

Hilltop Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114886
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	326083
Inspection dates	10–11 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Marianne Harris

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	202
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Harwood
Headteacher	Mrs Karen Mackenzie
Date of previous school inspection	10 October 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Hill Avenue Wickford Essex SS11 8LT
Telephone number	01268762531
Fax number	01268570217

Age group	4–7
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average sized school where pupils come from a mainly White British background. There is very little pupil mobility in the school and staffing is stable. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is much lower than that normally seen, although the proportion of those who require a statement of special educational needs is very close to average. These needs vary, but are mainly for moderate learning difficulties and emotional and social needs. The school has provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and when they join the school children have skills and knowledge close to those expected for their age.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Staff, governors and parents work together extremely well to provide a very high standard of education for all pupils. Excellent links have been made with a wide range of other professionals so that the needs of every child are met and all pupils make outstanding progress. Standards are well above those usually seen and this has been the trend over the recent past.

Along with academic excellence goes the drive to promote pupils' personal development and well-being because educating the whole child is important to the staff. From the children in the EYFS to those who are in Year 2 there is an exceptional understanding of healthy living and keeping safe. Pupils are proud of the money they have raised for local and national charities and the school council knows that it has a real say in the running of the school. Projects, such as encouraging recycling, ensure that pupils learn about being good citizens and pupils are very proud of what they have achieved. The care, guidance and support that pupils receive are exceptional and this supports their personal development because they feel safe and welcomed in school.

The thirst for knowledge begins in the EYFS and continues throughout the school. Teaching is excellent and lessons are exciting and fun. Many resources are used as well as very effective strategies to include all pupils. The most notable of these is 'talk partners' where pupils have the opportunity to discuss their ideas with a friend before sharing them with the rest of the class. Lessons move at a brisk pace with teachers and teaching assistants skilfully assessing how well pupils are learning so that activities can be challenging and engaging. Teaching is supported by a good curriculum that is enriched by many extra activities. Much progress has been made on combining subjects so that learning is more relevant to these young pupils, although there are a few occasions when the time allocated to one subject is too long and pupils tend to lose a little interest. However, teachers are very good at regaining their attention.

The outstanding provision can be attributed to the excellent leadership and management of the school. Senior leaders work very effectively to ensure that provision is always of a high standard and governors work with staff to ensure that they feel supported and valued. Pupils' progress is tracked very effectively so that all can make outstanding progress. Particular attention is paid to pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities so that families and relevant health professionals are involved in their education. The issues from the last inspection have been tackled very well, especially the one relating to reviewing the curriculum. Standards have remained very high and there is excellent capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children in the EYFS get off to a flying start because they are very well prepared for school life. Procedures for settling children into school are very well established, and visits into local pre-school settings along with home visits ensure that both parents and children know staff really well. Learning is exciting, with many activities to capture the imagination of the children. When they join Year 1, many children have exceeded the expected goals for their learning and have already started on the National Curriculum. Children are happy and behaviour is exemplary. Staff are excellent role models for the children. They provide a very good balance of activities that children choose for themselves and those where adults take the lead. As a result, children quickly gain the skills they need for the next stage of their education. They learn to sound out

and spell simple words and to count accurately. Many parents commented that their children had learnt so much in such a short time. The outside area is used very effectively so that children can learn about the elements and can practise their climbing and cycling skills. The school has a bank of appropriate clothing so that children can go out in all weathers. Planning is thorough and takes account of the needs of all children in the EYFS. It is based on careful assessments of what children already know and what they need to learn next in order to make excellent progress. The leadership and management of the EYFS is outstanding. Staff work extremely well together to provide such an effective learning environment.

What the school should do to improve further

- Review the organisation of the few lessons where too much time is allocated to one subject.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils' achievement is excellent, whatever their starting point. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics are very high and indications are that they will remain well above average. Standards in other subjects, such as art, are also very high, with excellent displays that celebrate the achievements of the pupils. The school makes excellent provision for pupils with complex needs, including physical disabilities, and these pupils make extremely good progress. Although some may not reach the nationally expected standard for their age, they are included in lessons and achieve very well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils have a very good understanding about healthy eating and staying safe. The 'walking bus' is active in school and many pupils make good use of this. Extra sporting activities are well attended and pupils enjoy skipping club as well as multi-sports activities. Attendance is above average and this reflects pupils' enjoyment of school. One parent commented that 'My daughter couldn't understand why she could not come to school when she was ill, she loves it so much.' Behaviour in school is exemplary and pupils are very enthusiastic about their work. They very confidently show prospective parents around the school and are justly proud of their achievements. In lessons, and in the playground, pupils work and play together in a friendly atmosphere of mutual respect. They are learning what it means to be a responsible citizen and the school council and eco-workers strive to make the school a most attractive place to learn. With all the skills they learn in school pupils are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage of their education. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent, particularly the spiritual dimension. The respect shown in the Remembrance assembly and the beautiful reflective poems written by pupils in Years 1 and 2 are testament to this.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

All staff foster a love of learning and encourage pupils to fully participate in lessons. Teaching assistants are very skilful at supporting pupils with particular difficulties and are very sensitive to their needs. Relationships throughout the school are excellent, and this helps encourage collaborative working and sharing of ideas. The purpose of each lesson is clearly explained and

teachers often revisit the lesson objectives to check that pupils are really sure of what they are learning. Pupils report that they know how well they are doing because teachers talk to them about their work and let them know what they need to do next to improve. Resources are used very effectively. In lessons, interactive whiteboards are used very well by both staff and pupils to make learning exciting and stimulating. Planning is thorough and takes account of the age of pupils and the stage of their development.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Since the time of the last inspection, the school has reviewed the curriculum offered to pupils and greatly extended the number and range of after school activities available. This has resulted in a good curriculum where visits into the local area and visitors into school greatly enhance learning for pupils. The range of clubs includes gardening, where pupils learn to grow their own vegetables, and knitting where a large group of pupils knit enthusiastically during lunchtime. The staff have made much progress in combining subjects together so that learning is more relevant and interesting for pupils. They acknowledge that there is still some work to be carried out to fully integrate subjects. However, there are very occasionally lessons where too much time is allocated to a particular subject and, when this happens, pupils begin to lose concentration.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

From the time they start in the EYFS, the safety and care of pupils is of paramount importance to staff. They know the pupils and their families well and thoroughly track the progress pupils make so that parents can be kept informed about this. Procedures for keeping pupils safe are robust and child protection systems are clearly understood by staff. Teachers are very skilful at telling pupils what to do next so, as one pupil reports, 'we know how to get better'.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The staff team is exceptionally effective at working together and providing an excellent education where all pupils are included. Governance is excellent, with governors who visit the school regularly and who are very aware of the many strengths of the school, and where improvement could be made. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. She has been most successful in promoting pupils' personal development as well as maintaining very high standards across the school. The school's evaluation of its work is accurate and reflective. The areas for development are clearly identified. Although the school has plans to extend the pupils' understanding of multi-cultural Britain, they have already taken huge steps to make this relevant to the pupils by linking up with a family who have moved abroad. There are many opportunities for pupils to visit the local area and to meet with others in the locality. The staff and governors have carried out an audit of how well community cohesion is promoted in the school and have plans to extend the already good provision further.

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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?	1
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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1

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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which 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 learners' needs?	1
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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
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	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

12 November 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Hilltop Infant School, Wickford, SS11 8LT

I am writing to thank you for being so welcoming when we visited your school a little while ago. We enjoyed hearing about your excellent school and were very impressed by all that we saw. The progress that you make in reading, writing and mathematics is exceptional and the standards you reach in subjects, such as art, are very high.

We would especially like to mention the tour guides who so expertly showed around new parents and showed just how proud you are of your school. I enjoyed visiting knitting club and am sorry that I will not be able to see your finished bags. We were very impressed by your excellent behaviour and by how friendly and respectful you are. I enjoyed the Remembrance assembly and reading the very thoughtful poems some of you had written. We thought that the school council and the eco-council do a very good job.

Your lessons are interesting and fun. Sometimes we did not want to leave them because we wanted to join in. Your teachers work very hard and make lessons interesting for you. We have asked Mrs Mackenzie to look at the timetables because some of your lessons are a little too long and sometimes you lose concentration.

Thank you once again for being so kind to us. We wish you all the best in the future.

Best wishes

Marianne Harris

Lead inspector