

Hexton Junior Mixed and Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117112
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	338948
Inspection dates	29–30 September 2009
Reporting inspector	Paul Canham

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	39
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Simon Gee
Headteacher	Jeni Houghton
Date of previous school inspection	10–11 January 2007
School address	Hexton Hitchin Hertfordshire SG5 3JL
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector. The inspector visited five lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and a representative group of pupils. The inspector also talked with pupils during lessons. He observed the school's work, and looked at school documentation, assessment, curriculum, and monitoring information, and the school's development planning. The inspector also scrutinised pupils' work and 26 parental questionnaires.

The inspector reviewed many aspects of the school's work. He looked in detail at the following:

- the extent to which the school is tackling variations in learning and is accelerating achievement, particularly for the more able pupils
- how successfully the school promotes pupils' experience and appreciation of cultures and faiths other than their own in this country and beyond
- the influence of the joint leadership team and the governing body on the school's direction and performance.

Information about the school

Almost all the pupils at this very small school are from families of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage age are taught in a mixed-age class along with pupils in Years 1 and 2. Thereafter, all the pupils are in two classes, which contain more than one age group.

The headteacher spends the equivalent of two days each week at the school, sharing her responsibilities with a temporary senior teacher. She is also a headteacher at another local school.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school where pupils progress well. Collective leadership, evident at all levels, has been the key factor in overcoming a dip in standards. The hard work of all staff is evident in the rapid progress now being made by pupils through the school. All staff are highly committed to doing the best for pupils and the school is firmly aimed at sustained improvement. At the very top, determined leadership has provided the driving force to maximise the opportunities for all pupils. Staff and governors have a clear and united vision on raising standards. This is reflected in their accurate evaluation of where the school is at present and of the improvements needed. Consequently, the school is well placed to bring about sustained improvement.

The headteacher's quest for high quality teaching and the promotion of equal opportunities is evident in the continual review of classroom practice, based upon close monitoring and the raising of expectations. Consequently, pupils are progressing well in lessons that are usually interesting and well paced. However, the school is aware of the need to give more able pupils regular opportunities to explain the reasons behind their answers in mathematics and provide more opportunities to write for different purposes in English.

Pupils' strong personal outcomes can be seen in their exceptionally good behaviour, interest and enjoyment of learning. These positive traits are seen in the regular attendance of the large majority of pupils, although the frequent absence of a small proportion of pupils brings the level to average. Clubs, projects and topics are popular and provide pupils with good opportunities to develop their creative and performance skills.

Almost all parents are happy with their children's experiences at the school. They value the welcoming environment and the priority the school gives to pastoral care and guidance. Safeguarding requirements are firmly embedded. Well-informed and sensitive support ensures pupils feel safe in a supportive learning environment, enhanced by warm relationships between staff and pupils. The school recognises the need to work more closely with parents, especially those who do not attend often enough. There is well planned intervention for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The success of this support leads to particularly good progress.

Governors provide a strong strategic approach to evaluating the school's success and supporting its way forward. While the school has good links with local schools and

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the community, it recognises the need to provide pupils with opportunities to appreciate and value people with a variety of backgrounds within other areas of the country and elsewhere in the world. The school also acknowledges the need to include elements of community cohesion when planning for cross-curricular themes and subjects.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve attendance and, by July 2010, meet local authority targets by:
 - strengthening the partnership with parents, especially those whose children do not attend often enough
 - sharing termly attendance information with parents
- Accelerate the progress and raise the achievement of more-able pupils by:
 - giving them more opportunities to explain the reasons behind their answers in mathematics
 - providing more opportunities to write for different purposes in English
- Extend the school's strategy for community cohesion by:
 - creating more opportunities for pupils to appreciate and value people from a wide variety of backgrounds and communities nationally and internationally
 - ensuring that elements are included in planning for cross-curricular themes and subjects.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

There are clear signs the school's determined efforts and well targeted support are making a difference, resulting in pupils' good progress. Pupils' enjoyment in learning, as seen in their enthusiasm and involvement in English and mathematics, are characteristic of lessons and indicate the quickening pace of learning across the school.

Standards, as indicated by the results of national tests and assessments, have improved significantly since 2007 and remained above national averages from year to year at the end of Year 2. The above average proportions of pupils reaching the higher Level 3 in each subject are a strong feature of the sustained improvement. The more rapid rate of progress is also having a marked impact on attainment further up the school. Standards in Year 6 show substantial improvement in the past two years, particularly in reading. Standards are above average overall and the increased proportions of pupils reaching nationally expected levels in both English and mathematics reflect the increased rate of progress through Key Stage 2. However, fewer than the nationally expected proportion of pupils reached the higher Level 5 in 2009 in each of the subjects. The school reached one of its targets for English but was just below its target for mathematics.

Pupils often take great care over their work, as seen in the presentation of written work and imaginative artwork in classrooms and around the school. Pupils work

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exceptionally well in small groups and independently from the teacher. The school's detailed assessment shows that substantially more pupils are making good progress than they did before. During lessons, all groups of pupils make similar rates of progress, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, the school is aware that progress made by more able pupils in writing and mathematics has not been rapid enough.

Pupils say that they like coming to school because they feel very well cared for, safe and enjoy the friendly atmosphere. They also enjoy participating in the wide range of activities. These positive characteristics are reflected in the regular attendance of the large majority of pupils, although attendance is average overall due to the frequent absence of a small proportion of pupils. The pupils' enjoyment of school life is evident in their happy and supportive approach towards each other. These strong characteristics play a crucial part in the school's positive ethos and in helping to make it a safe and welcoming place. Pupils show much confidence and willingly share their ideas and contribute to class discussion.

Pupils' thoughtful behaviour is an outstanding factor in their successful learning and ensures that lessons are very orderly and productive. Pupils are extremely considerate towards each other and are well aware of dangers in and out of school, including when using the internet. The school council provides good opportunities for pupils to represent the views of others, who develop numerical skills and leadership qualities during fund raising events. Pupils also contribute willingly to the wider community through raising funds for local and national charities.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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How effective is the provision?

Strengths of teaching lie in the attention given to individual pupils within mixed-ability classes. These characteristics are enhanced by the collaborative approach taken by teachers and their assistants who work effectively within teams and provide well-targeted support. These features successfully extend pupils' knowledge and skills and involve them fully in their learning. Topics, such as those that link history and English, capture pupils' interest and hold their attention. Consequently, pupils are eager to do well and share their success when getting it right. Pupils are responsive to questioning and work particularly well in groups, as well as on their own. Where teaching is most successful, well chosen tasks, lively questioning, and a good pace ensure that pupils cover a lot of useful ground. While teaching meets pupils' needs well most of the time, some tasks do not take sufficient account of the pupils' different starting points early enough in the lesson to ensure all needs are met. Marking is supportive and usually tells pupils what they need to do to improve.

The curriculum takes good account of the wide range of ability and mixed-age classes. It provides a careful balance between basic skills in literacy and numeracy and the development of pupils' performance and creative skills in subjects such as physical education, design and technology, music and art. Information and communication technology is used well to underpin pupils' work and record it in different ways. The teaching of French adds a further positive dimension. Strong links have also been established with local schools and outside agencies to provide additional subject specialist support and enrichment activities. Consequently, the good range of school activities, including sports clubs and residential trips, is much enjoyed by pupils.

The strong care and attention given to the particular needs of the school and the local community are recognised and valued by parents. One parent's comments illustrated a particular strength: 'It caters for the individual needs of each child and allows them to achieve their potential.' Individualised programmes of support are drawn up for the school's vulnerable pupils, covering a broad range of personal and learning needs. Individual achievement is managed through comprehensive and rigorous tracking of attainment and progress. Evaluations lead to focused intervention, either individually or in small groups, which skilfully reinforce pupils' literacy skills and build confidence. However, the school recognises the need to challenge consistently the more able pupils by giving them more chances to explain the reasons behind their answers in mathematics and additional opportunities to write for different purposes in English.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account:	
The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where	2

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relevant, through partnerships	
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Much has been achieved since the appointment of the headteacher. With strong support from governors and staff, the collective leadership has embedded systems, ensured greater consistency and introduced more challenging targets in all aspects of the school's work. One important outcome is the substantial improvement in attainment. Increased expectations of progress are accelerating achievement for all groups of pupils across the school. Staff and governors have a clear and accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Despite staff changes, the headteacher has successfully galvanised the staff, who share the same determination to move the school forward. The joint headship has enabled staff to successfully draw upon resources, including subject expertise, from a local school.

Governors work closely with the school. They form an integral part of the local community and readily challenge the effectiveness of the school's developments. Regular monitoring visits provide up-to-date information about teaching and achievement. Their strategic involvement is strong and well-embedded structures ensure that policies are systematically reviewed and resources are closely targeted at educational need. Local services and agencies are used particularly well to enhance the well-being of vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Safeguarding requirements are highly prioritised and firmly established.

The needs of the community are well understood and met by providing social events, such as the 'Summer Fete', for local residents, and other activities that draw together members from the local community. The school is also actively engaged in promoting links with local primary and secondary schools to share expertise. The school recognises the need to develop links nationally and internationally. Parents are given good opportunities to give views on the school, and benefit from regular newsletters and access to the school's website.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and	2

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tackles discrimination	
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

The mixed-age class provides a creative learning environment for those children in their Reception Year. The curriculum is under continual review, although the comprehensive planning takes good account of the wide ability range and mixed-age class. From expected starting points, children make good progress in all areas of learning, reaching above average standards by the end of the year. Imaginative and sensitive teaching, some of which involves mixed-age groups, captures the children’s interests. Well-planned, themed topics ensure all areas of learning are covered, with a particular focus on reading, writing and number skills. Support for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and for those who are more vulnerable, is good.

The school makes effective use of the indoor and outside areas which provide a wide range of stimulating activities. Adults give closely-targeted support to both teacher-initiated activities and those which children choose for themselves. Good leadership and management ensure that children’s needs are identified early and welfare arrangements are strong. Children are cherished and nurtured from the very start. As a result, they settle quickly and are eager to learn. Relationships are real strengths. Children listen attentively and chatter happily and confidently about their work.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Almost all parent questionnaires were positive, and many of the written comments expressed considerable satisfaction with the school. These included remarks about their children’s enjoyment of school, the welcoming environment and very caring atmosphere.

A very small minority of parents recorded concerns over several issues, including the

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school's leadership and behaviour. These concerns were not reflected in the very large majority of parents' comments and the inspection found no evidence to support the matters raised.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Hexton Junior Mixed and Infant to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 26 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 39 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	15	60	9	36	1	4	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	18	72	7	28	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	15	60	8	32	1	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	12	48	12	48	1	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	19	76	5	20	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	10	40	14	56	1	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	11	44	13	52	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	7	28	12	48	1	4	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	11	44	11	44	1	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	13	52	10	40	2	8	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	9	36	12	48	1	4	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	13	52	10	40	2	8	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	15	60	9	36	1	4	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

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.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>the following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.



1 October 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Hexton Junior Mixed and Infants School, Hitchin, SG5 3JL

I very much enjoyed my visit to your school and thank you for making me feel so very welcome. This letter is to tell you about some of the things I found while I was with you. Yours is a good school, where staff and governors are working hard to make it even better. I was pleased to hear that you like your school very much. Almost all your parents are happy with the school, too. You behave exceptionally well and get on with each other.

Here are some important things about your school.

- You make good progress in lessons.
- You feel safe and secure in school and enjoy your lessons.
- Those in charge of the school have already made improvements that are helping you to make even faster progress.
- All staff take good care of you, and make sure that you know what to do to keep safe.
- You have a good understanding of what makes for a healthy lifestyle and healthy eating.

This is what your school has been asked to do to make things even better.

- Where attendance is not as good as it should be, work more closely with you and your parents to improve it.
- Make sure teaching challenges all of you at all times in lessons, and especially those of you who are able to learn faster in English and mathematics.
- Help you to understand more about people's backgrounds and communities in other parts of this and other countries.

We wish each one of you every success in your future education.

Yours faithfully

Paul Canham
Lead inspector

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