

Halcon Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123707
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	314680
Inspection date	9 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Sheila Browning

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	141
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Fayle
Headteacher	Richard Adams
Date of previous school inspection	24 May 2004
School address	Outer Circle Taunton TA1 2BU
Telephone number	01823 337051
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average school and most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The attainment of children on entry to the Foundation Stage is significantly lower than that expected for their age. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is significantly higher than found nationally. The number of pupils entitled to free school meals is very high, as are the numbers who join and leave the school at other than the normal times.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Halcon is a good school that is very successful at developing pupils' personal and social qualities. It provides an oasis of calm within a very challenging local environment. Consequently, pupils' relationships, their attitudes to learning and behaviour are often excellent. As a result, pupils make good progress and by the time they leave school in Year 6, they are polite, confident youngsters. Pupils show an excellent understanding of how to keep safe and healthy and are actively involved in the school and local community. They feel proud to be play leaders and school councillors.

Foundation Stage children get off to a good start. The strong focus on developing their extremely low personal, social, emotional and communication skills means that these are much improved when they start in Year 1. By Year 2, pupils' standards in reading, writing and mathematics are rising, though still below average. The school has worked hard to improve pupils' basic skills. Pupils are becoming more confident in their speaking, listening and reading skills and their writing skills are beginning to improve as a result. Throughout the school, pupils build on these skills well. By Year 6, standards are below average, but this represents good progress, given the very low starting points and the significantly high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties in this year group. Weaknesses in learning are being remedied and pupils are now moving on at a faster rate than before, yet there is still more to be done to improve pupils' writing and problem solving skills in mathematics. Teaching is usually good. Recent changes in the reorganisation of classes have led to a sharper focus on pupils' learning needs. Nonetheless, in a few lessons, work set is not well matched to pupils' different abilities. Marking does not always help explain to pupils how they might improve their work and reach their targets. Visits and the 'Forest Curriculum' ensure good opportunities for pupils to work together and make learning fun. A popular breakfast club, many extra activities including nurture activities further enrich the curriculum. Improved resources and information and communication technology (ICT) are used well by pupils to improve the quality of their work.

Though academic guidance is generally good, the real strength lies in the vigilance and sensitivity staff show for children's well-being. These and the strong links with external agencies are features of the exceptional care and support pupils and their families receive. Good leadership and management and the strong determination of the headteacher are the driving forces behind the school's success. Governors share with the headteacher a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Thorough checking, and improvements in the curriculum and teaching, have led to standards in English, mathematics and science rising and give the school good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children make good progress because of good teaching. By the end of Reception Year, their skills are much improved but remain below the level expected for children of their age. Good leadership and management ensure a safe and caring environment. The skilled staff plan a variety of activities, which help children to interact with each other and adults. These and the good relationships support children's social, emotional and behavioural needs well. As a result, they gain in confidence and are more settled and ready to learn. To support learning, the school is strengthening the links with the on-site Nursery to help make the start at school even better.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure good progress in pupils' writing and problem solving skills so that standards are raised to the national averages by the end of Years 2 and 6.
- Make sure that work is well matched to pupils' different abilities in lessons and marking helps pupils' understand how to improve their work and meet their learning targets.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards in tests by the end of Year 2 and Year 6 are below average in English, mathematics and science, but pupils' achievements in relation to their starting points represent good progress. School targets were exceeded, and results in 2007 were the best for the past five years, with an overall rising trend in achievement and standards. This is due to effective teaching and smaller classes, which are helping pupils' needs to be better met. Effective measures have been taken to improve pupils' achievement, especially in speaking, listening and reading, and these are beginning to improve pupils' writing skills. Nonetheless, there is still scope to improve pupils' writing and their mathematical problem solving skills. The school's checks on pupil progress and inspection evidence indicate standards are set to rise again. Work seen in books and on display shows some excellent use of ICT to enhance the presentation of pupils' work. Better identification and help for pupils with learning difficulties ensures they make similar progress to their classmates.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' moral and social development is good and contributes to pupils having excellent attitudes and behaviour. Pupils really enjoy being in school and many say, 'I feel very safe in school', and they enjoy helping one another. Pupils are community-minded, helping local people and being 'eco warriors' as they grow and sell vegetables. They know that if they have a problem, there is always someone ready to listen to them. Pupils are increasingly well prepared to meet the challenges they will encounter as they grow older. The school places a strong emphasis on developing pupils' self-esteem and this is why they are increasingly confident. The school is aware that pupils' spiritual and cultural development is a relative weakness and is attending to that. Pupils show an excellent awareness of keeping healthy. Many thoroughly enjoy the healthy breakfast and lunches at school and are keen to take part in the many sporting activities offered. Their commitment is evident, too, in the school's Healthy Schools, Activemark and Eco flag awards.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well because teaching is good. Teachers are well supported by skilled teaching assistants who lead group work and help individual children. Very good classroom management and interesting practical tasks contribute to pupils' enjoyment of learning. Lessons are well organised and teachers work hard to ensure pupils build on their skills. For example in Years 5 and 6, in preparation for writing a persuasive argument, pupils discussed and debated the rights and wrongs of an argument. Listening to each other and sharing their ideas meant they could

write their views more clearly. On occasions, however, work is not well matched to the abilities of all pupils, which means they do not always do as well as they could. Whilst some marking is excellent, the usefulness of teachers' written comments is too variable. As a result, pupils do not always get enough guidance about how to improve and reach their targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Children's needs in the Foundation Stage are particularly well met and this effectively builds on their social skills and confidence. Wherever possible, learning is based on first-hand learning experiences. Pupils are encouraged to use ICT and this improves the quality and presentation of their work. Links with different subjects such as science, mathematics, ICT and geography help them to transfer skills learnt in one subject to another. The needs of the significant number of pupils with learning difficulties are met effectively and additional support such as speech and language therapy helps the most needy to improve. The wide range of after-school clubs and lunchtime nurture activities are very popular. Pupils enjoy residential visits linked to the 'Forest School Curriculum' and they find out a great deal about the natural world and their environment. Opportunities to develop their speaking, listening and reading skills are good. The school is building on this success to improve pupils' writing and problem solving skills to raise standards further.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The systems to promote the personal development of pupils through high levels of care are strengths of Halcon. Due to improved procedures and provision, pupils' learning needs are identified early on and pupils are given good support. Those who are at risk or vulnerable are very well supported through several initiatives and programmes which build on their self-esteem. The school does its very best to support children in some very challenging circumstances. The strong links with external agencies are beneficial to pupils and their parents and the school works hard to involve parents in their children's learning. Child protection and safeguarding procedures are robust. The tracking system to check pupils' academic progress is used well to trigger support where needed. However, work is not always matched to pupils' needs and day-to-day marking can be inconsistent.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has a clear focus on raising pupils' achievement and is very well supported in this by the local authority, staff and governors. Across the school, pupils are now making better progress than before. A strength is the insistence and success of building on pupils' self-esteem. At the centre of the school's approach is its commitment to ensuring all are properly included; any barrier to learning is seen as a challenge to be overcome. Leadership has been restructured and is strengthened as a result. Monitoring and self-evaluation are accurate and the right priorities for improvement adopted. The school has rigorously analysed its data on pupils' progress and uses this information well. Performance management of staff is clearly linked to the priorities for school improvement. Governors are very supportive of the school and although some members show a good ability to challenge the school in its performance, not all are as effective in holding the school to account.

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

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	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	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?	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?	2

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

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Halcon Primary School, Taunton TA1 2BU

Thank you for being so helpful to us, particularly those of you who talked to us during lessons and lunchtime. We agree with you that yours is a good school and it was great to see how much you knew about keeping safe and healthy. We were very impressed with your excellent behaviour and attitudes to learning.

These are some important things we found out about your school:

- Younger children have a good start in Reception class and most of you are make good progress all through the school, and especially in Years 5 and 6.
- You told us how well the school looked after you and how you felt much safer in school than outside.
- You have a hardworking headteacher and senior staff who lead your school successfully and have your well-being at the heart of all they do.
- You really enjoy school, and teachers try hard to make learning fun and exciting with the many visits you go on, such as to the wildlife park.
- We were very pleased to see all the clubs you have, and how much you enjoy taking regular exercise and leading healthy lives.
- You look after each other well, and play leaders do a good job to make sure no one feels left out.

This is what we have asked the school to do to make it even better:

- Help you to keep improving your writing skills and help you to get better at solving problems in mathematics.
- Make sure teachers check that your work is always at the right level for you and help you understand how to improve your work so that you can do even better.

You can help, too, by continuing to work hard and be involved in all that the school offers.

Yours sincerely

Sheila Browning Lead Inspector