

Handcross Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125932
Local Authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	315360
Inspection date	31 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Jacque Buttriss

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	112
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Katherine Aylett
Headteacher	Gillian Pedersen
Date of previous school inspection	18 June 2002
School address	London Road Handcross Haywards Heath RH17 6HB
Telephone number	01444 400291
Fax number	01444 401176

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a small school with a higher than average proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Pupils come from a mixture of urban and rural areas. All pupils are taught in mixed-age classes.

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 with many outstanding features. One parent sums up the view of many when she says, 'We are extremely impressed with the school'. Many children start school with weaknesses in speaking and listening skills, which hampers their early progress. However, the very good teaching and support ensures that they achieve well by the end of the year. Pupils continue to make good progress at every stage so that by the time they are ready to move on to their secondary school they are achieving standards above national averages. A recent focus on developing pupils' writing skills has successfully raised standards to well above average in English. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress and the more able pupils are well challenged.

Outstanding personal development and well-being is a strong feature of the school. Pupils of all ages are very aware of the need to adopt healthy lifestyles and stay safe. Their behaviour is excellent and they have highly positive attitudes to their learning. Pupils take on many responsibilities around the school and develop excellent skills to help their community and to prepare for their future lives. They clearly enjoy their time at school, as reflected in the comment, 'Our children love coming to school and are very happy here'. Everyone demonstrates great care for each other. As one Year 5 pupil put it, 'This is a very kind place with very kind people so that you can make lots of friends.'

All teaching is good or better and this has a strong impact on raising standards throughout the school, prompting one parent to comment, 'My son is inspired by his teachers.' Good planning and the teachers' excellent choice of stimulating activities ensure that work is well matched to pupils' needs. Teachers' high expectations and the generally good pace of learning ensure that pupils make good progress in all lessons. Teaching assistants give very good support to pupils of all abilities. Pupils in the Reception Class and Years 1 and 2 are successfully encouraged to organise their work and research independently. However, this practice is not yet fully developed in Years 3 to 6.

The outstanding curriculum provides pupils of all ages with well-planned and very motivating learning activities. Pupils praise exciting lessons and clearly enjoy all the stimulating opportunities teachers give them. The impressive variety of well-attended clubs and activities, as well as many interesting visits and visitors, further enrich pupils' learning experiences.

Excellent care, guidance and support are a great strength of the school. All staff work very hard to ensure the best possible care for every pupil – 'Our children are well loved and looked after', as one parent put it. Additional professional support is readily available and outstanding academic guidance gives all pupils the opportunity to do their best. Vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are exceptionally well supported.

Under the headteacher's dynamic leadership and with the hard work of staff, the school is well led and managed, with excellent direction and strong teamwork. Robust self-evaluation processes enable leaders to identify areas for further development and there has been good progress since the previous inspection, especially in the last two years. As one parent said, 'We have seen a great improvement in all aspects of the school'.

Parents are actively encouraged to be involved in their children's learning and are overwhelmingly supportive of what the school provides for them. One comment was typical of many: 'We are very happy that our son attends Handcross Primary School.'

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The Foundation Stage provides a good start for children's education in every way. Very good preparation ensures that all children settle in well and happily. They feel secure and gain confidence very quickly. Excellent adult-to-child ratios enable a great deal of individual attention and the very good Reception year curriculum gives an exciting springboard to every child's learning. Writing, however, has a lower profile in the early stages of the Foundation Stage. This is because many children start with a particular weakness in speaking and listening skills, and a greater emphasis is placed on developing these. Very good teaching and excellent care, guidance and support ensure outstanding personal, social and emotional development. One Reception child, when asked what she liked best about school, enthusiastically answered, 'Everything!'

Children's attainment when they enter the school is below national expectations. However, very good teaching and support ensures that they achieve well by the time they are ready to move on to Year 1.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase older pupils' involvement in organising their own learning by extending the good practice in Key Stage 1 to develop Key Stage 2 pupils' independent learning skills.
- Ensure that priorities for improvement identified by self-evaluation are clearly developed and expanded within the school development plan.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children come into the school at the beginning of the Reception year with standards that are below national expectations overall, and well below in language skills. They make good progress through their Reception year so that by the time they move into Year 1, children are achieving standards broadly in line with national expectations. Pupils continue to make good progress so that at the end of Year 2 they attain above national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. Overall standards by the end of Year 6 in 2007 were above average. This represents very good progress for this particular group, whose standards were below average when they were in Year 2. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress throughout the school and more-able pupils are challenged appropriately.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Outstanding personal development and well-being ensures that all pupils are exceptionally well prepared for each stage of education and for their future lives. Pupils are very aware, for example, of the need to adopt healthy lifestyles, such as eating balanced diets and taking regular exercise. They say that they eat healthily, although they admit they do not always like healthy foods! Physical education lessons are very popular and pupils make enthusiastic use of the various sports activities and playground games equipment available to them, described as 'wicked' by one Year 6 pupil.

Excellent relationships ensure that pupils of all ages get along well together. There is a good range of approaches, such as older pupils trained as peer mentors, to diffuse any potential

harassment issues. Bullying is not tolerated and any rare instances are quickly dealt with. Pupils thoroughly enjoy coming to school, as shown by the good levels of attendance. Behaviour is exemplary in lessons and around the school. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall, with a strong emphasis on high social and moral values. Pupils enjoy taking on a range of class and whole-school responsibilities. The active school council takes many decisions and enthusiastically organises events such as fund-raising and community projects, thereby making a very positive contribution to the school and the wider community.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good teaching ensures that all pupils make good progress and this is successfully raising standards across the school. Two outstanding lessons took place during the inspection, in the oldest and youngest age groups. In the opinion of a Year 6 pupil, 'All the teachers are brilliant'. Lessons are well planned and the stimulating work set for pupils is well matched to all their needs. Teachers' high expectations, appropriate levels of challenge and the good pace of learning motivate pupils to do their best. Teachers have very good assessment procedures and their marking helps pupils to know how to improve their work. Teaching assistants give very good support to pupils of all abilities. In occasional lessons, too much time is spent in teachers talking to pupils, with the result that less individual work can be done. Reception and Key Stage 1 pupils are successfully encouraged to develop independent learning skills, but older pupils are not yet as actively involved in organising and carrying out research or working independently.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The exciting curriculum provides outstanding opportunities for learning. Planning is meticulous and seeks to enhance pupils' enjoyment of learning through interesting links between curriculum areas, as shown in one parent's comment that 'my daughter is very happy and always learning new things'. A very wide range of popular clubs and activities, visits and visitors enriches pupils' school experience. Topics are especially chosen to appeal to the interests of pupils and provide excellent foundations for their learning. Many parents comment on the 'interesting and creative learning environment' and one notes that 'the introduction of the outdoor classroom has had a dramatic effect on pupils' learning and enthusiasm'. Pupils and parents alike highly value the specialist music provision. Very good personal, social and health education contributes very well to pupils' outstanding personal development and well-being. Excellent links with other schools successfully provide additional learning opportunities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils' learning and personal development benefit greatly from the school's outstanding care, guidance and support. The very good quality of pastoral care and support ensures that there is excellent provision to meet the needs and circumstances of all pupils and their families. Indeed, many parents comment on the way that the school helps them as well as their children. Child protection and safeguarding issues are fully covered, with regular training and secure practices such as risk assessments for proposed outings. The support given to vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is excellent, for example, through the

employment of a learning mentor, and there is very good access to outside agencies for further support and advice. Excellent academic guidance, such as involving pupils in focused individual target setting and assessment, ensures that learners know how well they are doing and how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Dynamic and hardworking leadership by the headteacher and all the teaching staff is a feature of this school, setting a very clear direction for future development. This has led to the great improvements that have been made since the previous inspection, especially in the successful raising of standards and the increased progress of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In particular, the very hard work that has taken place to improve writing skills has led to pupils making outstanding progress in writing and a dramatic rise in their standards of English. These improvements demonstrate the school's good capacity to improve still further.

The school has rigorous self-evaluation processes which enable the identification of priorities for improvement and the setting of challenging targets. However, self-evaluation is not always linked directly to the school development plan and there are no specific leadership and management priorities included. Governors fulfil their roles and responsibilities effectively and provide good support and challenge to the school.

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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?	1
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	2
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?	1
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	1

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?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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	1
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 Children

Inspection of Handcross Primary School, Haywards Heath, West Sussex

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful when we came to inspect your school. You made us feel very welcome and we enjoyed talking with you. Yours is a good school that helps you to do well in your work and cares for you outstandingly well.

These are the things we especially like about your school:

- You are friendly, polite and helpful and your behaviour is excellent. Well done!
- You have an excellent understanding of how to keep healthy and fit.
- You greatly enjoy school and are keen to do your best.
- Yours is an exceptionally caring school where you all look after each other extremely well.
- Your teachers work very hard to provide enjoyable learning activities that help you make good progress and achieve well.
- You have made excellent progress in improving your writing skills this year. Keep up the good work!
- Your headteacher, other staff and governors are leading the school well and are working hard to make it even better.
- There are excellent links with other schools to help extend your learning.
- Your parents and carers are very pleased that you come to this school.

These are the things we think your school could do even better:

- The younger pupils are developing very good skills in organising their own learning. We would like to see that the rest of you consistently have these opportunities as well.
- When your teachers assess how well everything is going in the school and what they could do to make it even better, it would be helpful if they could write down what needs to be improved in all the sections of the school development plan.

We would like to wish you lots of success in your future education. Keep up the good work!

With very best wishes

Jacquie Buttriss