

High Halstow Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118434
Local Authority	Medway
Inspection number	339218
Inspection dates	30 September –1 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Kevin Hodge

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	179
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Matt Stutely
Headteacher	Pat Sanford
Date of previous school inspection	7 November 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 11 lessons and held meetings with staff, governors and pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at school documents, including monitoring records, and development plan. They also looked at questionnaires from staff and pupils, and 63 from parents.

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

- how well teaching promotes pupils' basic skills, particularly for the most able
- how well pupils achieve in writing and mathematics, particularly boys
- how well pupils' personal development is promoted, particularly their knowledge of others' beliefs and backgrounds
- how senior leaders use self-evaluation to help guide and promote improvement.

Information about the school

The school is smaller than an average size primary school. It has grown in size since the last inspection. The school has a higher than average number of pupils leaving or joining the school other than at the normal times in the school year. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs/and or disabilities is slightly below average. The majority of these pupils have communication, language and behaviour difficulties. The school has awards for promoting pupils' healthy living and active lifestyles. There is a privately managed nursery sited within the school grounds.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Pupils enjoy coming to this satisfactory and improving school. They point to the friendly approach of staff and classmates. One comment that 'school is a good place to see your friends and have fun while learning' was typical. Things have not all been plain sailing during the recent past, with staff changes sometimes causing disruption and slowing the pace of improvement. However, some dips in recent results are being addressed so that pupils achieve satisfactorily and the standards pupils reach by Year 6 are now around the national average. They are lower in writing, where fewer pupils than average achieved the higher level. There is a rising profile of achievement and standards by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and more recently in Years 1 and 2. Progress in Years 3 to 6 is sometimes slower, particularly for boys. Pupils' writing skills are improving, but at a slower rate for the most able, who are not always stretched in their learning. Pupils' number handling skills, although accurate, are not applied confidently enough in solving 'real life' mathematical problems. Pupils' good attitudes, fostered by good levels of social and moral development, help them approach work with some enthusiasm, particularly in reading, physical education, computer-based work and artistic activities.

Teaching is typically satisfactory. The school is at an early stage of using information about pupils' progress to fine-tune teachers' planning consistently and to accelerate learning further. Occasionally, staff do not let pupils get on quickly enough, challenge the most able pupils sufficiently, or use technology to the best advantage in motivating pupils. The older pupils use targets to guide their efforts, but this practice is not extended to all classes. There is more to be done within the curriculum to build on the interesting topics and approaches that can be seen in some classes, so that pupils are given consistently purposeful and challenging activities. There is a good range of additional out of class activities such as the 'green team', which help broaden pupils' horizons, raise activity levels and develop an awareness of the environment.

The school's positive reputation in the community is confirmed by most parents, although a small minority voiced concern about the progress their children make and wanted more information on this. The staff and governors work together well as a team and newer members of staff are settling well to their roles. There is a shared goal for the school to become more effective, particularly in terms of pupils' achievement. This has been successful to some extent, although improvement since the last inspection has not been quick enough. This is partly due to actions and priorities not always being evaluated, monitored or implemented rigorously. Nevertheless, the school is now better placed to build on its strengths as new routines are beginning to take effect. It has a satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' confidence and ability in writing and mathematics in Years 3 to 6 this coming year by:
- challenging those who are more able so they achieve higher levels in their written work
- developing more enticing opportunities for boys to write in a range of styles and subjects to boost their confidence
- ensuring pupils use and apply their number skills in more 'real life' problem solving activities.
- Raise the quality and pace of pupils' learning in the coming year by:
- involving the children more in assessing their own learning
- providing targets for all pupils to aim for
- helping parents to become more informed about how they can aid their children's learning at school and home.
- Improve the rigour and quality of leadership and management by:
- making better use of information on pupils' progress to accurately plan work for all abilities
- ensuring checks on teaching focus upon those aspects that accelerate pupils' progress the most
- involve all staff, parents and governors in seeking ways of raising pupils' achievement and standards.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Pupils reach broadly average standards in their academic work, aided to some extent by their generally good behaviour, which helps them to achieve satisfactorily. Children start school in Reception with a level of skills expected at this age, although consistently lower in communication and language skills. Children's secure start in the Early Years Foundation Stage, particularly in their social and emotional development, aids their settled transfer into Year 1. The school's sound promotion of pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development results in happy pupils who like attending school. Pupils generally enjoy activities in class, although this, along with their behaviour, sometimes dips. This is usually because they sit for too long before getting involved in their work. Group work is not planned carefully enough to ensure that more able pupils are challenged sufficiently in their thinking and so their progress slows. During the inspection pupils in Years 6 enjoyed investigating different styles of books, while pupils in Year 1 enjoyed raising their activity and skill levels when kicking, throwing and catching balls in a physical education lesson. While pupils' English skills have improved this year, writing is the weaker element, with boys still lagging a little behind the girls in their skills and enthusiasm to write. However, their current work shows that the gap is slowly closing. The very few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve as well as others as they are well supported and integrate with others happily. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress in line with their classmates. Their

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emotional needs are catered for particularly well.

The school environment is safe. Staff ensure each pupil has a voice and can turn to 'busy buddy' classmates, the SMILE club or a member of staff with any concerns. This gives them the confidence to work together with minimum fuss. After-school clubs such as chess, sports and the 'green team' help foster the pupils' social skills, activity levels and environmental awareness. Pupils say 'school is great' and 'a happy place', but this enthusiasm is not consistently resulting in better academic achievement. Pupils know much about healthy eating options and the benefits of choosing healthy foods, but confide that it is sometimes hard!

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

Teaching promotes activities which are taught with enthusiasm. There are too many times, however, when teachers do not let pupils get down to work quickly enough or involve them in identifying what they need to do to improve; this slows their progress. Marking of pupils' work, however, is of good quality and shows pupils how to improve their work. Most pupils take an active part within lessons, sensitively supported by adult

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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helpers. However, some lose interest if the pace of lessons is too slow. Pupils like the school's approach to planning the curriculum through topics, although they commented about it in appreciative rather than glowing terms. This approach, although not new, is taking time to really accelerate pupils' learning and doesn't always extend the talents of more able pupils. Daily '5 a day' number activities are an innovative and increasingly effective way of promoting pupils' mathematical skills. The curriculum has been more successful at enthusing boys, but there is still some fine-tuning to do to make it more enticing for them. Pupils also benefit from trips away from school, which they enjoy. Many visitors, including members of local religious groups, and out of school clubs, such as Saturday university held at the local secondary school, help extend class-based activities. The school maintains a culture of good care and guidance so that those who are having emotional or behavioural difficulties are supported well. Parents and pupils appreciate this.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Since the last inspection, the school has had some success in raising pupils' attainment, although this has been uneven between subjects and between boys and girls. Recent appointments and changes to senior team structures are beginning to have a greater impact. The school's self-evaluation is only satisfactory as the monitoring of the school's performance lacks rigour. The school development plan, while covering a good range of aspects, does not always pinpoint the most telling areas to tackle or remedy. As a result, while some improvements are being made, with reading as a notable example, pupils' progress in other subjects has varied and been slower to improve. The school's desire to build capacity to remedy weaknesses is helped by new curriculum teams who share the responsibility for bringing about improvements. The monitoring of teaching is not always focused directly on its outcomes by way of pupils' learning and progress. The school satisfactorily ensures that pupils have equal access and opportunity to learn and enjoy their time at school. There are good safeguarding procedures with policies and arrangements securely in place and understood by staff and governors. The school's promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory. A plan and clear actions are in place for promoting pupils' understanding from a local perspective. The need to build upon national and global links is well understood by the school. Links with other schools are fostered well to broaden pupils' horizons.

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Governors support the school satisfactorily, led by an able and enthusiastic chair. They have a clear overview of the school's direction and current priorities, but their role as a critical friend has not fully resulted in the good school to which they are clearly seeking to aspire. This is partly due to the more limited focus upon pupils' academic progress than on broader aspects such as buildings and personnel.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
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	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enjoy their new school, making friends and readily talking about what they want to do. Although there have been staff changes, children are working securely at average levels when they enter Year 1 and some reach higher levels. They do particularly well in improving their levels of speech and communication, due to the good focus on developing language skills. For example, children really enjoyed tasting different fruits and vegetables, blindfolded, but were secretly glad the teaching assistant had the first turn! This produced lots of conversation and excitement, but was not fully capitalised upon by staff in other activities as they did not fully extend or build upon the learning that had just taken place. Nearly all children behave well and willingly share resources. Confident teaching, aided by well-briefed assistants, makes children feel at home and ensures that they make satisfactory progress. Staff are effective at assessing children's personal needs and in turn provide good level of care and welfare, which helps to settle new arrivals and quickly develop their confidence. Children have access to an outdoor area which is quite extensive. They enjoy using it, particularly when exploring the wood trail or using the climbing frame, but activities do not always build upon the learning taking place in the classroom. The school establishes good links with

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parents and the onsite nursery very quickly and this ensures children have a smooth start to school.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

About 50% of parents completed questionnaires. The vast majority of parents indicated they were happy with the school and appreciated the school's efforts. Of those that commented, there was a broad balance of positive and negative views. Those favourable comments pointed to the good transition arrangements between classes, the 'village family atmosphere' and the good progress their children make. On the other hand, just over half those who responded with a comment pointed to concerns over pupils' progress, particularly in preparing for selection tests, the lack of information on progress and the amount of homework. The inspection found that some pupils do not always make consistently good progress and there is scope for this to improve, particularly for some more able pupils and for some boys. The school has made attempts to give parents more information about levels of pupils' attainment, but acknowledges that more could be shared regularly about pupils' progress over time. The school's approach to setting homework seemed to be similar to that followed by many schools.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at High Halstow 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 63 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 179 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	30	48	32	51	1	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	37	59	25	40	1	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	14	22	37	59	9	14	2	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	13	20	31	50	13	20	1	2
The teaching is good at this school	14	22	40	64	2	3	1	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	19	30	35	56	6	10	3	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	23	37	37	59	1	2	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)	28	44	24	38	4	6	2	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	9	14	37	59	13	21	1	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	16	25	34	54	3	5	3	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	7	11	37	59	7	11	3	5
The school is led and managed effectively	18	29	38	60	2	3	2	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	18	29	41	65	4	6	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 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

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

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>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. 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 pupil's 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.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



2 October 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of High Halstow Primary School, Rochester ME3 8TF

I am writing to let you know about the findings from the inspection we carried out recently. The vast majority of your parents and carers like what goes on in school, but a small number would like it to be even better. We think yours is a satisfactory school that can improve.

Here are some of the things we found out:

- The youngest children settle in well and enjoy their new school.
- Most of you try hard and make satisfactory progress. Some of you, such as the boys and those capable of doing harder work, could do a bit better at times.
- Your behaviour is good most of the time.
- You are good at keeping active at playtimes, during lessons and in your after-school clubs.
- The range of things you get to do is about average, but your 'eco' school awards and 'green team' sound exciting.
- The school helps those of you who sometimes feel a bit sad or find work difficult, and cares for everyone well.
- Your 'SMILE club', 'busy buddies' and school council help to make the school run smoothly.
- The teaching is sometimes good, but the teachers need to let you get on with work more quickly and stretch your thinking more....so watch out!

We have asked the school to do three things to help it improve further:

- give those of you in Years 3 to 6 more help with your writing and mathematics
- help staff find more ways of ensuring you learn better and faster
- make sure senior staff and governors look really closely at how they keep a check on what's going on and how they can improve the school even more.

You can help your teachers by keeping up your good behaviour all through lessons and around the school.

Yours faithfully

Kevin Hodge

Lead inspector

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