

Howe Park School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132786
Local Authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	316015
Inspection date	28 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Keith Williams

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	3-7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	246
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr M Gurner
Headteacher	Mrs R Jacklin
Date of previous school inspection	24 March 2003
School address	Bowland Drive Emerson Valley Milton Keynes MK4 2SH
Telephone number	01908 526294
Fax number	01908 526869

Age group	3-7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the extent to which monitoring is giving leaders an accurate view of teaching and the school's effectiveness; the impact of work to increase the challenge for more able pupils and the success with which a new staff team is being built.

Evidence was gathered from: lesson observations, discussion with staff, pupils and governors, the scrutiny of pupils' work, assessment data and documents. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The large majority of the pupils at this smaller than average infant school are of White British heritage. About a third, more than that found nationally, are from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils learning English as an additional language is similar to that found in most schools. A lower than average proportion of pupils has been identified with learning difficulties. These include pupils with moderate learning, speech, language and communication and social and emotional difficulties, and autism. Pupils come from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds; a lower than average proportion is eligible for free school meals. The school has the healthy schools silver award and the quality inclusion mark. There have been a number of significant changes since September 2006. Nursery provision was introduced at that time and, amongst many changes in staff, a new headteacher and leadership team have been appointed. When the school was last inspected in 2003, it was a first school, taking pupils up to Year 3.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Howe Park is an improving school that provides a good standard of education for its pupils and takes excellent care of them. From broadly average starting points, pupils achieve well to reach above average standards by the end of Year 2. Pupils make good progress in their all-round development because they enjoy school immensely, are well taught and are keen to do their best. Most parents are very supportive of the school's work. Amongst their many positive comments, 'It is a wonderful school and all of the staff work very hard to raise standards and provide children with good role models,' is typical.

Thoughtful and resolute leadership from the headteacher has ensured that the school has faced its many recent challenges determinedly and successfully. She has quickly forged a strong leadership team with the assistant head, and they use their complementary skills and attributes well. Their focus, rightly, has been on establishing a new staff team, while ensuring that teaching is of the highest possible quality as new staff find their feet. New staff, including those who are newly qualified, speak very highly of the support they have been given. The success of the leaders' efforts is seen in the strong sense of teamwork amongst staff and a shared commitment to improving the quality of education. Senior staff keep a close check on pupils' learning and they use the information they gain well to hold teachers to account, identify aspects of teaching that might be improved and ensure that pupils who need extra help get it. As a result, pupils benefit from consistently good teaching and this makes a significant contribution to their progress and the standards they reach.

Another key reason why the school is successful is the high quality care and support provided for pupils, which means that they are able to learn in a safe and supportive environment. Rigorous procedures, including checks on the suitability of adults to work with children, help to protect and safeguard pupils. Very close links with outside agencies provide additional help for those pupils who need it. As a result of this intervention, pupils with learning difficulties, including those with social or emotional difficulties, make good progress. Those learning English as an additional language are very well supported, too, so that they soon gain confidence and achieve well. New and very much improved systems to assess and track pupils' progress are providing detailed information about how pupils are doing, particularly in literacy and numeracy. The school has plans to extend this approach to pupils' work in science, and is right to do so.

The school's results in the national assessments for pupils in Year 2 have been significantly above average in most recent years. Pupils in Year 2 are well on track to maintain these standards. There has been no complacency, however. A detailed analysis by senior staff revealed that fewer pupils reached the higher Level 3 in writing and mathematics than in reading in 2007. To tackle this, the school has recently focused on increasing the challenge for more able pupils. Teachers' planning has improved and there is now a clear indication of how and when work that is more difficult will be provided for those capable of doing it. In addition, a teaching assistant has been deployed to work with groups of pupils to challenge and extend their understanding. These strategies are working well, and there are already signs that more able pupils are making similarly good progress to their classmates. The school has rightly recognised that there is more to do to ensure a consistent approach and plans are well in hand. The results of assessments and teachers' day-to-day marking are used well to ensure that pupils have a good understanding of how well they are learning and what they need to concentrate on next. This information is often displayed on 'learning ladders' and many pupils have a mature understanding of their particular targets.

Pupils respond well to the supportive and stimulating environment. They behave well and relationships are very positive, which helps lessons to run smoothly, and ensures that teachers are able to teach and pupils are able to learn. Pupils appreciate the interesting range of activities in and out of lessons and the help they get from teachers, particularly when they find work difficult or have a problem. They are well prepared for the next stage in their education because they make good progress academically and are encouraged to work together. School councillors, for example, are very proud of their efforts to improve the 'friendship benches.' Good progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development contributes to pupils' all-round development. Many pupils have an excellent understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles and enjoy the healthy food on offer. Playtimes are lively, energetic and enjoyable because pupils are respectful of each other and know how to play safely.

Governors provide good support for the school. They are improving their effectiveness by placing their monitoring activities on a more formal basis. They contribute well to the leaders' clear and accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness and how it can improve. Their successful track record shows they are well placed to secure further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The school has successfully established a Nursery that gives children a very good start to their education. Teaching is very good and many parents speak very highly of this provision. A very close check is kept on children's learning and their social development. School leaders have acted quickly to secure good teaching for Reception (Foundation 2) children, who are responding well. Teaching and support staff in the Nursery and Reception work very closely together to plan a broad and interesting range of activities. Developing children's independence is given a high priority, whilst children are encouraged successfully to play and work together. As a result, children enjoy their time in the Foundation Stage very much and achieve well from their starting points. Most reach the goals expected of them by the end of Reception. Arrangements to establish links with parents before their children start school are very good, and children are well prepared for Year 1.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that more able pupils are challenged consistently.
- Extend assessment arrangements to science.

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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?	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	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
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 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?	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	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

06 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Howe Park School, Milton Keynes, MK4 2SH

Thank you for the friendly way that you welcomed me to school recently. I enjoyed my day and I was pleased to be able to talk to some of you. You gave me lots of helpful information. I am writing to tell you what I found out.

Lots of you, and your parents, told me that you go to a good school and I agree. There are a number of reasons why you are doing well. Your headteacher and the other teachers work hard to make sure that your school is a safe and exciting place to be. I was pleased to see how hard you work in lessons and how you listen carefully to your teachers. Please keep this up because it is very important. I was also pleased to see that you behave well on the playground. You have an excellent understanding of how to be healthy and I am sure that your teachers will explain what this means. You obviously enjoy lots of exercise, and many of you told me why this is important. It was good to see that you eat healthily, too.

Even though your school is good, your teachers want it to be even better. There are two things I would like them to do. Firstly, they have been making sure that those of you who can do harder work get it. They agree with me that they still need to concentrate on this. Secondly, your teachers keep a close check on how you are doing in literacy and numeracy, they are planning to do the same in science and I agree that this is important.

I am sure you will want to help them by working hard, behaving well and always trying your best. I wish you good luck for the future.

Your sincerely,

Keith Williams

Lead inspector