

Hempstead Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118423
Local Authority	Medway
Inspection number	312934
Inspection dates	12 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Peter Sudworth

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	339
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Cave
Headteacher	Mr David Bignell
Date of previous school inspection	16–18 May 2005
School address	Birch Grove Hempstead Gillingham, Kent ME7 3SD
Telephone number	01634 371823
Fax number	01634 233328

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school with a particular focus on any significant difference between boys' and girls' attainment and between English and mathematics. The inspector also evaluated the quality of the school's monitoring arrangements of teaching and learning and the effectiveness of systems to support and guide the pupils academically.

Evidence was gathered from discussions with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, the chair of governors, various staff and pupils. Parents' questionnaires were analysed and visits made to lessons. Work samples and a range of documents were examined. Other aspects of the school were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments as given in its self-evaluation were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

Most pupils transfer at age seven from the infant school on the shared site. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is well below the national average. The proportion of pupils who have difficulties in learning the basic skills and/or with emotional problems is about the same as in most schools. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups and those who speak a first language other than English is much lower than usually found. Some pupils from this school attend a privately managed breakfast, after-school and holiday club which meets at the infant school on the same site.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. Thoughtful teaching, well-planned lessons, which meet pupils' needs effectively, combined with an exciting curriculum foster pupils' good achievement. Pupils reach well above average standards in basic skills from their slightly above average level of attainment on entry. Pupils' attainment over time has generally been stronger in mathematics than in English because staff match the work particularly effectively to pupils' needs in this subject and incorporate a good level of challenge. Writing had been a weaker element of English. Staff have addressed this successfully and English results in the last two years have been comparable to those in mathematics. In the main, there is little significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls. Pupils who have initial problems with basic skills make good progress because they have good individual or group support. Challenging targets were met in 2008, despite a fall in results at the higher level from those in 2007 because the group was not quite as able.

Pupils thoroughly enjoy school. They talk very enthusiastically about the things that they do. The duties that they perform promote their sense of responsibility very well. Older pupils, for example, act as play leaders promoting happy and enjoyable playtimes. Some pupils become 'buddies' to prepare the infant children for their admission and look after them when they transfer. Pupils behave extremely well and show much interest in their learning. They particularly look forward to visits locally, including one that is residential. Pupils engage very well in local community events, such as inter-school competitions in which they achieve much success.

Pupils greatly appreciate the excellent opportunities they have to work practically and to learn through first-hand experiences. Through these, they acquire a very good understanding because they use all of their senses. Learning becomes meaningful and so it is remembered. In their study of the Ancient Greeks, Year 6 pupils' good understanding of the period is enhanced by engaging in drama, dressing up in Greek costume of the period and researching and tasting Greek food. Pupils in Year 5 visit Chatham Docks and Museum where they study the Second World War, put on period dress and experience hardships like rationing. A wealth of extra-curricular activities, such as philosophy, choir and seasonal games, support the broad curriculum extremely well. These engage the pupils profitably and extend their interests. The wide range of sports, which pupils are very keen to join, strongly support their own very good healthy lifestyles.

The great majority of parents are very supportive of the school; they are happy about the approachability of staff, their children's enjoyment of school and their good progress. As one parent writes, 'My daughter seems to be thriving in the school environment – she is always eager to get to school and on her return has plenty to tell me about the day's events.'

The school's outstanding programme for personal, social and health education and very good discipline support pupils' very good awareness of how they should conduct themselves when both in and out of school. Pupils very clearly understand how to keep themselves safe and have a very good awareness of 'stranger danger' and road safety. Pupils show much concern for others and raise lots of money for different charities, often through their own ideas. They were soon to sell cakes to raise money

for 'Children in Need'. They have made links with an orphanage in Africa and supported it practically by sending out gifts with one of its aid workers. Pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Pastoral support is outstanding because staff take excellent care of the pupils and give very good attention to health and safety and child protection matters. Pupils, too, take care of one another and have a joint sense of responsibility. As one pupil said, 'We are all in this school together, we are a team, and we won't stand for bullying.' Parents and pupils appreciate the opportunities to meet with a trained counsellor when problems arise that can affect their emotional well-being, such as bereavement or other family circumstances. The system clearly serves a need. One pupil had commented, 'What I like most about my school is Place2be (the counselling service). I got big problems.' The school has very good links with external professional agencies to add further support for pupils with difficulties.

While academic support and guidance have some strong features, such as the good quality of marking which blends praise and suggestions for improvement effectively, there is scope for further development. Tracking of pupils' progress is thorough, but the largely paper system is cumbersome and is not efficient of time. The system currently does not make it easy to plot and analyse the performance of different groups quickly. The school recognises that it needs to move to a more streamlined, computerised system. Pupils' targets to help them develop their learning vary in quality. They are generally better in English than in mathematics. Some targets are too broad. In such cases, it is not possible for staff to gauge pupils' progress or for pupils to assess their own progress.

There is a very good tone in the school. Staff work very well as a team under the headteacher's good leadership, helping to sustain good standards. Year group teams' weekly meetings support the sharing of ideas and assure a common approach to curriculum coverage. In these, staff exploit opportunities very well for pupils to use computers regularly in different subjects. Subject leaders have secure plans for the development of different subjects. They report to the governing body on the progress made in these. However, there is some variability in quality when teaching and learning are monitored because staff do not deploy the full range of possible strategies. For example, while the criteria for judging teaching quality are used effectively for newly qualified staff, they are not always used well enough when judgements are made about more experienced staff. As a result, the monitoring reports are often too brief and are not always helpful enough in improving quality further. Some subject leaders do not seek out pupils' views sufficiently well during subject reviews.

The chair of the governing body leads it well and members take a keen interest in the school. Some governors are regular visitors and their links to different subjects give them a clear focus for involvement. The finance committee meets regularly and so keeps well abreast of financial spending. It is very mindful of future needs.

This is a school that has kept up good standards consistently for a number of years. It has a stable and well-motivated staff who want to do the best for the pupils that they serve. It has a good capacity for even further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Adopt a more efficient system to track pupils' progress and to make it easier to extract information.
- Improve strategies for monitoring teaching and learning to raise the quality even further.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate.	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No



13 November 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Hempstead Junior School, Gillingham, ME7 3SD

Thank you for your warm welcome when I visited your school. I really enjoyed my visit. You attend a good school. You really enjoy school, make good progress and reach a standard above that expected for your age. You take a very keen interest in all that you do. The teachers plan an exciting curriculum for you, which gives you lots of variety. You enjoy the visits that staff arrange for you to places of interest, especially when you can dress up in costume. I looked at many photographs of your recent visits and you certainly look the part as Ancient Greeks and Romans. I know how much you were looking forward to dressing up as book characters during Book Week. I wish I could have visited again to see you.

Your development as young people is outstanding. Your behaviour in school is excellent. You have a very good knowledge of how to keep safe and live healthy lives. I was impressed with your thoughts for others and the money that you raise for different charities. You work very hard at your lessons and show much interest.

I have asked the school to make two improvements. The first is to develop a better system to track your progress as you go through the school. The present paper system is hard work for the teachers to manage. My other request is for staff to improve the ways in which it checks the quality of teaching and learning so that the school continues to improve even more.

I wish you all very well for the future and thank you once again for all your help. I hope you will all lead happy and successful lives.

Yours sincerely

Peter Sudworth,
Lead inspector