

High Firs Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118541
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	339237
Inspection dates	7–8 December 2009
Reporting inspector	Mike Capper

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	209
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tony Phipps
Headteacher	Colin Turtle
Date of previous school inspection	9 September 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 14 lessons or parts of lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at teachers' planning, the school's assessment information, safeguarding procedures and samples of pupils' work. They analysed questionnaires from staff and pupils, as well as 54 from parents and carers.

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

- how well teaching meets differing needs to ensure that progress is consistent, especially in mathematics and for the most able
- how effectively leaders monitor provision to check that all pupils are doing well enough
- pupils' enjoyment of school and how well they take responsibility
- the impact of staff absence on the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Information about the school

The majority of pupils come to this average sized school from the local community. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average. Most, but not all, of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties. Nearly all pupils are from White British backgrounds.

The school has been affected by a high level of staff absence over the last 18 months due to illness. The Early Years Foundation Stage consists of one reception class. At the time of the inspection, the Reception year teacher was away due to long term illness and the class was being taken by a temporary teacher.

The school has the Activemark award for its work in physical education.

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

This satisfactory school supports pupils' personal development well. Pupils are polite and courteous and behave well. They very keenly take responsibility through the school council and by being 'buddies' to their friends at playtimes.

The school is going through a period of significant turbulence due to staff absence and resignation. Staffing issues are being managed appropriately by leaders who are taking the correct actions to ensure that pupils' learning is not significantly affected.

Consequently, pupils' achievement remains satisfactory despite these problems. Children make a steady start in the Early Years Foundation Stage where teaching assistants are doing a sterling job in supporting temporary teachers so that continuity of provision is largely maintained. In the rest of the school, pupils' progress in lessons, whilst uneven, is satisfactory and attainment is broadly average by the end of Year 6. There is an improving picture to attainment at the end of Year 2. This is beginning to filter through to national test results at the end of Year 6 and these rose in English and science in 2009, although the school has been less successful at reversing a falling trend in mathematics. This is because differing needs are not always met well enough in these lessons.

There is some good teaching in the school, but much of it is satisfactory. Teachers are enthusiastic and hard working. They use information and communication technology (ICT) well to bring subjects alive and they manage pupils' behaviour effectively. Leaders know that inconsistency in the match of work to all pupils' needs, especially for the most able, is the main factor stopping more teaching from being good. In addition, in satisfactory lessons the pace sometimes drops, for example when the introduction keeps pupils waiting on the carpet too long. Pupils would like more information about how well they are doing. Teachers give pupils targets to aim for and some can talk about what these are, but the marking of work, including homework, to help them understand how to improve is not consistent across the school.

The school takes good care of its pupils. Consequently, most pupils feel very secure. They are particularly appreciative of the good range of clubs and visits offered by the school, for example pupils talk very positively about the choir and their successes in sporting competitions such as bench ball and football. Pupils develop a good understanding of the importance of staying healthy. They participate keenly in sports and are very conscientious about eating healthily at playtimes.

Leaders are moving the school forward and are doing the right things to improve attainment further. There are satisfactory systems for evaluating school effectiveness, with the use of data to identify pupils who are not doing well enough being a particularly

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strong feature. However, monitoring by leaders at all levels does not focus rigorously enough on whether initiatives are being applied consistently by all staff and are having the desired effect. For example, in the last year the school has purchased new workbooks to support mathematics teaching but the impact and use of these has not been checked closely enough by leaders. Subject leaders are keen but their action planning does not identify clearly how attainment will be raised even more quickly. Nevertheless, the positive impact of the work of leaders can be seen in the improved attainment at the end of Year 2 and the generally improving picture in the rest of the school, demonstrating that there is a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

Leaders understand the importance of rebuilding the partnership between home and school which has become less strong very recently due to parental concerns over staffing problems. They have some good ideas about how they will achieve this, for example by introducing a forum for parents to share their views openly with the school. Leaders know that they need to make a start to this straight away.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Move teaching from satisfactory to good by:
 - ensuring that teaching consistently provides the right level of challenge for all, especially in mathematics and for the more able
 - ensuring that marking is used consistently across the school to help pupils understand how to improve
 - ensuring that the pace of learning in lessons is always quick enough, especially when pupils sit together at the start of lessons.
- Strengthen the monitoring of provision by leaders at all levels so that action planning is focused more closely on raising standards and leaders can be confident that initiatives are having the desired effect on pupils' learning and are being applied consistently.
- Work with parents to rebuild the partnership between home and school.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Pupils' thorough enjoyment of school can be seen in their above average rates of attendance. Pupils make largely satisfactory progress in lessons although they are very enthusiastic about their work, especially when the learning is brought alive by the teacher. This was seen to good effect in a history lesson, where everyone dressed up as Victorians, and pupils made good progress because they were motivated and engaged. In lessons where progress is no better than satisfactory, pupils' progress slows because work is too easy or too difficult for some of them, for example a group of pupils who were learning about ordering numbers up to a million struggled because too many concepts were introduced at once. Where learning is best, it is made purposeful. In a good English lesson, pupils learnt quickly using their ICT skills to research climate change and to improve their poetry writing. Although pupils usually show good attitudes

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towards learning, they do not always take enough care with their work, for example in Year 6 the written work of pupils in English and science is not always good enough and does not reflect their ability.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are given sound support in lessons and make satisfactory progress. They make the best progress when working with teachers or teaching assistants outside of lessons; at these times, work is generally closely matched to need.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils have a good understanding of what is meant by right and wrong. They make posters to discourage bullying and they help to write class rules. Pupils contribute well to the community by taking part in town events and raising funds for local charities. For example, pupils distribute harvest goods to a local homeless centre. Pupils show good confidence and self-esteem. They respect the views of others. They know who to turn to if they have a worry and say that occasional 'falling out' is managed well.

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	2
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	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

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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There are good features to teaching throughout the school. Teachers work hard to make learning enjoyable and make good use of interactive whiteboards to introduce new skills, for example when introducing two-dimensional shapes. Teaching assistants give good support to small groups of pupils outside of lessons. Teachers plan carefully and the curriculum soundly promotes basic skills, but there are times when work is not pitched at the right level for all pupils.

The school successfully meets the pastoral needs of pupils. There are good procedures to promote good attendance and behaviour and a breakfast club gives pupils a healthy start to the day. The school is diligent in supporting vulnerable children such as those in care. Leaders have appointed a teaching assistant with specific responsibility for helping these children and this has a positive effect on their learning.

Some work has been done on linking subjects together, but there are missed opportunities to use basic skills in different subjects. In contrast, the ICT suite is used well to support learning in literacy and numeracy lessons. A good range of clubs in sport and the arts promote creativity and physical development well. Activities such as a recent Multi-Cultural Week are greatly enjoyed by pupils. There is a good partnership with other schools and groups and this helps to extend the curriculum. For example, the teaching of French is supported by a local grammar school.

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?

Senior leaders have established a clear vision for school development that is shared by most teachers and governors. Together, they are identifying the right priorities and they are driving improvement satisfactorily despite the distraction of tackling staffing issues. There have been some helpful initiatives over the last three years, such as a sharpening of assessment procedures in Key Stage 1. Governors are supportive and are beginning to do more to find out things for themselves so that they can provide more rigorous challenge. There are good safeguarding procedures. Members of staff are vigilant in identifying and responding to any potential dangers that pupils may encounter.

The school promotes equality satisfactorily. Leaders are doing the right things to ensure that progress is more even across the school. Discrimination is tackled very vigorously and pupils quickly learn to respect different beliefs. The school makes a good contribution to community cohesion and leaders ensure that pupils develop a good understanding of the world beyond High Firs, including life in multicultural Britain. To

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strengthen provision in this area further, leaders are now rightly looking at how they can develop links with a school or community in a different part of the world.

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	2
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make satisfactory progress in the Reception class. In the absence of the regular teacher, leaders are doing the right things to ensure that children's learning is not impaired. Adults ensure that children are well cared for and this means that there is a happy atmosphere in lessons. Children cooperate well and work together sensibly.

Children's attainment on starting school varies significantly from year to year. In the current year, most are working at, or above, the expected levels for their age and they are on track to reach above average attainment by the end of the year. Adults support differing needs well for much of the time, but there are occasions when learning is not moved on quickly enough especially when children are working independently. On occasions, there is a lack of challenge for the most able and this also slows learning. There is a good focus on teaching children to be independent and this is largely effective, with children making sensible choices about where they are going to work at different times during the day. The outdoor area is used to good effect for some lessons, for example when children search for different addresses as they deliver Christmas letters, but its use is not fully integrated into all areas of learning.

Provision is satisfactorily led and managed. Leaders have a clear understanding of where they need to do to improve provision, but the pace of change has been affected by a lack of continuity due to staff absence.

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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

A large majority of the parents who returned questionnaires are happy with the work of the school and feel that the needs of their children are met well. These views are summed up by comments such as, 'My child loves going to school every day,' and, 'This is a wonderful school.' A small minority are less happy, with virtually all concerns centring on staff absence due to illness, the imminent departure of two teachers at the end of the autumn term, and the way that leaders have responded to these issues. Inspectors found that these matters have been handled appropriately by the school and leaders have done all that could be reasonably expected to keep parents informed about staffing issues during this period of transition. Some also raised concerns about the way that the school tackles unacceptable behaviour. None was seen during the inspection. The school has rigorous procedures to deal with very occasional bullying and bad behaviour in school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at High Firs 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 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 54 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 209 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	31	57	21	39	1	2	1	2
The school keeps my child safe	30	56	22	41	2	4	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	15	28	30	56	6	11	1	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	14	26	27	50	7	13	2	4
The teaching is good at this school	18	33	25	46	7	13	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	18	33	28	52	3	6	1	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	14	26	39	72	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)	11	20	32	59	4	7	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	15	28	29	54	7	13	1	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	16	30	20	37	11	20	5	8
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	3	17	30	56	12	22	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	12	22	23	43	11	20	4	7
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	16	30	27	50	8	15	3	6

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.



9 December 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of High Firs Primary School, Swanley BR8 8NR

Thank you for welcoming us to your school and completing the questionnaire ' your comments were very helpful. At the moment, your school is providing a satisfactory education. This means that we found some good things in the school but also some things that need improving.

Some of the things we found out about your school

- Satisfactory teaching means that you make steady progress as you move through the school. Progress is slightly slower in mathematics than in other subjects.
- You play and work together happily in the Reception class. It is lovely to see so many smiling faces as you come into school in the morning!
- Your behaviour is good and you get on well together. You make a good contribution to the life of the school; the school council does a good job, as do the 'buddies' and other helpers.
- All adults in school are kind and caring and they give suitable help to those of you who find work difficult.
- There are many interesting things to do outside lessons and some of these help you develop a good understanding of how to stay safe and healthy.
- The headteacher, teachers and governors know what needs improving and are taking the right steps to move things forward more quickly.

What we have asked your school to do now

- Check how well the school is doing more carefully so that it can improve more quickly.
- Improve teaching by making sure that your work is not too hard or too easy for you, making sure that you do not sit on the carpet for too long at the start of lessons and using marking to tell you how well you are doing and how you can improve more clearly.
- Work with parents and carers more closely so that everyone is pulling in the same direction.

We wish you all well for the future. You can help your teachers by trying to make sure you always do your best work all of the time. We hope that those of you in Year 2 and

Year 6 give your new teachers a great welcome when they start in January.

Yours sincerely

Mike Capper

Lead inspector

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