

Hartford Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111119
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	288864
Inspection date	22 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Sarah Drake

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 on roll	
School	396
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr M McBride
Headteacher	Mrs C Slater
Date of previous school inspection	27 January 2003
School address	Riddings Lane Hartford Northwich Cheshire CW8 1NA
Telephone number	01606 74164
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This large, popular school serves a settled, village community to the south-west of Northwich. The great majority of pupils are of White British heritage and most of their families live in relatively advantaged circumstances. A very small proportion speaks English as an additional language. Few pupils are eligible to receive free school meals or have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

'Overall an excellent school.' 'If you have children, I suggest you send them here.' Such comments are typical of those made by many parents, who are understandably certain that Hartford is an outstanding school. They particularly appreciate that their children are 'inspired to develop socially and academically' and also that they thoroughly enjoy school. Pupils themselves say they feel happy and safe in school because everyone is friendly and staff notice if they are feeling down. The trained playground buddies are proud to take their turns as friendship bench helpers but say that, actually, their services are seldom needed because everyone gets on so well.

Most children join the school with skills that are above those expected for their age. They make exceptionally good progress in all areas of learning during their Reception year so that they enter Year 1 with well above the nationally expected standards. Throughout Years 1 to 6, pupils continue to make excellent progress in response to high quality teaching that inspires them to want to learn more. Standards at the end of Year 6 are consistently well above average and pupils' achievement is outstanding. Pupils of all abilities achieve exceptionally well throughout the curriculum; for example, they have a good knowledge of history and geography and their high quality artwork, using a range of media including information and communication technology (ICT), greatly enriches the environment.

The school's leaders and staff, including governors, are determined that pupils should receive a very broad educational experience during their time at Hartford. To this end, they regularly review all its provision to ensure that it is relevant to pupils' interests and needs. Subjects are linked together creatively across the excellent curriculum. It is timetabled in such a way that pupils have time to get really stuck into a subject, deepening their knowledge and understanding at the same time as developing a range of academic and personal skills. Teachers plan lessons meticulously, taking account of pupils' previous work, and they explain very clearly to pupils what they expect them to do. They mark work supportively, drawing particular attention to its strong points, but do not consistently add further comments to challenge pupils' thinking or clarify what they need to do next in order to improve.

Pupils flourish in the supportive environment where they care for each other and form very strong relationships. Their personal development is outstanding and their behaviour is exemplary. Typical of parents' comments is that their children leave with 'discipline, manners and morals'. Pupils know what constitutes healthy living and they have a mature awareness of the need to assess risks and act safely. They understand about having responsibilities towards others and they leave the school extremely well equipped to profit from the next stage of their education. Many parents commented on how well their older children are doing at secondary school: in the words of one, 'breezing through Year 7'. This is largely because staff provide pupils with outstanding care, guidance and support which instils them with confidence and equips them with strategies to cope when times are hard.

Exceptional leadership and management at all levels mean that staff work together extremely well as a team in the pupils' best interest. A number of parents voiced concerns about some recent and unavoidable staff absence, but despite this the school has continued to move forward and provides pupils with very high quality education. Rigorous analysis of pupils' progress leads to swift action. For example, a new approach to helping pupils confirm their knowledge of letter sounds and plan their work is reaping rewards in raising the standards of their writing

closer to those of their reading. The school's use of information gained from monitoring has sharpened considerably since the previous inspection. The accommodation inside and outside has also improved, although bright daylight pouring into the computer suite makes it difficult for pupils in some positions to see their screens sufficiently clearly. The school successfully develops in its pupils a zest for learning and an awareness of their place in the community which will stand them in good stead in future life. It provides excellent value for money and has outstanding capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teachers' marking consistently helps pupils to understand the next steps to take in order to improve their work.
- Find a way to make sure all pupils using the computer suite can see the screens easily.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The school's effort to seek out information about children's abilities, likes and dislikes before they join the Reception classes pays great dividends. It means that activities are well adapted to engage their interests and cater for their needs so that they make rapid progress. Particular strengths are their emotional development, reading skills and ability to use numbers for counting. Together, these form a very strong foundation for future learning. Although the school does not always meet its own challenging targets, for many years older pupils have achieved well in tested subjects, particularly in reading and mathematics. More recently, science standards have been exceptionally high whereas those in writing, while still well above average, slipped a little. In response to different methods of teaching, the quality of pupils' writing is improving rapidly and they use it to very good effect across a range of subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development underpins the happy nature of the school community. Their attendance is above average. Pupils are friendly and thoughtful, and have the confidence to express their views cogently. Year 6 pupils enjoy their role as reading buddies for the youngest children. Year 5 'Fizz kids' lead games for others at lunchtimes. School councillors diligently seek the views of those they represent before suggesting improvements, such as how to make the cloakrooms less crowded. At others' request, one young pupil who speaks English as an additional language has set up a club to teach them words in her language, 'so that we can greet other people politely!' Staff's consistent use of praise, combined with pupils' good example, mean that all pupils soon learn that forming good quality relationships and developing tolerance makes life more enjoyable for everyone. Pupils' excellent collaborative skills, interest in life and awareness of their own and others' feelings mean that they leave the school as mature young people, ready to take their place in the world.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

When talking about their school, pupils explained that 'it is really good because the teachers don't just say you have to listen to this and write about it'. Indeed, the teachers take great care

to make lessons interesting, organising plenty of practical activities that spark enthusiasm in pupils. Lessons move at a good pace and teachers value pupils' contributions. They do not let any slackness pass and they ask skilful questions that stretch pupils' thinking. For example, Year 2 pupils had to think hard about why, although it can fly, a ladybird is not a bird. Pupils listen very well to instructions and move seamlessly from one activity to another so no time is wasted. They discuss ideas sensibly and understand the purpose of what they are doing. At the beginning of each week, teachers share the outline of the coming days' activities and at the end of the day different pupils evaluate how well they feel they have done, in terms of both new things learned and their enjoyment. Teachers carefully monitor pupils' work and provide helpful oral guidance at the right moment to ensure that they are using their time and effort purposefully. However, they do not always use marking to best advantage as a tool for providing more challenge or clear pointers for improvement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is highly successful in enabling pupils to develop well above average basic skills at the same time as having good fun and broadening their knowledge of the world around them. Excellent links made between subjects bring learning to life. For example, Year 3 pupils have a vivid understanding of life in the Second World War, developed through an educational visit, art, creative and factual writing and even turning the headteacher's office into an air-raid shelter! Year 4 pupils in a geography lesson used ICT with ease to discover more about Indian currency, culture and religion, while also honing their note-making skills. The curriculum for Reception children is carefully planned to cover all areas of learning both inside and outside. Additional support for those who find learning difficult is also enjoyable, with good use of games to increase pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Throughout the day, the school takes every opportunity to develop pupils' personal as well as academic skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Staff use their very good knowledge of pupils' individual character and family circumstances to provide them with excellent care, guidance and support. The required arrangements are in place to ensure child protection, health and safety. Pupils confidently share their troubles because they know they will be dealt with sensitively. Careful diagnosis of the needs of those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities leads to prompt action which helps them make very good progress alongside their peers. Parents praise the 'fantastic support' provided to help those who speak English as an additional language to integrate quickly. Others comment on the warm welcome for those who arrive partway through their education. The strong academic support for pupils means that they are fully involved in evaluating their learning and remain keen to strive hard to improve it.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The school's all-round high quality provision is the result of outstanding leadership and management. Senior teachers use their complementary skills to form a highly successful team which has a clear vision of the type of education it wishes pupils to have and the ability to put this aspiration into practice. Through development planning that takes into account all staff

members' views, everyone is clear about school priorities and the chosen methods to achieve them. Staff also have plenty of opportunity to develop specialist expertise and take the lead in specific areas. The three curriculum groups are working well to move forward initiatives, such as the development of the outside area or the revamping of the religious education curriculum, with strong impetus and enthusiasm. The school is far from complacent and constantly strives for improvement. For example, recent adaptations to its assessment system are providing more regular information about pupils' progress which class teachers use when creating their lesson plans. Governors are very committed to the school and provide staff with an excellent balance of support and challenge. The school runs very smoothly, and skilful financial management, combined with very generous fund-raising by parents, means that the school is well resourced. At the helm is a quietly confident, reflective headteacher who ensures that both staff and pupils enjoy coming to work every day.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

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	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
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	1
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?	1
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?	1

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
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	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

I greatly enjoyed the day that I recently spent in your school. Thank you very much indeed for the warm welcome that you gave me. Special thanks should go to school council members who spoke with me at length about what it is like to be a pupil at Hartford. Thanks also to those others of you who talked to me on the playground and in lessons, helping me to build up a clear picture of the school.

You are very lucky to attend such an excellent school that helps you to reach high standards of work while you thoroughly enjoy yourselves. From the day you join the school, your teachers work very hard to get to know you as individuals and to plan activities that will make you want to learn. You were right when you told me that the school is really good because your teachers don't just make you listen and then write things down. You have many opportunities to learn things in exciting ways. Year 2's computer-generated Jackson Pollock pictures are great and I loved the Reception pupils' Chinese lion masks.

I was pleased when you told me that everyone in your school is friendly and behaves well, and I could see in lessons and at break time how well you get on with each other. You know lots about healthy living and behave very sensibly and safely. You take very good care of each other. Your teachers also take very good care of you and make sure that you feel comfortable in school so you can concentrate on learning.

Your senior teachers and governors are extremely good at knowing how they can keep improving your school so that it remains one of the best. In order to make things even better for you, I have asked your teachers to give you clearer guidance when marking your work about how it could be improved. I have also asked the leadership team to find ways of making sure that bright daylight coming into the ICT suite doesn't make it difficult for you to see the computer screens.