

Hermitage Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111043
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	325281
Inspection dates	26–27 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Henry Moreton

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.
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)	200
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Janet Clarke
Headteacher	Mrs H Jarrold
Date of previous school inspection	January 2006
School address	Hermitage Drive Holmes Chapel Crewe Cheshire CW4 7NP
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Introduction

Two Additional Inspectors carried out this pilot inspection. The inspectors visited 12 lessons, 5 of which were with either the headteacher or the deputy headteacher. The inspectors held meetings with: two governors and the school improvement partner (SIP); with the leaders of the resourced provision for pupils with autistic spectrum conditions (ASC) and the Early Years Foundation Stage; and subject leaders for reading and writing. Inspectors talked to several groups of pupils, observed the assembly led by a visitor and scrutinised key documents. These included those to ensure the safeguarding of pupils' welfare and the notes of the termly visits by the SIP. Questionnaires from 83 parents/carers were examined, more than half of which included a written comment.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the attainment of pupils over time
- the school's provision for developing pupils' workplace skills
- how the curriculum is contributing to pupils' enjoyment and achievement
- the provision for pupils with autistic spectrum conditions.

Information about the school

The school is situated in a residential setting close to the centre of Holmes Chapel. Virtually all pupils are from White British backgrounds and the number eligible for a free school meal is below that found nationally. There is an almost equal number of boys and girls in the school overall. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average.

Since September 2007, the school has hosted a local authority resourced provision for pupils who have an autistic spectrum condition. At the time of the inspection five of the seven places were filled.

The school holds the national Healthy School's award, Artsmark Silver award, Sports Activemark, the Basic Skills Quality Mark and the Inclusion Quality Mark. It also holds Investors in People status and is a Dyslexia Friendly school.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Hermitage primary is an outstanding school, with very few areas where its performance is less than outstanding. The school's provision has improved since its last inspection. The school's distinguishing feature is its sustained high performance over time, reflected in outstanding outcomes for all pupils. Pupils make excellent progress during their time in school to reach very high standards in English, mathematics and science. Excellent leadership ensures this is not a complacent school and it continues to improve its performance. There are several pivotal reasons for these outcomes. The vast majority of pupils demonstrate exceptionally positive attitudes to their learning and are very well supported by their parents and carers. The staff are extremely strong, not only in terms of their individual experience and skills, but also in the way they pull together and are a cohesive team. The school is innovative and outward looking. For example, several teachers demonstrate their commitment through their work with their peers in other schools.

The very experienced senior leaders and school governors, who have significant expertise in key areas, demonstrate drive and determination. They exercise principled leadership. Because of the school's improved performance, consistently strong outcomes across the board and rigorous support from its partners, the school has an excellent capacity to improve further. Leaders are resolved to redress the relative weaknesses that remain. These are: how the school communicates with parents and carers about important matters such as homework; and the opportunities it provides to enable pupils to work directly with children who come from different backgrounds.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the way in which it communicates with parents and carers, by developing the use of the new technologies, such as the use of email or the systematic use of questionnaires.
- Build on pupils' developing links with their peers from different socio-economic and ethnically different towns and cities. This might include, for example, a regular programme of exchange visits and collaborative workshops.

How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

1

Pupils of all abilities achieve outstandingly well because of the keenness they show in lessons. This is reflected in levels of concentration and the respect they show when they listen so well to teachers and to each other. Pupils enjoy their lessons because they are interesting and there are regular opportunities to work alongside those from different classes. A typical parental comment is, 'He has learned so much, made so many friends, even in the older years through the buddy system'. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make excellent progress as they move through the school because of the way teachers use assessment information to target their specific needs. Pupils with autistic spectrum conditions make excellent progress. This is due to the specialist support they receive and the way in which they work alongside their classmates for most of the school day and during extra-curricular activities. As a result, pupils love coming to school and this is reflected in their high levels of attendance.

Children's attainment on entry to the school is broadly as expected for their age, with many having personal, social and number skills higher than is typically expected. Both girls and boys reach very high standards by the end of Year 6. This represents outstanding progress. Results in national tests are consistently well above average in English, mathematics and science. Inspection evidence shows that these very high standards are on course to be sustained. Pupils get off to a flying start in the Early Years Foundation Stage, make great strides in Years 1 and 2 and build on these good learning habits through Years 3 to 6. At the same time, parents and pupils value the numerous opportunities to flourish in areas such as music with the Year 5 and 6 wind-band, sport and modern foreign languages.

While the behaviour of pupils in lessons and around school is seldom less than exemplary, there are very occasional incidents of unacceptable behaviour. These are dealt with immediately but rightly concern some parents and pupils. This does not diminish the high quality of care at the school overall, and pupils feel safe and secure. This is an inclusive school community, with a very positive ethos for learning.

Pupils have mature attitudes about what is right and wrong, and a high level of social awareness and responsibility. They pursue a healthy lifestyle while in school and this includes taking part in sport, tending the allotment and extra-curricular activities. They value the many residential experiences which combine sporting and artistic themes. Pupils make a significant contribution to the school and its local community and show great interest in the wider world through, for instance, Fairtrade initiatives and the developing work with a school abroad. Pupils have an excellent awareness of their role as global citizens but they are given fewer chances to develop links with those parts of the country which differ from their own. Assemblies are very positive events where pupils of all ages come together to celebrate and to learn about the outside world.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	1
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	1
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	1
How well do pupils behave?	2
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	1
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	2
Pupils' attendance	1
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	1
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	1

The quality of the school's work

The quality of teaching is outstanding across the school. The rare occasions when it falls short of this level occur when the tasks set are too complicated, and when there is too much to do so that pupils cannot finish their tasks. Marking reflects high expectations and leads to pupils of all abilities taking great care and pride in their written work. These good habits are established lower down the school, so that by the time pupils reach Year 6 they know exactly what is expected of them.

Arrangements to assess pupils' attainment and track their progress over time are exemplary, because class teachers, subject leaders and school leaders work effectively together. Teachers use this information to plan challenging lessons, and to provide appropriate additional support where it is needed. As well as providing very well for lower attaining pupils, this ensures that higher attainers, including those who are gifted and talented, are challenged.

The curriculum excites pupils. It includes activities that are tackled by the whole school, working in teams. The quality of displays on the topic 'Mexico,' for example, reflects the pupils' enthusiasm and the staff's commitment. Pupils value the chance to work with others and to explore areas of particular interest. The programme of visitors who talk about their jobs contributes to pupils' awareness of the world of work and many pupils develop high aspirations.

Pupils are very well supported and cared for and know that there is someone they can turn to in school to talk to, if necessary. Older pupils take their role as 'buddy' very seriously. Pupils with autistic spectrum conditions are supported by others who act as excellent role models. Pupils in Key Stage 2 are provided with many excellent opportunities to work with students at the local high school in subjects such as

¹ Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

science, drama and languages. The gifted and talented pupils respond especially well and these strong links help to contribute to all pupils' growing confidence.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	1
Effective assessment	1
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	1
Support, guidance and care	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The determination and drive of school leaders, including the school's very effective governing body, means that the staff team is strong and united. Everybody knows their role. Each pupil is well known to staff, who ensure that all are treated fairly. On the occasions where individuals or groups of pupils look to be underachieving, timely and targeted action is taken to get them on track. Many steps are taken to extend pupils' experiences and they are made aware of their responsibilities, especially locally and globally. While links are developing with a school several miles away, which serves a very different socio-economic and cultural community, these are not extensive. School governors lead by example, through their developing links with other local governing bodies. The school encourages pupils to take pride in their school and contribute actively to events in the local community, and this includes those with autistic spectrum conditions. Communications with parents and carers is usually effective over most areas of schoolwork. However, opportunities to use new technologies to improve communication further are missed. The school's safeguarding procedures are robust, with a recent training event proving helpful in ensuring that all parties are aware of their roles and responsibilities. The support and challenge provided to the school and its governors is rigorous. Change is well considered and as a typical parental comment reflects, 'the school does not exist as an island but has always been very good at making children aware of the wider world and the value of all'.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	1
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	1
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	1
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	1
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision-making about matters relating to learning and well-being	2
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	1

Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	2
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

As a result of exemplary leadership, the outstanding provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage enables all children to make rapid progress. By the time children move into Year 1 most have achieved or surpassed the expected early learning goals; this represents outstanding achievement. All children quickly settle into a very happy start to their school life. They are content and thoroughly enjoy being here.

The environment for learning is stimulating and lively, both indoors and outdoors. It encourages children to explore and find things out for themselves, and to think critically. Children quickly develop into independent learners who work well together. They love to discuss ideas and cooperate with each other. Many opportunities are provided for children to extend their personal ways of learning; mathematical skills, for example, are explored in practical settings.

The input of adults to facilitate learning is timely and well considered. Planning is comprehensive and rigorous. Teaching offers pace, challenge and is highly interactive. Staff value children's views. Staff observations feed into the 'Learning Journeys', which are excellent celebrations of children's achievements over time. All welfare requirements are met.

How good are the outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	1
What is the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	1
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?	1
Overall effectiveness: how well does the setting/school meet the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	1

Views of parents and carers

Eighty per cent of the parental questionnaires were very positive. Parents commented on their children being motivated academically and well supported socially, and that their children were very happy with the school. A typical comment is, 'it is a forward thinking, innovative school, from promoting Fairtrade, school allotments, exciting residential trips, interesting projects often involving the whole school - the list is endless'.

Some questionnaires raised concerns, usually about the occasional inappropriate behaviour of a very small number of pupils. The comments included concerns about how well this is addressed. This relates to concerns about how occasionally the school fails to communicate clearly enough with parents.

The inspectors agree that these concerns are merited and so they appear as judgements in the body of the report.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



02 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Hermitage Primary School, CW4 7NP

You will remember that myself and a colleague visited your school a little while ago to check on the progress it is making. In this letter I want to let you know what we found.

Yours is an outstanding school. This is because of the way in which most of you try your best, most of the time. Your enthusiasm really impressed us. The care that you take over your work and the way you listen to your teachers is exceptional. It is also because you have excellent teachers. You are fortunate that your headteacher is so well supported by the other senior staff and the school governors. Of course, part of our job is also to find ways the school can improve. It was hard for us, but we do think there are two things it can do.

Firstly, find better ways to let your parents and carers know what the school is doing. This includes, for example, information about your homework and project work. You have a really important job to do here, because you can help the school by letting your teachers know if you think they may need to tell your parents/carers about something that is happening at school.

Secondly, find ways for you to work with children from different parts of the country. We know you love doing this sort of thing because many of you do some great work with the students and staff at your local comprehensive school, and you enjoy finding out about the wider world through your Fairtrade activities. So, why don't you let the school know which parts of the country you would like to know more about, and try to think about how you could do that?

Finally, on behalf of the inspection team, I wish to thank all of you for the way you welcomed us and conducted yourselves throughout our visit. In particular, I want to thank those of you who were kind enough to talk to us. We took what you said very seriously. I hope that the older children will try to read some of the full report. Do ask your teachers for a copy and if you don't quite understand all of it then please ask them, or your parents/carers, to explain it to you.

Yours sincerely

Henry Moreton
Lead inspector

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