

Halfway Houses Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118866
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	339312
Inspection dates	12–13 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Olson Davis

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	512
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	G Philpott
Headteacher	L Lawrence (Advisory Headteacher)
Date of previous school inspection	6 March 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 20 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, looked at progress tracking data, improvement planning, the quality of monitoring, safeguarding procedures, minutes of the governing body meetings and curriculum planning documents.

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

- the progress that pupils make, particularly at Key Stage 2, and how this relates to the quality of teaching
- the impact of the school's strategies to improve the quality of teaching and the curriculum
- the impact that leaders, managers and governors are having on provision and outcomes for pupils
- the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Information about the school

This large primary school serves an area recognised as one of significant social and economic disadvantage. Most pupils are of White British heritage. There are no pupils at the early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above the national average. The range of needs includes pupils with moderate learning difficulties and pupils with behavioural difficulties. Since the last inspection there has been a local authority reorganisation of schools on the Isle of Sheppey. The school now takes pupils from age four to eleven when formerly it took pupils from age four to nine. This is the first year in which there is a Year 6 group in the school. Partly as a result of this expansion and some staff turnover, seven new teachers have joined the staff this year. The school has had to use temporary classrooms to accommodate the growing numbers of pupils. The previous headteacher retired at the end of the last term following a period of absence. The school is being led by an advisory headteacher until a substantive headteacher is appointed.

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

The school has been through a period of turbulence since its last inspection which has adversely affected its development. Furthermore, governors are uncertain whether the school will continue on its current site or move to a bigger site and this has made it difficult for them to plan effectively for the growing numbers of pupils. Their wise decision to re-advertise in order to appoint a high-calibre substantive headteacher has also added to the uncertainty for parents and staff. Nonetheless, under the determined leadership of the advisory headteacher and the deputy headteacher, there is a renewed sense of common purpose among staff which is firmly fixed on improving provision and raising standards. The school has a satisfactory capacity for continuous improvement. Although there have been improvements and some strengths have been maintained, there is more to do to ensure the full impact of new structures and initiatives on raising standards. Subject leaders offer sound support and advice to colleagues throughout the school. Several of them are new to their roles. Senior leaders rightly recognise the need to strengthen the influence of subject leaders on monitoring and improving achievement levels, and the quality of teaching and learning within their areas of responsibility. Governors are supportive of the school, particularly in these difficult times. They recognise that their role in monitoring the school's work is not developed sufficiently for them to fully hold it to account for the progress made by pupils.

Children make a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. This good progress generally continues in Key Stage 1 so that pupils achieve average standards at the end of Year 2. Attainment is broadly average at the end of Year 6 because pupils make no better than satisfactory progress from the results obtained at the end of Year 2. As a result, achievement overall is satisfactory for boys and girls. More remains to be done to raise attainment further, particularly in writing. Here, attainment lags behind other areas because more able pupils are not set sufficiently challenging work. In addition, the quality of teaching varies across the school and within year groups. It tends to be strongest in the younger age groups. Teachers give clear explanations and encourage pupils to discuss their work. As a result, pupils are keen to participate in lessons. However, in too many lessons, teachers do not make effective enough use of assessment information to stretch the more able pupils and their learning is not always moved on swiftly enough.

The school has a warm, welcoming ethos and works hard to include all pupils. The quality of care given to pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable is good and, as a result, they feel well supported and secure.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

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- Raise attainment in writing at Key Stage 2, particularly for the more able pupils.
- Improve the quality of teaching from satisfactory to good or better by:
 - ensuring that work matches pupils' individual needs more consistently, particularly for the more able
 - consistently providing more precise feedback for pupils about their learning and how they can improve.
- Develop the role of subject leaders so they can have more influence over the quality of teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility.
- Strengthen the monitoring and evaluating role of governors so that they can more fully hold the school accountable for the progress made by different groups of pupils.

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

Achievement is satisfactory. Attainment in the current Year 6 is broadly average. This represents satisfactory progress overall in the light of pupils' starting points at the end of Year 2. Children make uneven progress across the school because the quality of teaching is inconsistent, as observed by inspectors and senior leaders. The shortcomings in the use of assessment information result in more able pupils not being challenged sufficiently and so not doing as well as they should, particularly in writing at Key Stage 2. A scrutiny of pupils' books showed that more able pupils are often given writing tasks at the same level of difficulty as the rest of the class. There is no significant variation in the learning and progress of minority ethnic pupils. The overall achievement of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is satisfactory. Those pupils with more severe levels of need do better because of the high levels of effective support they receive. The school is rightly working on improving provision for pupils with less severe needs to quicken the progress they make.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Assemblies successfully reinforce the spiritual, moral and social values of the school community. Pupils are polite and friendly to visitors. Despite a sound breadth of cultural activities in art, music and drama, current provision does not do enough to help prepare pupils for life in a culturally and ethnically diverse society. Pupils say that they feel safe because adults are kind and are ready to help if things go wrong. Pupils report that there can sometimes be bullying, but incidents are promptly dealt with by teachers now that anti-bullying has been given a higher profile in school. Behaviour is satisfactory. Pupils generally behave well in class because teachers are skilled in managing behaviour and help pupils to get on well with each other. Behaviour of older pupils can be boisterous on the playground especially when there is a lack of interesting activities to take part in. Pupils participate enthusiastically in physical education lessons and in a range of sporting activities, showing a strong awareness of the benefits of exercise. However, the snacks that some pupils eat at lunchtimes do not reflect a strong commitment to healthy eating. Pupils develop a sense of social responsibility by raising money for charities at home and abroad. They take their responsibilities seriously. For example, the recently

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constituted school council is playing an active part in selecting the new headteacher. Through the eco-council and gardening club pupils develop insights into environmental issues. Pupils' sound basic skills prepare them satisfactorily for the next stage of their education. Attendance has improved and is now broadly in line with the national average.

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	3
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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?

The quality of teaching varies across the school and within year groups but tends to be strongest in the younger age groups. Relationships are good and teachers manage pupils' behaviour well. As a result, classrooms are calm and supportive environments in which pupils can develop. Pupils feel involved in their learning because they are given a clear idea of what they are expected to learn and achieve by the end of each lesson. Teaching assistants are used satisfactorily to support pupils who find learning difficult, which has a positive impact on their enjoyment and learning. However, in some lessons, assessment is not used effectively to plan the next steps in learning. This means that teachers sometimes expect too little of pupils who find the work lacks challenge,

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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particularly in writing. School leaders have improved how teachers mark the pupils' work. There are examples of effective marking which have helped pupils to improve their work and are contributing to secure improvements in pupils' progress. However, these improvements are not consistent across the school.

The curriculum is broad, balanced and enriched by well-planned links between subjects which makes learning more interesting and meaningful for pupils. Pupils enjoy the opportunities to do topic work which encourages their skills as independent learners. They have well-structured opportunities to develop and practise their information and communication technology skills. Curriculum planning is improving but school leaders have accurately identified the need for it to meet the needs of individuals and groups more closely and to prepare pupils more fully for life in a multi-ethnic society. There is a satisfactory programme to support pupils' personal, social and emotional development which is having a positive impact on behaviour and increasing pupils' sense of social responsibility. Through it pupils are learning to stay safe and lead healthy lives.

The quality of care, guidance and support provided by the school is satisfactory. Procedures for ensuring pupils' welfare and safety are securely in place and are followed well by adults. Careful checks are made of adults working with pupils. Sound links with outside agencies, such as the behaviour support team, benefit vulnerable pupils and those who need additional help.

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	3

How effective are leadership and management?

The advisory headteacher has very quickly acquired an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for development. There are clear plans for improvement and these are set to be developed further as the school takes part in the 'ensuring success' programme with the local authority. The roles and responsibilities of managers are now clearer and, as a result, there is a more unified drive to raise standards and improve the quality of provision. Although the regular monitoring of teaching has led to some improvements, it has not yet succeeded in removing inconsistencies in teaching. Self-evaluation is satisfactory but subject leaders are not yet sufficiently involved in evaluating the school's work. For example, their role in monitoring the quality of teaching and working alongside colleagues is underdeveloped. This means that they are not fully aware of the strengths of teaching and those aspects that need improving within their particular subject areas across the school.

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Governors are supportive but have not always been well enough informed about the school's overall effectiveness, although this situation is improving. They carry out their statutory duties and ensure that all safeguarding requirements are met. They recognise the need to strengthen their monitoring role so that they can more fully hold the school to account for the progress made by pupils. The school promotes equality of opportunity satisfactorily, although at times it does not give high enough priority to provision for more able pupils. The school has appropriate plans for promoting community cohesion. It has not evaluated or developed this area widely as the school has focused strongly on local needs during its reorganisation.

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	3
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

Attainment on entry varies from year to year. Most children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage below, and some well below, typical expectations in almost all areas for their age. Speech and language are particularly weak. Children are well cared for and feel safe in their environment. As a result, they settle quickly. Children say they enjoy their activities and show very positive attitudes to their learning. Consequently, most children behave well for their age. Many could be seen laughing and having fun in a rocket ship imagining what happened next in a class story or enjoying the challenge of body-boarding in the outdoor area. Because teaching and the leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage are good most pupils' needs are quickly identified and appropriate support put in place for those pupils who need help. Parents appreciate the efforts made by the school to ensure that the needs of individual children who require help are well met. By the end of Reception, most children have

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made good progress towards the goals expected for their age in all areas of learning except reading and writing where attainment is well below average. However, the school is well aware of the need to raise attainment in these areas and to accelerate the progress of the most able pupils. Plans are already in place to provide children with an extended range of activities and opportunities to write and develop their skills in linking letters and sounds. The balance of child-initiated and adult-directed activities ensures a very good range of indoor activities. However, the outdoor learning provided does not fully complement this very good indoor range. The school has urgent plans to reinvigorate the outside learning area. Regular and effective assessment, which is shared with parents, helps to support the children's 'learning journey', as do the vibrant and stimulating displays.

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

A very large majority of the parents and carers of pupils at Halfway Houses School are happy with their child's experience. They say that their child enjoys school and they feel that the school keeps their child safe. A few parents raise concerns over the cramped condition of some classrooms and the playgrounds because of the growing numbers of pupils. A very small minority feel that unacceptable behaviour is not dealt with well and insufficient account is taken of their suggestions and concerns. Inspectors found that behaviour in class and around the school is well managed and that the school is working assiduously to improve the behaviour of some pupils on the playground. A similarly small minority feel that the school is not led and managed effectively, partly because of what they consider to be the low profile of school leaders. Inspectors found that the senior leaders of the school provide strong leadership which is rapidly driving improvements in the school. Nonetheless, they agree that in this time of uncertainty the school could do more to reassure parents and carers and address their concerns.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Halfway Houses Primary School 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 181 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 510 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	117	65	60	33	4	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	104	57	75	41	0	0	2	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	59	33	108	60	12	7	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	64	35	99	55	13	7	3	2
The teaching is good at this school	76	42	92	51	11	6	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	65	36	93	51	11	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	72	40	98	54	10	6	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)	62	34	91	50	13	7	4	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	68	38	94	52	10	6	3	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	68	38	83	46	16	9	9	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	46	25	104	57	18	10	2	1
The school is led and managed effectively	49	27	102	56	20	11	6	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	87	48	76	42	12	7	3	2

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.



16 November 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Halfway Houses Primary School, Sheerness ME12 3BE

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited recently. We enjoyed talking to you and listening to what you had to say about your school. We found that your school provides you with a satisfactory education. Here are some of the main things that we found about your school.

- Children in the Reception classes get off to a good start.
- You enjoy school, behave well in lessons and are coming to school more regularly.
- You are making satisfactory progress in your learning. You reach the levels expected for your age but some of you could do better in your writing.
- The adults look after you well, which makes you feel happy and safe.
- You take lots of exercise and know a great deal about healthy living, but some of you don't put what you know into practice as much as you should.
- The new school council represents your views and you all help the school to run smoothly.

We have asked the advisory headteacher, staff and governors to make your school better for you by doing a number of things.

- Help some of you to do better in your writing by giving you harder work.
- Make sure that more lessons are good ones by getting teachers to give you tasks that are just the right level for you and to give you feedback on how you can improve your work. This will help you to make faster progress in your learning.
- Make sure that some of the teachers in charge of subjects visit classrooms more often to see their subjects being taught. This will help them to check that things are going well in their subjects and that you are making good progress.
- Make sure that governors keep a closer eye on how well things are going in school so that you do the best that you can.

You can help by always trying your hardest and doing your best work.

Yours sincerely

Olson Davis

Lead inspector

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