when working without support.

Teaching is satisfactory, and has strengths. A specific strength is the effective way that both teachers and teaching assistants use observations to assess and record children's progress. Teaching is most effective when children are being taught as a whole class at the start of lessons. At these times, teachers make good use of questioning to provide suitable challenge to different groups of children. However, when children are working on activities that they have chosen for themselves, there is too little adult intervention, and this means that there are missed opportunities to extend learning.

Provision is satisfactorily led and managed. There is a developing understanding of what needs to be improved and the key elements of good provision. With local authority support, leaders have already drawn up an action plan that provides a realistic picture of what needs improving and how this is going to be achieved. This is still in the early stages of implementation and has not been in place long enough to have a significant impact on overall provision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that leaders rigorously monitor teaching and learning in the EYFS to check that children are given good support when they are working independently.
- Give pupils more opportunities to practise and improve their writing skills by writing independently in different subjects.
- Make sharper use of marking and targets to help pupils understand how to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children make satisfactory progress in the EYFS, and then good progress in the rest of the school. There has been a good focus on improving standards since the last inspection, and standards are now above average by the end of Year 6 in English, mathematics and science. In English, pupils do slightly better in reading than in writing. Reading skills are promoted particularly well but in writing, opportunities to write in different subjects are limited and this sometimes slows progress. Good quality support means that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' good enjoyment of school is evident in their good attendance. Pupils' behaviour is good and they respond well to the trust shown by teachers by working sensibly, even when not being closely supervised. Pupils usually try their best in lessons, although occasionally they do not take enough care when writing.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils are polite and friendly and develop a strong understanding of the difference between right and wrong. They are very proud that they won the 'Fair Play' award at a recent sporting competition. Pupils are keen to take responsibility and this helps them to make a good contribution to the community. For example, specially trained 'young-leaders' give good support to others at playtime. Pupils gain a good knowledge of their own and other cultures and show good concern for the needs of others by organising their own fund-raising events.

The school's good efforts to promote positive lifestyles are reflected in the pupils' good knowledge of how to stay safe and healthy. Pupils are keen to take exercise and they play safely. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education and later life. They make good progress in developing basic skills and become confident and articulate citizens.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good teaching enables pupils to achieve well. Pupils learn quickly in most lessons because teachers have good relationships with them and plan purposeful tasks. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour very effectively and use questioning well to challenge pupils to think for themselves. Teachers make it clear to pupils at the start of lessons what they are expected to learn and then encourage them to check for themselves whether this has been achieved. Consequently, pupils are taking increasing responsibility for their own learning, especially in English, where targets also give them good understanding of how to improve. Good use is made of interactive whiteboards to introduce new skills and to reinforce learning. Pupils are encouraged to think for themselves and to explain their ideas to the teacher or a 'talk partner', ensuring that there is good involvement in lessons. Pupils' differing needs are generally met well although there are a few occasions where work is not pitched at the right level for all pupils. Occasionally, this results in pupils making slower progress. Pupils with moderate learning difficulties are supported well in lessons by teaching assistants, ensuring that they make good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good because it focuses successfully on the development of basic skills. Good use is made of intervention groups for pupils who are in danger of falling behind in English and mathematics. The school is beginning to link work in different subjects to make learning even more purposeful. This is still being developed and, while there are examples of good practice in some year groups, pupils are not yet given enough opportunities to practise and improve their writing skills in subjects such as science, history and geography. The curriculum is enhanced by an interesting range of visits and visitors that help to bring subjects alive. For example, pupils dress up as centurions when learning about the Romans. Pupils are able to try

out many different sports and this successfully supports their understanding of how to stay healthy. Pupils like being able to learn French as 'it helps us when we go to secondary school'. Several parents and pupils commented that they would like more after-school clubs and inspectors agree that there are fewer clubs than are usually found in a school of this size.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Good pastoral care supports pupils' enjoyment of school successfully. Members of staff are conscientious about ensuring that pupils are happy at school and any problems are dealt with quickly. There are thorough systems to promote good behaviour. The school deals with occasional instances of bullying effectively but does not always follow its own guidelines about how incidents are to be recorded. A well-attended breakfast club gives pupils a good start to the day. There are good links with outside bodies such as the local children's centre that help to support the school's own systems for safeguarding pupils' well-being.

The academic guidance for pupils is satisfactory. While there are thorough systems for assessing pupils' progress, the use of targets and the marking of work are not yet consistent across classes or subjects. This means that pupils are not always clear about how they can improve their work. The school sets pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities clear goals that help them to improve quickly.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leaders have helped the school to move forward quickly in many areas since the last inspection. There has been a successful focus on raising attainment at the end of Year 6. Members of staff work together well and there is a shared sense of purpose. There is a strong team of middle managers who have good involvement in monitoring provision. They are doing the right things to improve standards further. For example, data are being used well to set challenging targets and to identify where extra help is needed.

Self-evaluation is good. There is a good understanding of strengths and weaknesses in Years 1 to 6 but some evaluations on the EYFS are overgenerous because senior leaders lack expertise in this area. They are aware of this and with local authority support have already identified potentially helpful strategies such as visits to other schools to tackle this. Governors are supportive. They are rightly developing their own monitoring systems so that they can do even more to hold the school to account and to provide challenge.

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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	3
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	3
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

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	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 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?	3

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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	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**

10 December 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Hilltop Primary School, Rochester ME2 4QN

Thank you for welcoming us to your school and for showing us your work. You were very polite and friendly. We are very pleased that you come to a good school.

Some of the things we found out about your school:

- Good teaching helps you to learn new things quickly. You make good progress and reach above average standards by the end of Year 6. At the moment, you do slightly better in reading than in writing.
- Children in the Reception classes are happy and make steady progress.
- You behave well and are keen to take responsibility. The well-organised school council helps you all to contribute successfully to school life.
- Visits and visitors help to make learning fun.
- You develop a good understanding of how to stay safe and healthy.
- All adults in school are kind and caring and they give you good support if you are struggling with your work. The targets that you are given in English are helping you to improve.
- Your headteacher and other members of staff lead the school well and are working hard to make the school even better.

What we have asked your school to do now:

- Ensure that leaders carefully check that adults in the Reception classes give the right kind of help when children are working independently.
- Give you more opportunities to practise and improve your writing skills by writing independently, rather than copying, in different subjects.
- Make better use of marking and targets to help you understand how to improve your work.

We thoroughly enjoyed talking to you about your work and watching you learn. The Christmas performances sounded great! We wish you all well for the future. We hope you continue to help your teachers by working hard and trying always to present your work neatly.

Best wishes

Mike Capper

Lead inspector