

Hilltop Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115033
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	326115
Inspection dates	5–6 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Nichola Perry

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)	302
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Eileen Bull
Headteacher	Mrs Alison Waite
Date of previous school inspection	13 July 2006
School address	Hill Avenue Wickford Essex SS11 8LT
Telephone number	01268 734649
Fax number	01268 570237

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Hilltop Junior School is a larger than average school, which provides for pupils in the local area. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is much lower than average. The number of pupils identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average, although the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is low. The majority of pupils are of White British backgrounds. Attainment of pupils entering Year 3 is above levels expected nationally.

There are close links with a wide range of local providers. Membership of an Extended Schools network ensures that pupils benefit from good links with local secondary schools. The school participates in the School Sports Co-ordinator Programme and is a member of a local primary school sports partnership, which has led to large numbers of pupils having access to a wide range of sports. The school has been awarded the Activemark and has the National Healthy Schools Award. Along with other schools in the local cluster, Hilltop is part of the Pathfinder Project Building Schools of the Future, leading to shared use of the Collaborative Learning Centre, offering pupils opportunities to develop information and communication technology (ICT) skills outside those available in school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Hilltop Junior School is a good school. The new headteacher, well supported by the deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher, provides effective leadership so that her crystal clear vision and unrelenting focus on continuous improvement is shared by staff, governors, parents and, increasingly, the pupils themselves. Governors, including several new members, are positive and determined to do their best for the school. Parents are very pleased with the provision, care and support for their children and recognise improvements. A comment which summed up the views of parents stated, 'My child has blossomed into a confident, caring and happy child at Hilltop, enjoys life as part of the school community and feels valued and valuable.'

Teaching is good and some is outstanding, although it has yet to have a full impact on raising standards by the end of Year 6 because of previous underachievement. This is why standards are broadly average currently. The school has significantly increased its level of challenge in lessons and now expects pupils to make greater progress in all year groups. As a result, pupils' achievement is improving across the school and indications are that standards are rising. Although writing, and to a lesser extent mathematics, remain the weaker subjects, work on this is already leading to improvement.

Relationships and pastoral care are strengths of the school and contribute strongly to pupils' well-developed personal skills. Behaviour, both in lessons and around the school, is good because it is well managed and teachers have high expectations of how pupils should conduct themselves. Good strategies support a few pupils who still struggle with their behaviour. Attendance is good. Pupils like their school and enjoy learning. Pupils say they feel safe and show a good understanding of how to lead a healthy life. The wide range of sports activities and physical education (PE) lessons and the high quality school meals contribute well to this aspect of learning. Pupils are developing into confident and friendly children who make a significant contribution to the life of the school community and that outside the school. Older pupils enjoy additional responsibilities around the school, especially in the playground when helping younger pupils play and be safe.

The curriculum is good and is increasingly being adapted to more closely meet the needs of the school. It is enriched well by a range of out-of-school activities and visitors. There are effective systems for assessing and tracking the progress made by pupils, which staff now use well. Effective use of external agencies and in-school support for vulnerable pupils ensure full participation in all aspects of learning and good progress.

The headteacher and senior staff lead the school well. They and the governors are fully aware of how well the school is performing and where it needs to be. Subject leaders are contributing increasingly well to school improvement. However, there needs to be a more rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of their impact on raising standards. There has been good progress since the previous inspection, and as a result of the school's track record, the school demonstrates good capacity for further and more rapid improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that pupils become increasingly responsible for, and more significant partners in, their own learning in order to raise standards, especially in writing and mathematics.
- Develop further the role of subject leaders, specifically in monitoring and evaluating their subjects, in order to accelerate the pace at which the school is improving.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards in the current Year 6 are average in all three subjects because of some underachievement in the past. Close monitoring, effective interventions and improvements in teaching, which places greater focus on what pupils can learn, has reversed this trend. Assessment and tracking procedures are used to set challenging targets, which are reviewed half-termly. Teacher assessment, tracking data and work in books all show that progress has accelerated rapidly so that pupils in all year groups are now making good progress. Progress seen in the majority of lessons during the inspection was good, leading to good achievement overall. Pupils in the current Years 4 and 5 are making rapid progress and are on track to reach above average standards by the end of Year 6. Pupils with learning difficulties are supported well. They have clear targets which enable them to make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school is a friendly and happy community. Pupils are confident, articulate and well behaved. Little time is wasted by teachers needing to keep pupils on task. Pupils report occasional unkindness by pupils towards others. Strong mutual respect between pupils and adults means pupils are confident to approach an adult if troubled, secure in the knowledge that necessary actions would be taken. They feel safe as a result. Pupils clearly enjoy school, reflected in their good attendance. They enjoy fun activities such as art and PE and the various clubs. As a result they have positive attitudes to learning and work very well together. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Racist incidents are very rare, taken very seriously by the school and reported appropriately. Pupils have a good understanding of what makes a healthy lifestyle. They make a good contribution to the community and take their various roles and responsibilities seriously. Pupils have a voice through the school council. Foundations for their future economic well-being are laid well because of work undertaken to promote enterprise, frequent opportunities to work together, their rising academic standards, good social skills and positive attitudes to learning.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good, and some outstanding, teaching is having a significant impact on pupils' learning. The school has laid good foundations for further improvements. Teachers in all classes are striving hard to continuously accelerate progress and are setting their sights much higher to generate top quality work. Teaching is energetic and the brisk pace, relevant success criteria, challenge and a range of teaching styles ensure pupils are keen and attentive learners who enjoy lessons. Ongoing assessment is used well to guide lesson planning so that work challenges and engages pupils of all abilities. There are still some examples of teaching being too directed so that opportunities for pupils to take greater responsibility for their own learning are limited and pupils' skills in independent learning are variable as a result. Teachers treat pupils with great respect and have very good relationships with them so that pupils are learning how to value peers and adults. Marking is frequently used well to give pupils guidance on what they should

do to improve, although this is not fully consistent in all classes. Attention to the presentation of work is not as good as it should be.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and meets statutory requirements. It promotes pupils' enjoyment and their personal development particularly well. It provides a broad range of experiences such as in the arts, which, along with good enrichment and use of specialists, provide a good range of opportunities for pupils to gain a sense of success and confidence. The school has started the process of developing a skills-based approach to learning by linking subjects together in a meaningful way. This means that there are now good opportunities for pupils to use and develop basic skills, including developing their competence in ICT, in a range of contexts. Pupils are involved in business enterprise and demonstrate their compassion and empathy through their charity work. Good attention is given to helping pupils manage risk, including internet safety. Outdoor education and study of aspects of the local environment are stressed through the work of a visiting specialist. The school promotes awareness of environmental issues well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

A warm and welcoming atmosphere pervades the school. All the requirements for safeguarding pupils are in place. Systems to ensure pupils' health, safety and welfare are robust so that both pupils and their parents consider the school a safe place to be. No individual or group is disadvantaged in any way. There are good extension opportunities for higher attaining pupils so that their progress is now good. Effective support for learning, including additional help from external agencies and access to a counsellor, means that vulnerable pupils and those who find learning difficult receive the help they need. Teaching assistants are having a good impact on pupils' learning. Good relationships have been established with the infant school and several joint events now take place. Procedures for the induction of new pupils are very effective and make sure pupils settle easily and quickly. Good links with local secondary schools facilitate the transfer process and promote continuity and enrichment of learning. Pupils have good information about their progress and generally clear guidance about how to improve their work. Many pupils are able to state at which level they are working, what their targets are and what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Staff work effectively as a team because the headteacher provides strong leadership. She has quickly and successfully engaged all staff so that they share her commitment to improving pupils' learning opportunities rapidly and have become more accountable for their year-on-year progress. Self-evaluation is accurate. The school plan, well focused on pupils' welfare and learning, provides a useful tool to guide school improvement and is being used effectively to raise expectations across the school. Targets for improvement are challenging leading to rapid improvement. The development of subject leaders' roles has involved them in whole school planning, monitoring and evaluation, although this aspect of their work is not yet securely embedded. The role of the governors in holding the school to account is improving, although not yet good, and is beginning to help in moving the school forward. The school is ensuring

that pupils recognize and experience the diversity of other cultures. Community cohesion is promoted well. Pupils gain good knowledge of the diversity of society by reaching out to the local community as well as bringing them into the school, for example, through links with another local school attended by pupils from other cultures. In the wider world, initial international links with schools in Spanish-speaking countries have been established which support pupils' learning of Spanish well.

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	3
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	3
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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	3
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**

7 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Hilltop Junior School, Wickford, SS11 8LT

This letter is to thank you for your help when we visited your school recently. Special thanks go to those of you who gave up some of your lunchtime to talk to us. We really enjoyed our time with you. We were impressed by the bright displays in the corridors and in classrooms and your new learning walls. You clearly enjoy being at school and most of you behave well.

We think you go to a lovely school where you are able to do lots of activities, including sports and games. You told us how safe you feel and we were pleased to see how much you know about keeping healthy. We saw lots of you trying hard in lessons and paying good attention to your teachers. We thought you were very polite and we were impressed at the way many of you talked to us.

Your headteacher and all the teachers work hard to make sure they know a lot about the school and about you. We have seen that you are starting to do better in reading, writing, mathematics and science, although we think you could do even better in writing and mathematics. We have asked your headteacher to do some things to help you improve so that all of you make better progress in all subjects.

- Help you become more actively involved in your own learning so that you make much faster progress, especially in writing and mathematics.
- Make sure that the senior teachers come and watch you learning regularly so that they can check on things that need to get even better.

Carry on enjoying your school and trying your best.

Best wishes

Nichola Perry

Lead inspector