



Helsby Hillside Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 111004
Local Authority Cheshire
Inspection number 288826
Inspection date 18 January 2007
Reporting inspector Marguerite McCloy HMI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Bates Lane
School category	Community		Helsby, Frodsham
Age range of pupils	4-11		Cheshire WA6 9LN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01928 722991
Number on roll (school)	208	Fax number	01928 725663
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Nigel Tomlinson
		Headteacher	Mr R Seabrook
Date of previous school inspection	27 January 2003		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

Helsby Hillside is a slightly smaller than average sized primary school situated in the village of Helsby, between Runcorn and Chester. Around 15% of its pupils are from outside the school's immediate catchment area. Pupils come from generally favourable social and economic backgrounds and a much lower than average proportion is eligible for free school meals. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below the national average. The vast majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds and just three speak English as an additional language.

The school achieved the Inclusion Quality Mark and the Activemark awards in 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Helsby Hillside is a good school. Pupils enjoy school, as demonstrated by their excellent behaviour, attitudes and attendance. The headteacher and his staff have the overwhelming support of parents and carers, as reflected in the questionnaires returned to the inspection team. They are very happy with the quality of education and care provided for their children.

Although there are variations in pupils' ability levels on entry to the school, these are generally above average. All groups of pupils make good progress and reach standards which are consistently above or well above the national average by the time they leave the school. One exception to this is in pupils' achievement in writing, especially boys, which is satisfactory overall.

The school has successfully taken action to improve pupils' attainment in science and the presentation of pupils' work since the last inspection. Procedures for checking on the school's performance have been developed to some extent, although they still lack sharpness and rigour.

Helsby Hillside is an inclusive school and the way in which it promotes every child's personal development and well-being is excellent. Pupils are encouraged to become independent learners and are given the skills which will enable them to develop into confident, capable and well rounded individuals.

Teaching is good overall and sometimes outstanding, and the work of skilled teaching assistants has a very good impact on the progress of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Relationships are a strength of the school and pupils are very well cared for and supported in their learning and personal development.

The good quality curriculum is enhanced by a range of enrichment activities for example in music, drama and sport. There is a strong emphasis on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. The school is rightly aiming to review its curriculum plans to forge stronger links between subjects in order to enhance further pupils' enjoyment and learning.

Leadership and management are good and the senior leadership team are working well together to set clear priorities for improvement which are shared by staff and governors. Senior leaders monitor the work of the school and know its strengths and areas for development. However, the school's evaluation and the involvement of governors in this, is not systematic enough to accurately judge the impact of its plans for improvement.

The school provides good value for money and has good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the rigour and sharpness of the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning.
- Improve pupils' achievement in writing, particularly boys.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

A good proportion of pupils enter the school with above average skills and most have attended local pre-school groups. By the end of their Reception year the majority of pupils are meeting the learning goals expected of them and a good proportion are exceeding these. However, there are variations from year to year and the 2006 end of Foundation Stage assessments showed that pupils' skills in personal and social development and communication, language and literacy were below those usually seen in the school at the start of Year 1. The school's planning takes this into account and strategies are being used which are aimed at improving the reading, writing and speaking skills of those pupils. These actions are having a positive impact on pupils' confidence and skills.

Results in the 2006 end of Key Stage 1 assessments show that attainment is above the national average in reading and mathematics and average in writing. This was a little below the targets the school had set for itself, although a good proportion of pupils achieved the higher level in mathematics and reading. Pupils' achievement in writing was less strong. This was a particular issue for boys, whose performance in writing was considerably lower than for girls.

By the end of Key Stage 2, attainment is consistently above average in the national tests for English, mathematics and science and has been for the last five years. In 2006, the number of pupils achieving at the expected level in English was in line with the national average. This was affected by a small number of pupils whose skills in literacy and verbal communication were below average. The overall achievement of that group of pupils was good based on their previous attainment at Key Stage 1. An above average proportion reached the higher level in each of the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. The school has set challenging targets for improved Key Stage 2 achievement in 2007 and work seen during the inspection suggests that the Year 6 pupils are in line to reach those targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are promoted in an outstanding way. They behave exceptionally well in lessons and at other times, showing good manners and respect for adults and each other. They thoroughly enjoy coming to school, so attendance is very high and pupils are keen to learn. A key factor in this is the very high quality of relationships across the school which contribute to its warm and caring ethos and positive learning environment. Incidents of bullying or negative behaviour are extremely rare, and pupils agree that these are dealt with effectively and quickly.

Pupils have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles. They enjoy physical activities and appreciate the healthy food options at lunchtimes. Pupils make a good contribution to the community and participate in local events, for example through performances, sports and charity fundraising. The school's focus on building pupils' self-esteem and

confidence leads to them willingly taking on responsibilities and the school council gives them a voice in the running of the school. Pupils happily talk about other responsibilities they have such as being classroom helpers or older pupils training as playground counsellors.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. The school is effective in raising their awareness of other cultures through the curriculum. Independent skills are well promoted, and pupils are provided with opportunities to develop all the skills they need to do well in the next stage of their education. One pupil expressed the views of many when saying, 'I am proud to have come to this school'. Older pupils express their views in a mature way, for example when explaining that they appreciate being respected by their teacher and referred to as 'young people' who can be trusted to take on important duties.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall with some that is outstanding. Pupils have a good start to their education in the Foundation Stage. They feel safe and secure, are eager to learn, and make good progress. Adults understand the needs of the age range and provide a variety of interesting activities which encourages young learners to be creative and independent. Common features of teaching throughout the school are: good subject knowledge and planning; the promotion of pupils' independent learning skills; good pace and high quality relationships.

Skilled teaching assistants work alongside the teachers to provide effective support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, enabling them to make good progress. The most able pupils are identified and provided with additional challenge.

Teachers give careful consideration to their use of day to day assessment as a result of recent staff training. Appropriate attention is given to the use of effective questioning and observation of pupils. The marking of work is often detailed and well focused, particularly the marking of pupils' writing.

Teachers are beginning to use the school's range of data on pupils' achievement to track progress and enable the identification of more specific targets for improvement. This process is not yet sufficiently rigorous to ensure that pupils are fully aware of how much progress they are making and what they should do to reach their next challenging target.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good curriculum which meets pupils' needs well. Throughout the school there is a strong focus on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very well supported by good

intervention programmes which are enabling all pupils to make good progress. The curriculum is enhanced by a good range of enrichment activities particularly those in music, drama and sport. Pupils benefit from a good programme of educational visits. Their understanding of other cultures is well developed. Pupils' are actively encouraged to develop as independent learners and are confident users of information and communication technology. This is used well by teachers and pupils to support and enrich learning.

The school plans to review its curriculum policies and this is appropriate. At present there are insufficient planned opportunities to make stronger links between a range of subjects. Strong emphasis is given to personal, emotional and citizenship education and this has a significant impact on pupils' extremely positive behaviour and attitudes to learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are very well cared for, guided and supported. Pastoral care is a strength of the school and arrangements for safeguarding pupils are fully in place. The school's emphasis on inclusion is effective in ensuring that all pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the most able, achieve well. Pupils receive very good support when settling into the school and at times of transition, for example in preparation for secondary school.

Academic guidance is generally good, although pupils do not always understand what level they are working at and what they need to do to reach the next level. The school is aware of the need to update its policy on assessment and the process of setting targets.

The school maintains close links with parents and carers so that it knows the pupils and their families very well. Good communication ensures that parents are well informed about the work their children are doing and the progress they make.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher is well supported by two assistant headteachers who are fairly new to their role. This senior leadership team has a clear vision for the development of the school and this contributes to good capacity for improvement. The school has a very positive ethos with a strong sense of teamwork and an emphasis on providing high quality care and support for each and every pupil.

Whilst the school's self-evaluation is accurate in its judgements of key areas of its work, some of these are arrived at through informal checking rather than a clear and systematic analysis. Performance management reviews of staff take place annually, although other opportunities for senior staff to observe lessons and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning have been few. Information about pupils' standards

and achievement contributes to the process of setting targets but the school's monitoring systems do not focus strongly enough on evaluating the impact of measures taken to improve pupils' progress.

Key subject leaders monitor their areas of responsibility by checking teachers' planning and pupils' work and the school plans to develop further the role of middle leaders. Staff development is well organised to make good use of learning networks and partnerships, utilising expertise from within and beyond the school.

Governors fulfil their responsibilities and are kept well informed. They are aware of the school's strengths and areas for improvement and acknowledge that their role in strategic planning and evaluation of the school's work could be developed further.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

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 disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

As you know, I visited your school recently. I enjoyed joining your lessons and was very interested to hear about all the things you do and what you think about your school. I know you will agree that Helsby Hillside is a good school. These are some of the particular strengths I found:

- you reach good and sometimes very good standards in your work
- your behaviour, attitudes and attendance are excellent and you get on well with each other and with the adults
- you really enjoy school and the extra activities and visits it provides for you
- all of the adults in school take good care of you so that you feel safe and happy and because of this you are growing into confident, independent young people
- teaching is good and sometimes outstanding and you also get very good support from teaching assistants
- your parents support you very well and are happy with the way the school looks after each of you and keeps them well informed about what is going on
- the school is well led and managed and there is a very happy and busy atmosphere!

To help make Helsby Hillside an even better school I have asked your headteacher, staff and governors to check its work more sharply and carry on making improvements to your writing skills (especially the boys!). You can help by trying your best, as you always do, and making sure you know exactly what you have to do to improve your work.