

Helmingham Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124586
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	314973
Inspection dates	24–25 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Roger Brown

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)	69
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	5
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Kate Branch
Headteacher	Mrs Linda Sherman
Date of previous school inspection	16 May 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	School Road Helmingham Stowmarket Suffolk IP14 6EX
Telephone number	01473 890267
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The school is smaller than average, but numbers are rising and there is greater than normal turnover of pupils. All pupils are from White British backgrounds. A very small proportion are entitled to free school meals. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is in line with the average. Very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) takes in children three times a year in the term in which they have their fifth birthday, but because of the small numbers involved, they are taught alongside the Year 1 pupils.

There is an independent nursery on site that is not managed by the governing body. All the school buildings are privately owned, and cannot easily be modified or changed as they have listed status.

The school has a Bronze ECO award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. It is a happy school where pupils get on well together, really enjoy their education and are thoroughly involved in their learning. Parents are full of praise for the school. 'Helmingham is a friendly, happy family school caring for the needs of each individual child,' wrote one parent in a comment that was typical of those submitted for the inspection. The school accommodation, although thoughtfully adapted to maximise the restricted physical space of the listed Victorian building, limits some aspects of the pupils' education, particularly that of the children in the Reception class. Nevertheless, the staff work very hard and creatively to overcome these limitations. They put a great deal of time and energy into ensuring that by some means or other, the pupils get their full entitlement.

The standards attained by the pupils in all areas and subjects are currently above average at all stages of their development. There is no clear pattern in the school's results showing any particular weakness. Although the children's level of skills when they start school are broadly in line with expectations for their age, by the time children leave the EYFS most are attaining standards that are at least in line with those expected and some are working well beyond expectations. Teachers and teaching assistants cater for a wide range of needs very well and the teaching and learning are good. All pupils, whatever their starting points, make good progress, and consequently their achievements are good. Teachers make sure that all pupils are fully integrated into all aspects of the work they cover. The teachers recognise that some pupils have special gifts and talents and they provide good opportunities for the pupils to develop these, especially in music, art and sport. The staff have experimented with a number of strategies to help pupils' understand how to improve their learning, but these have not yet proved particularly effective. This has led to a degree of inconsistency in the approach to setting targets which the school recognises, but has not yet resolved.

All pupils are encouraged to be actively involved in the school community. All pupils have a genuine say in what happens at the school through a number of committees such as the school council. During the inspection, each Year 6 pupil made a presentation to the whole school about the work and commitments of a specific charity. These culminated in a vote to choose the charity that the school will focus on for the coming year. Their thoughts, ideas and attitudes were typical of the pupils' excellent moral and social development and are outstanding features of the school. Other aspects of the pupil's personal development are good. The pupils are keen to explain that the teachers make learning fun and enjoyable. This results in their good behaviour in class and around school.

The school has progressed well since it was last inspected. The headteacher has encouraged all staff to take a more active role in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school. This spreading of responsibilities has encouraged even stronger leadership from the staff team, and consequently, the leadership has a realistic and honest evaluation of what works well and what needs to be improved. Given the quality of leadership, and the improvements since the last inspection, the school has a good capacity to continue to improve.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The good quality of the leadership and teaching in the EYFS gives children an effective start to the early years of their schooling. As a result, most children are broadly average by the time

they move into Year 1. Thoughtful curriculum planning ensures that there is a careful match of the tasks and activities to children's needs. The process is backed up by accurate assessments and careful observations by all the adults. This allows staff to track the children's progress and accurately target interventions when they are needed. A good relationship with the private nursery on the school site ensures the children settle quickly and they soon begin to enjoy all aspects of school. However, the physical space in which the children are taught is inadequate. The Reception/Year 1 classroom is small, and although a lot of effort has gone into making it an attractive and workable space, it places limits on the children's choices and restricts their independence in learning. The classroom does not connect directly with the outdoor learning environment, also restricting the children's freedom to choose what they are doing, or freely move between activities. This limits their independence and restricts the creativity of the staff.

What the school should do to improve further

- Refine and develop the systems for target setting and the guidance pupils receive about what they need to do to improve.
- Work with external agencies to seek ways to extend and improve the accommodation for the EYFS to give the children more scope to become independent learners.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The good start made in Reception is built on well in the rest of the school. Pupils make good progress overall. This includes those pupils who need extra support with their learning who make good gains in relation to their starting points. The number of pupils in each year group is relatively low and this can appear to significantly alter the levels of success in each year group and subject. The end of Year 2 assessment results have varied in recent years with the changing nature of each cohort. This year, the Year 2 results in mathematics are stronger once again after falling back in 2007; reading remains good, but writing is not as strong. A similar picture emerges for the end of Year 6 assessments. The school is still waiting for the final outcomes of the national test results for this year, but the mathematics assessments indicate that they will be below the school's target. However, those for English and science look as if they will be stronger and in line with the longer-term trend of above average performance at the end of Key Stage 2.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and emotional development are good overall, but their social and moral development are outstanding. This is because the staff create excellent opportunities for the pupils to study, reflect and share their understanding of the factors that impact upon their own lives and others in their community. They also place a strong emphasis on safety, developing a healthy lifestyle and pupils caring for each other. This helps to make this school a genuinely 'fun place to learn' as one pupil reported enthusiastically. A rich variety of sporting opportunities, music and art activities, which everyone has the opportunity to take part in, reinforces the fact that this school is about giving the pupils a great foundation upon which to build their adult life. The pupils are committed to the school community. They revel in the opportunities to take responsibility; contributing to the school council, acting as playground friends, raising money for charity, planning their own environment and growing their own vegetables. These are then used by the cook in the much appreciated school dinners.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Consistently good quality teaching enables pupils to make good progress in their learning. Teachers and teaching assistants work together very effectively. They manage pupils well and establish good relationships. Learning takes place in a calm, orderly and friendly environment. Pupils want to learn and do well. Good lesson planning, which includes a range of varied activities, helps pupils develop their knowledge, understanding and skills. The marking of work is thorough, but not yet fully consistent across each subject and class. Pupils and parents also report that in each class, there is a different emphasis on the targets and rewards that are used. Although the pupils are praised effectively when they do well, they do not yet get consistent guidance on their targets, or how they can make further progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

There is good provision for teaching the essential literacy and numeracy skills. Teachers are developing the curriculum well to incorporate the new national initiatives, and in doing so, are beginning to integrate different subjects in imaginative ways. This provides pupils with a rich diet of interesting work and experiences that builds their wider knowledge and understanding very effectively. For instance, French is taught to all pupils throughout the school. The good use of a variety of extra-curricular activities actively promotes pupils enjoyment of learning. Information and communication technology (ICT) now plays an important part in supporting the pupils' learning, and the pupils commented enthusiastically about the contribution this makes to their learning. However, staff acknowledge that the system for recording pupils' progress in ICT is not yet fully in place. Parents and pupils remarked very positively about the provision the staff make for music and the performances the school puts on.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils correctly believe that the care, guidance and support they receive are good. Teaching assistants are deployed very effectively and their work gives great support to individual pupils' development. Pupils are proud of their school, speaking enthusiastically about how their work is valued, praised and developed by the staff. Very careful attention is paid to the pupils' welfare. Child protection procedures are well established and rigorously maintained. The good quality tracking systems check pupils' academic progress and are effective at preventing children from falling behind. However, although the staff have experimented with a number of different ways of using targets to promote higher standards, they have not yet established an effective system. This omission is reflected in the guidance pupils receive about how they can make the next steps in their learning. Teachers regularly praise good work, but rarely indicate what the pupils need to do to improve their work and reach even higher levels.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is well led and managed. The headteacher places a great emphasis on corporate leadership, and staff respond well to this. Staff at all levels contribute enthusiastically to initiatives to promote learning and to enhance the curriculum to meet the needs of the pupils. As a result of this good level of involvement, the staff have an accurate understanding of the quality of their work. There is a good commitment to professional development which is an important strength of the school. The headteacher and staff are forward looking and plan effectively for the school's continued improvement. The school is active in promoting community cohesion, particularly within the context of its rural setting, but staff recognise that there is still more to do in developing a national and global perspective for their pupils. Governors are well informed, and give good support to the school. The staff are active in a number of local school partnerships and are keen to develop these to improve the well-being and standards of the pupils.

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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 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?	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?	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?	2

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	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

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

26 September 2008

Dear Children,

Inspection of Helmingham Primary School, Stowmarket IP14 6EX

Thank you for being so friendly when I visited you. I would like to explain what I found when I spent time in your lessons and talked with you and your teachers.

I really enjoyed my time in your school. I was very impressed with how polite, thoughtful and caring you all are. I think that your attitudes to school, to each other, and your care for others and the environment are excellent. I was especially impressed by the presentations about the individual charities that those of you in Year 6 were making. I think that it is a great idea and I hope that when you have all chosen the charity for the school to support this year that you have as many good ideas to raise funds for it. Well done!

I think that you go to a good school. It is clearly working well and many of your parents wrote to me to tell me this too. A number of things really pleased me. One was the way in which you are now using information and communication technology to develop your learning. Others include your skills in French and the fact that so many of you get good opportunities to become musicians. Please keep up the good work.

I could see that your teachers and teaching assistants work really hard to help you to learn and that they have some great ideas to help you. However, I have asked the staff to do some things to make it even better. I would like them to create a system to set targets for you to help you all achieve even higher standards.

I know that your buildings and grounds are very special, and I could see that the way the staff have used your artwork to make it even more attractive is great. However, it is small, especially as your numbers are growing. It is also awkward and difficult to use, especially for the Reception children. Their classroom does not connect directly with their outdoor space, which itself is very cramped. Therefore, I have asked Mrs Sherman, the staff and your governors to consult with the authorities to see if they can find some creative ways to adapt your building to meet the needs of the Reception children more effectively. I would like them to become really independent and confident learners.

Thank you once again for your warm welcome, and all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Roger Brown

Lead inspector