

High Bank First School and Early Years Unit

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107684
Local Authority	Kirklees
Inspection number	317346
Inspection dates	3–4 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Jane Hughes

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	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	77
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Miss C Holt
Headteacher	Mrs Kath Benetis
Date of previous school inspection	5 June 2006
School address	Eighth Avenue Liversedge West Yorkshire WF15 8LD
Telephone number	01274 335237
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Age group	3–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This small school was designated an extended school and Children's Centre in 2004. It draws pupils from an area of significant social disadvantage. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is almost three times above the average. Most pupils are of White British heritage. A high proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The proportion of pupils having a statement of special educational needs is well above average. The school receives funding from the Excellence in Cities project to support the work of the learning mentor and of pupils with particular gifts and talents. The Nursery currently provides part time sessions. The school is working towards Healthy School status and has achieved the Activemark award. The school is in the throes of reorganisation and will become a full primary school in 2008/09. The school received Year 5 pupils for the first time in September 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

High Bank First School and Early Years Unit is a good school. It provides outstanding care, pastoral support and equality of opportunity for all its pupils. It is not by chance that parents typically remark, 'Children receive a genuine, caring education from staff who want to make a difference. We are proud of the school.' In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Recent successes stem from a newly stable staff team, led impressively by the dynamic headteacher and ably supported by a cohesive senior leadership team. Standards are rising throughout the school and pupils' achievement is accelerating, particularly in regard to their improving speech and language, a key focus in all year groups. The impressive provision for pupils with a whole range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities continues to improve. Together with active and highly supportive governors, the school demonstrates good improvement since its last inspection and good capacity to improve further.

Pupils achieve well throughout the school and make good progress. Year groups are small and a significant number of pupils in each year have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Children start school with below average skills for their age. Standards are broadly average by Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils in Years 3, 4 and 5 also achieve well. Standards for these pupils are broadly in line with national expectations in English, mathematics and science. Standards in Year 5 overall reflect the high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in this small year group. These pupils enjoy first class support and skilful interventions so they achieve as well as other groups of pupils. However, spelling is the weaker area of writing and pupils do not always take enough care when checking their work. A key focus for the school is to raise achievement through developing pupils' speaking skills. This adds additional depth to the school's rich curriculum. Leaders recognise how vital it is to improve pupils' speech and language skills from the time they first set foot in school if they are to make useful social and economic contributions in later life. They also have plentiful opportunities to learn about healthy and safe lifestyles.

Pupils' positive attitudes, exemplary behaviour and above average attendance reflect their delight in school. Pupils relish the chance to take responsibility around school and to participate in the before and after school activities, some involving well established community links. Excellent care and personal support from staff encourage pupils to become increasingly self-confident individuals. This bodes well for their future success. Good academic guidance helps pupils to pursue challenging yet attainable targets. Nevertheless, teachers do not consistently indicate to pupils how to improve their work, nor do they make certain that pupils put any guidance into practice. Good teaching stimulates pupils' curiosity and they come to school to work hard. Parents forge increasingly positive partnerships with school. Many demonstrate to their children the value of lifelong learning as they take up the offer of adult education classes in school. First class partnerships with a range of higher education establishments and support agencies enable the school to provide just the right levels of support to pupils whatever their needs or particular talents.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Good quality provision in the Foundation Stage ensures the children get off to a fine start. They join the Nursery with skills that are below average, this is particularly so in their language and physical development. The reason the children have such a strong start lies with the school's immediate emphasis on developing their speaking and listening skills. Children make good progress through Nursery and Reception because of consistently good teaching with some that is outstanding. Their teaching is practically based with a range of stimulating activities. For example, staff plan exciting activities, with good questioning, to extend children's learning. To encourage better understanding of healthy eating options, children snack routinely on exotic fare such as pomegranates. They painstakingly prick out and nibble the pips, using long wooden skewers. 'Mmm, I like it. It's juicy.' they report, as they reach for seconds. Ready opportunities to learn both inside and outdoors allow children to choose where and how to learn. This helps them to become increasingly independent learners. By the end of Reception, many children are working within the goals expected for their age. However, low starting points and the high percentage of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities mean that not all children reach the expected levels by Year 1, particularly in communication, language and literacy.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' spelling throughout the school.
- Ensure teachers provide pupils with guidance on how to improve each piece of work and that pupils follow this guidance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Continuing their good progress in the Foundation Stage, pupils achieve well through Years 1 and 2. By the end of Year 2, standards are broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics. Recent assessments by teachers show reading standards are at their highest for five years. Taken alongside gains in writing, there is clear evidence that current approaches to overcoming pupils' low starting points, particularly in their speaking and listening skills, are bearing fruit. Pupils in Years 3, 4 and 5 also achieve well. Standards are broadly in line with national expectations in English, mathematics and science. Throughout the school, pupils' spelling is a weaker element of their writing. The high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with a statement of special educational need make good progress. Low pupil numbers in each year group indicate that published data in respect of standards should be treated cautiously.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils emphatically agree that they like school. They eagerly embrace the new experiences and opportunities the school provides. Parents speak of their own 'peace of mind as children build their confidence and self-esteem'. Such positive responses reflect in the school's improving attendance, which is now above the national average. Pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development shines through in all they do. They work hard in lessons, behave beautifully and show increasing respect for themselves and others. They prove themselves trustworthy as they help out at lunchtime or sell snack-time raisins. The innovative use of a programme to

improve pupils' speaking and listening skills provides many activities for pupils to develop social skills important for their future well-being. Pupils do not yet have a clear enough awareness of the cultural diversity of the world beyond their immediate community, although the school is working to rectify this.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and support staff continue to increase in number as the school gradually extends into a full primary school. At the time of the inspection, new staff were still settling into the school's routines. Nevertheless, lessons are of a consistently good quality overall because teachers plan work carefully to meet pupils' needs and offer appropriate challenge. There is a sharp focus on key skills, especially in terms of pupils' speech and language development. Classrooms buzz with purposeful activities and teachers demonstrate consistently high expectations of pupils. Some teaching is of the highest quality. A key example of this was seen where a teaching assistant encouraged less adept pupils to improve their physical skills through a range of specific exercises to sharpen finger dexterity. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive close attention from skilful teachers, support assistants and the special educational needs coordinator. Similarly, individual programmes for those pupils with special gifts or talents ensure they are stretched and challenged in all they do. Staff constantly reappraise their classroom practice and look to extend pupils' academic and personal development. One parent commented, 'If my child stumbles in a subject, she is picked up.' Teachers' marking does not always consistently pick out how pupils can improve their work, nor do teachers always make sure that the pupils follow their careful guidance.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The rich curriculum centres on intense efforts to equip pupils with the skills they require to lead happy and successful lives. Innovative approaches integrate the quest to improve communication and social skills alongside pupils' physical development. Pupils have regular opportunities throughout the week to work closely with the learning mentor and support assistants to improve their listening skills. For example, pupils in Year 1 know how important it is to maintain eye contact when speaking or listening to someone and that it is also important not to fidget. This approach is rapidly accelerating pupils' achievement, particularly that of the younger ones. There is good provision for literacy and numeracy as pupils are grouped across Years 1 to 5 by ability to encourage maximum improvement. A good mix of visits and visitors bring learning to life for pupils. Older pupils delight in playing their new violins as part of a large ensemble and say how they really 'look forward to performing'. The school has recently reorganised its approach to the whole of the curriculum, placing increasing emphasis on a cross-curricular approach to teaching other subjects. Pupils report excitedly that, 'We've got cross-curricular now' and can explain that this means they learn about one subject with the help of skills from another. This approach is in the early stages of development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Outstanding pastoral care is central to the school's provision. Adults ensure pupils squeeze every benefit from their time in school. This is evident in the highly successful breakfast and after school clubs. These set the correct tone for the day and then allow pupils to wind down with meaningful activities. There is excellent support for the high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Meticulous individual learning programmes help each pupil to achieve well. First-rate links with outside agencies ensure the school makes good use of specific expertise. Procedures to protect and safeguard pupils are in place. Pupils say they feel safe in school and know who to go to with problems. They say these are swiftly resolved. Teachers and support staff know pupils very well. They make regular assessments of pupils' progress and ensure that they are on track to attain challenging targets. Although teachers mark pupils work regularly, they do not consistently show pupils how to improve their work, nor do pupils automatically check over their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The small staff team work very well together under the highly focused direction of the headteacher. Despite progressing through a period of considerable change, associated with leading the school to full primary school status, the headteacher does not allow her attention to waver from the key task of raising the achievements and expectations of each pupil. Every pupil is equally valued here. The headteacher imbues staff with the determination to improve upon already successful strategies to make them even more effective. For instance, provision for pupils with special educational needs goes from strength to strength. Astute appointments to the senior leadership team ensure a consistent focus on identified priorities. Staff seek out innovative practice to improve pupils' learning. Senior leaders have a secure view of teaching and learning and provide good support for new staff. Some curriculum responsibilities have only just been redistributed as staff levels increase and these coordinators are still establishing a clear picture of their subjects. Conscientious governors provide effective monitoring of, and challenge to, the school's performance. Wholly appreciative parents have the final word, 'A lot of time and effort has been put in to give children the best possible chance in life and so allow them to achieve their full potential.'

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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	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	2
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	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?	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	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
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**

Thank you for making me so welcome during my recent visit. I enjoyed hearing what you had to say about your school. Many of you told me that, 'It's fun here.' When I saw most of you keen to arrive just after eight o'clock for Breakfast Club, I understood that you meant it. The porridge, bagels and fruit were very tempting.

Your headteacher and all the adults who help you each day have worked very hard since your school was last inspected. I do not think you or your parents will be surprised that I judge yours to be a good school. You all do well because lessons are good quality and your behaviour is excellent. Adults look after you extremely well so that you feel both happy and safe. New opportunities pop up a lot, like playing your violins together - what a fantastic experience! You learn important life skills every single day because your headteacher makes sure you learn to communicate better and use 'good speaking and listening'. Remember the eye contact! I was pleased to see so many of your mums and dads in school learning new skills - such as using the computer. Perhaps you can practise together sometimes.

One reason for my visit was to check if your school could do even better. I found two things to improve. I have asked your teachers to help you spell better. You can help with this by learning your spellings carefully and checking over your work once you have finished writing. I have also asked your teachers to make sure that, when they mark your work, they always show you clearly how to improve it in some way. You need to make sure you always check what they have written and try to do what they suggest.

Carry on enjoying school and watching it grow. Just think, this time next year there will be Year 6s in school. How exciting! Lastly, do not forget that Moby knows best!