

Hempstead Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118555
Local Authority	Medway
Inspection number	312987
Inspection dates	6–7 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Paul Missin

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	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	235
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sally Hodson
Headteacher	Heather Futter
Date of previous school inspection	10 May 2004
School address	Hempstead Road Hempstead Gillingham ME7 3QG
Telephone number	01634 365969
Fax number	01634 260275

Age group	4–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This school is about the same size as most other schools but the number on roll is falling. Most children benefit from pre-school educational provision. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average but the proportion eligible for free school meals is well below average. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. During the time of the inspection, the headteacher was absent on long term sick leave and the school was being led by an acting headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This school provides a sound quality of education for its pupils, with some important strengths but it also has aspects that require further development. This is a caring school where the emphasis is clearly on the needs of individual pupils. The safety and welfare of all pupils is a high priority and the needs of vulnerable pupils and those who have learning difficulties are met well. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall because, while there are strengths in the school's pastoral care systems, the use of assessment information to monitor pupils' progress is only satisfactory. Strengths in the promotion of pupils' personal development have been maintained since the last inspection. Pupils' behaviour, the relationships in the school, and links with the wider community are good. Pupils say that they enjoy what the school provides and they have a clear understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles and how to keep safe. The introduction of interesting cross-curricular topics encourages pupils' commitment to their learning and their sense of involvement and enjoyment. Attendance is average.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Strengths are the way in which teachers encourage and motivate pupils and establish clear, responsive relationships in their classes. Pupils contribute well to class and paired discussions and have an important say in some of the activities which they follow. However, teaching is less effective when the pace of lessons slows, and when work is not sufficiently clearly planned for different ability groups in the class. Overall, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. This has limited the progress that pupils make, particularly in writing and mathematics. The curriculum is satisfactory overall. The new 'creative curriculum' is providing a range of interesting activities for the pupils. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Several important initiatives have been put in place recently but, because of unexpected changes in overall leadership, the drive for improvement has not been able to be rigorously sustained. A newly focused leadership team and effective curriculum leadership teams have strengthened provision. Initiatives such as focusing on improving reading and the provision in the Foundation Stage have been successful. However, other action taken has not yet impacted significantly on the crucial area of raising standards and accelerating pupils' progress. While achievement is good in the Foundation Stage, it is only satisfactory in Years 1 and 2. Current standards in the Foundation Stage are above average but previously they have been lower, especially in language and communication. By the end of Year 2, standards are above average in reading, but broadly average in writing and mathematics. More-able pupils are not consistently challenged and do not always make the progress which they should, particularly in their writing and mathematics.

Overall progress is not better because there has not been a clear enough whole-school focus in the improvement plan on standards and achievement and on the need to improve the quality of teaching. Existing self-evaluation judgments are accurate. School leaders and governors have a realistic view of the school's current strengths and a developing appreciation of where it needs to improve. Capacity for improvement is therefore satisfactory.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

From a broadly average level when they first enter the school, children make good progress to reach standards that are above average by the end of the Foundation Stage. Children get off to a good start because the curriculum is focused well on developing their attitudes and skills,

and teachers are skilled in ensuring that children settle quickly and are encouraged to do their best. Children are confident and happy and enjoy each other's company. Behaviour is good. The way that they interact positively with each other is shown in their lively involvement in a range of play games, supported by staff and using the equipment in the well resourced outside activity area. Some of the children express themselves clearly and confidently as they talk about their work. Leadership and management are good but the effective transition to Year 1 is less secure.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and accelerate the progress that pupils make in writing and mathematics.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve and ensuring that work is more closely matched to their individual needs.

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

Children get off to a good start to their time at school and make good progress in the Foundation Stage. In 2007, by the beginning of Year 1, standards were above average but this has not always been the case. Previously, standards in communication and language skills in particular have been lower and closer to the average. Standards at the end of Year 2 are above average in reading and average in writing and mathematics, where the proportion of more-able pupils reaching the higher Level 3 is below average. Achievement is good in the Foundation Stage but only satisfactory in Years 1 and 2. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress in their learning, but more-able pupils do not consistently make good enough progress, particularly in their writing and mathematics.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, although pupils' understanding of living in a multi-faith and culturally diverse society is less well developed. Pupils behave well and they are polite, courteous and friendly. They enjoy school and talk very positively about the school and all that it offers. One commented, 'It is a fun, exciting school', and another claimed, 'We get to do loads of events'. They feel safe and are reassured by the presence of staff in school who they confidently approach to express their concerns. Pupils are actively encouraged to make healthy choices at meal times which develops their awareness of healthy living. Pupils happily help around the school as 'Helping Hands' and playground buddies. The system of paired friends with pupils in the junior school helps the process of changing schools. The school intends to provide the opportunity for them to take on further responsibility through plans for a school council.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, with some good features. Good teaching ensures that pupils understand what is expected of them and clear lesson planning means that there is a good focus on the learning intended in each lesson. Opportunities for pupils to discuss their ideas and to make choices about which activity to follow during the 'topic' afternoons is helping to encourage their commitment to learning and boost their enjoyment. Teachers and their assistants work effectively with pupils who need additional support. Where teaching is less effective, the pace of important parts of the lesson is too slow, and teachers do not have sufficiently high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Teachers do not always plan work in sufficient detail for pupils' different abilities, including those who are more able.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The recently revised 'creative curriculum' provides a varied range of interesting activities for pupils and develops important cross-curricular links well. Pupils are involved well in their own learning through contributions from home and undertaking individual research. A recent emphasis on teaching letter sounds has led to an improvement in reading. However, curriculum planning for improvements in writing and mathematics has not yet been secured. Information and communication technology supports the wider curriculum satisfactorily. Provision is enhanced by purposeful visits to local places of interest such as the Cobtree Museum and Groombridge Place, and through special visitors to the school. The range of displays of completed pupils' work enhances the quality of the learning environment. Pupils participate in dance and recorder after-school clubs, although the range of other clubs is limited.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

There are important strengths in care and welfare provision. The school complies with statutory requirements for ensuring that pupils are kept safe and well protected. Careful checks are made on the suitability of all adults with access to pupils. The needs of pupils with learning difficulties are met well. Safeguarding procedures are robust and the school works effectively with external agencies to address the needs of vulnerable pupils when appropriate. 'The Place2Be', a place where pupils can receive confidential counselling and support, is a valuable strength. Information on how well pupils are doing is not used effectively enough to ensure pupils make good progress, and there are weaknesses in the quality of academic guidance and support. Although pupils are aware of their class targets, some are not sufficiently clear about what to do to move to the next stage of their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

A number of useful procedures have recently been established which have strengthened the school's leadership. The senior management team has been re-focused, curriculum management teams have been created and more responsibility given to year group leaders. As a result, all

school leaders are now more effectively involved with decision making, and initiatives to focus on improving reading and on the effectiveness of the Foundation Stage have been successful. However, there have been several unforeseen changes in overall school leadership which have made it more difficult to secure consistency of approach. The drive for school improvement, and particularly the focus on accelerating the progress that pupils make and improving the quality of teaching, has not been sufficiently explicit in school improvement planning. Self-evaluation processes are in place and they provide an accurate assessment of the school's current performance. Governors, several of whom are new to their roles, discuss a wide range of school issues and are beginning to develop the confidence and expertise to challenge the school effectively.

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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?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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 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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the 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?	3

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?	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 tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

21 May 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Hempstead Infant School, Gillingham, Kent ME7 3QG

Thank you for making us so welcome when we came to the school recently to see how well you were doing. We enjoyed talking to you and seeing you at work and at play.

Here are some of the best things about your school

- Children in the Foundation Stage get off to a good start to their time at school.
- Those of you who find learning difficult are supported well.
- All the adults in the school look after you well so that you feel safe and secure.
- You enjoy school and tell us how much you appreciate the interesting and exciting things that you do.
- Your behaviour and attitudes are good.

There are a few things that we think could be even better

- All school leaders need to plan carefully to make sure that they build on the good progress you make in Reception so that in Years 1 and 2 you make better progress, especially in writing and mathematics.
- Teachers need to make sure that work is always matched to what you can do, including harder work for those who can manage it.

Thank you again for your welcome.

We wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Paul Missin Lead inspector