

Heronsgate School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110389
Local Authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	325143
Inspection dates	10–11 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Hugh Protherough

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	392
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Anthony Ashmore
Headteacher	Mr David Harper
Date of previous school inspection	7 December 2005
School address	Litchfield Down Walnut Tree MK7 7BW
Telephone number	01908 550811
Fax number	01908 605273

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is larger than average. Although the majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds, the school community is diverse and includes about a quarter of pupils from other ethnic backgrounds such as Asian British Indian, Asian British Pakistani, Black African, Black British Caribbean and Chinese. While most are competent in English, about a fifth of these pupils are at the early stages of learning the language. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals, while growing, remains slightly below average. The number of pupils with special educational needs and learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. Most of these pupils are experiencing specific or moderate learning difficulties. The local community is very mobile and the number of pupils entering or leaving the school at times other than the start or end of the school year is well above the national average.

The school currently holds a Healthy School Silver 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 that has made good improvement since its previous inspection.

Throughout the school pupils of all backgrounds and abilities are achieving well. Pupils entering the school in Year 3 usually arrive with average levels of attainment, although the profile of this year's intake was higher. In recent years standards have risen steadily and in 2007 they were above the national average in English, mathematics and science. Results of the unvalidated tests for 2008 were lower, caused in part by the many changes of teacher these pupils experienced during local authority reorganisation, and a higher than usual proportion of pupils with additional learning needs. However, analysis of test and assessment data and the work of the current Year 6 show that pupils have made good progress from their starting points, with most already working at the expected levels and a good number who exceed them.

Despite the growing diversity of the school population, staff and governors cater successfully for the wide-ranging needs of their pupils. Provision for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and a statement of special educational need is very well organised. Pupils are identified swiftly and appropriate plans and support enable them to make good progress towards their targets. Pupils speaking English as an additional language are equally well catered for with specialist staff supporting both pupils and their teachers. The 'Nrich' programme offers good opportunity to deepen and extend the talents of the gifted and talented. The work of teaching assistants makes a significant contribution in all these areas.

As a result, pupils enjoy school and their personal development is good. They eat healthily and exercise enthusiastically. They feel safe in school and have positive attitudes to learning. Although most pupils have a strong sense of community and speak interestingly about the ways that their school contributes to the immediate area, their understanding of the United Kingdom and global communities is less well developed.

Teachers plan thoroughly and the content of lessons is often carefully structured to engage and motivate the pupils. The purpose of learning is always clear and in the strongest lessons teachers question probingly to deepen understanding. Learning is further enhanced by special events such as 'Arts Week' and specially designed units of work such as 'Dr Who' in Year 6. The pupils' well-developed computer skills are increasingly being put to good use in other subjects. However, there are inconsistencies of practice that impede faster progress. Approaches to marking are too variable. Although teachers set targets and the pupils know them, marking seldom refers to these or tells pupils how they can improve their work. There is similar variation in the approaches to teaching handwriting and in setting high expectations for the presentation of work.

The leadership of the school has grown in strength and effectiveness in recent years. The headteacher's commitment to staff development and rigorous performance management means that he can increasingly depend on his senior staff to play their full part as leaders and managers. This team has a mostly accurate oversight of pupils' achievements across the school and a realistic view of what needs to be done to develop greater consistency of provision. However, the expertise of senior staff is too often confined to their own classrooms, rather than being shared more widely to improve teaching elsewhere in the school and accelerate still further the pupils' achievements.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure greater consistency in the teachers' use of marking and ongoing assessments to increase still further the pace and challenge of lessons.
- Establish more consistent expectations for the presentation of pupils' work and the teaching of handwriting.
- Increase opportunities for those senior leaders with significant expertise to make further impact on pupil achievement by working alongside colleagues in their classrooms.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils of all backgrounds and abilities achieve well. In the national tests for 2007 pupils attained above-average standards in English, mathematics and science and made good progress from their starting points in Year 3. The unvalidated results for 2008 indicate that standards were lower than the previous year, but that pupils achieved satisfactorily. This slight decline was in part a reflection of the considerable turbulence in staffing experienced by this cohort during local authority reorganisation in 2005–06 and a higher than usual incidence of pupils with additional needs.

Pupils currently in Year 6 are achieving well and standards are have recovered to a higher level compared with last year. The inspectors' analysis of the pupils' work confirms the school's tracking and assessment information which shows that these pupils have made good progress in English and mathematics since entering the school in Year 3. Boys are achieving slightly better in mathematics than the girls. The reverse is true in writing. The school has identified this and is taking effective action to narrow the gap. Well-targeted, expert support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language ensures these pupils achieve well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Conversations with pupils reveal that not only do they enjoy school, but that they have a strong sense of pride and identity with their local community. Their attendance is above average. Pupils display positive attitudes and respond well in lessons to the activities provided. They have mostly positive, trusting relationships with the staff and relationships in classrooms and on the playground are almost always cordial. Pupils behave well. Those who spoke with the inspectors report no bullying or unfriendliness and are confident that a member of staff would help them should this occur. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe and demonstrate maturity when called upon to undertake tasks such as moving furniture or equipment. They know how to eat healthily and keep fit. Inspectors observed healthy eating choices being made at lunchtime and saw pupils enthusiastically engaged in physical education.

Pupils' good development in the spiritual and cultural aspects of learning is reflected in attractive displays throughout the school. Members of the school council are proud of their role, manage their own budget and make helpful suggestions in support of school improvement. Rising standards, regular involvement in local enterprise events and the pupils' good personal qualities mean that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Learning moves forward at a brisk pace because in most lessons teachers are careful to plan work that engages the interest of the pupils. Practical and themed activities, such as National Book Week and the 'Dr Who' project in Year 6, contribute to the positive working ethos that is in evidence throughout the school. Many lessons make effective use of new technology such as interactive whiteboards to support learning. Relationships between teachers and pupils are generally very positive. The consistent application of the school's behaviour policy means that the pace of learning is seldom interrupted.

Pupils know their targets and helpful classroom displays illustrate progress towards these. However, the inspectors' analysis of pupils' books shows that marking seldom refers to pupils' targets or tells them how to improve. Teachers' expectations for the presentation of work vary from class to class and the absence of an agreed policy for teaching handwriting inhibits the progress of those arriving at the school without a properly formed script.

Effective use is made of specialist expertise to support many aspects of teaching such as music, French and physical education. Similarly, the school's support for groups of pupils such as the higher-attainers, those who speak English as an additional language or who have statements of special educational needs or learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well targeted and effective. Additional adults such as teaching assistants make a strong contribution in these areas and in the support of newly arrived pupils or vulnerable children.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum which is responsive to the needs and interests of pupils and contributes strongly to their overall achievement and enjoyment. Helpful cross-curricular links are being developed that enable pupils to transfer skills and knowledge between subjects. This is particularly evident in information and communication technology, which has a high profile throughout the school. For example, pupils were observed using technology to prepare blogs based on performance poetry in an English lesson in Year 4. Similarly a multimedia presentation has been prepared based on work undertaken in history in Year 6. While this type of work adds considerable value to pupils' learning, there is not yet a coherent plan to ensure that all pupils are able to use and apply skills and knowledge in other areas; by developing their writing across the curriculum, for instance.

Learning is enhanced by the wide range of visits and visitors. There are many opportunities for pupils to deepen and extend their learning through themed weeks, projects, drama and musical performances. The extra-curricular programme provides opportunities for personal success and contributes strongly to the pupil's personal and social development. Pupils who find learning more difficult are skilfully supported, as are the more able pupils through the school's 'Nrich' programme.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides excellent levels of pastoral care and support for pupils. There are effective child protection and safeguarding arrangements and risk assessments are regularly undertaken for all aspects of school life. Vulnerable pupils are well cared for and new pupils are welcomed into the school and settle quickly. Procedures to support pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and statements of special educational need are good. An effective range of intervention strategies helps accelerate their progress.

The school's systems for tracking academic progress are much improved since the previous inspection. Senior leaders now make effective use of a computer package to record and track the progress of individual pupils as well as that of different groups and cohorts. This information is well used to determine where to direct support and to set challenging targets for different cohorts of pupils. However, inconsistencies in marking and the day-to-day assessment of pupils' work mean that this process is not yet fully effective.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The effectiveness of the school leadership team has increased considerably since the previous inspection. Pupils are achieving higher standards and the quality of teaching has improved. Senior leaders have a good oversight of pupils' achievements based upon a secure analysis of test and assessment data, supported by the regular monitoring of pupils' work. They hold an accurate view of current strengths balanced with a realistic appreciation of what needs to be done to improve things further. For instance, several subject leaders possess significant teaching expertise, but as yet their influence is not shared widely enough throughout the school.

Governors possess a wealth of experience and a detailed knowledge of the school, its history and the immediate community. They provide strong support for the headteacher and staff team and are fully involved in shaping the priorities for school improvement. Their plan provides a comprehensive outline of proposed actions and processes, but in some sections the absence of measurable outcomes limits the capacity of the school to evaluate fully the impact of its work.

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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

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	3
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?	3
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

24 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Heronsgate School, Walnut Tree, MK7 7BW

Thank you very much for welcoming me and my colleagues during the recent inspection of your school. Our conversations with you were extremely useful in helping us to discover all about Heronsgate.

Heronsgate is a good school. From the moment we arrived we were impressed by your good behaviour. You are polite and courteous and work hard in lessons. Many of you know a lot about your local community and we particularly like the way you help new children settle into school and take care of each other throughout the day.

One of the main reasons you all achieve well is because your teachers do their best to make learning fun. Your enthusiasm for events like National Book Day and the Dr Who work in Year 6 was evident to us all. Most of the time you take care to do your work neatly, but this is not always the case. We have asked teachers to make sure you always write neatly and to help everyone develop a good handwriting style.

We were delighted to find that most of you know your targets and can explain them to visitors. It was good to see that in many classes you are well on the way towards achieving these. In order to help you make even faster progress, we would like the teachers to make sure that when they mark your work they tell you whether you are getting closer to your targets and how you can improve still further. You can help by reading their suggestions and using them in your next piece of work.

We saw some very good teaching around Heronsgate and our final suggestion is that your teachers should sometimes work together in the classroom. This way they can share ideas and improve lessons even more.

With best wishes for the future.

Yours faithfully

Hugh Protherough

Lead Inspector