

# Hillcross Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	102655
<b>Local Authority</b>	Merton
<b>Inspection number</b>	308080
<b>Inspection dates</b>	5–6 February 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Wendy Simmons

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	411
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Mike Featherstone (Acting)
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Mandy Pitts
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	8 September 2003
<b>School address</b>	Ashridge Way Morden SM4 4EE
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 8542 6936
<b>Fax number</b>	020 8540 6743

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<b>Age group</b>	3–11
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Hillcross is a large primary school, serving a socially and ethnically mixed community. A few pupils experience social and emotional problems and are vulnerable. Just over half of the pupils are from White British backgrounds. The next largest groups are mainly of Asian heritage. A third of the pupils speak English as an additional language, although only a few are at the very early stages. A significant number of pupils have a statement of special educational need, mostly related to speech and language difficulties or autistic spectrum disorders. A significant number of pupils have left the school at unexpected times throughout the school year.

The headteacher has been on sick leave since September 2007. In the last two years, the school has faced significant staffing difficulties. In January 2008, a consultant headteacher joined the school to help the deputy headteacher for two days a week. Just before the inspection, governors formalised arrangements for the deputy headteacher to take over as acting headteacher.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

The school has gone through an extremely difficult period since the last inspection and especially in the last year. A breakdown of communication between governors and the leadership team has hampered school improvement. Staffing changes have also contributed to the difficulties. These factors have resulted in the standard of pupils' work falling significantly in 2007 to become exceptionally low in Year 2 and below average in Year 6. Standards and achievement are too low in English and mathematics. There are also weaknesses in pupils' behaviour. However, the provision in the Foundation Stage is outstanding.

Parents and staff view the appointment of the acting headteacher as a positive move and staff commented that morale has improved. A recent public letter signed by parents recognises the efforts he has made for the school and his readiness to listen to their concerns. Staff are keen to work together and the acting headteacher and consultant headteacher have united the staff well.

The new leadership team, aided by the local authority, has started work with enthusiasm and commitment, but as yet leadership and management are not robust enough to ensure that the school can recover quickly. Many actions to improve achievement are too new to demonstrate sustained impact. Teaching and learning have improved recently and are satisfactory overall. However, there is not yet enough consistently good teaching to ensure that pupils progress quickly enough to compensate for previous underachievement. In some lessons, teachers do not provide suitably challenging work to meet the wide-range of the pupils' abilities. In November 2007, the local authority identified that the governors were not acting in a robust enough way to contribute effectively to improvement. They are still not clear enough about their roles, although communication with school leaders has improved recently.

Inspectors agree with many parents, who responded to the questionnaire, that they felt that their children should be doing better. Whilst children get off to a flying start in the Foundation Stage this is not sustained in the rest of the school. The support given to pupils with learning difficulties is inconsistent. As a result, their progress ranges from good to very slow. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, including those who speak English as an additional language, sometimes achieve better than pupils from White British backgrounds, as is evident in mathematics and science. However, like other groups of learners, their achievement is also uneven. Pupils from White British backgrounds and higher ability pupils underachieve.

The curriculum is satisfactory. Strengths in music, science and enrichment activities contribute well to pupils' cultural and spiritual awareness and to their good fitness and healthy eating habits. However, pupils' personal development is inadequate overall. This is because the quality of behaviour, by a small minority of pupils when outside their classrooms, is sometimes over boisterous, threatening or aggressive. While many pupils enjoy school, this negative behaviour impacts on some pupils' enthusiasm to come to school. Some pupils feel threatened or concerned about bullying because the school's care systems are not effective enough in addressing bullying.

## Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

### Grade: 1

A significant strength of the school is the outstanding provision for the youngest children in the school. Children start with skills and understanding that are usually expected for children of that age and make outstanding progress in the Nursery and Reception classes. This leads to higher than average standards by the end of the Reception year. In particular, a high proportion of children are working at well above the expected level in their social, mathematical, speaking, reading and writing skills. High standards have been maintained for several years. This reflects the excellent teaching, learning, curriculum and children's enjoyment. Activities are fun and help children to explore things very well through play and formal work. Superb relationships lead to children gaining confidence and self-esteem. The emphasis on discussion work aids their all-round progress very successfully. The caring relationships, exemplary assessment systems and very high quality support from assistants aid children's progress.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Make sure that leaders at all levels work rigorously to improve achievement and standards, especially in mathematics and English.
- Ensure that governors are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities and work closely with all other leaders to bring about improvement.
- Improve the quality of teaching to provide activities that are suitably challenging for all groups of learners.
- Deal with instances of bullying quickly and effectively and improve pupils' behaviour when they are outside lessons, so that all pupils are happy to come to school.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 4

Standards at the end of Year 2 were exceptionally low in 2007 and had been falling since 2004. By the end of Year 6, standards dropped significantly in 2007 and are now below average. Considering the excellent start that pupils make in the Foundation Stage this shows that progress is inadequate. Between Year 1 and Year 6, progress in writing and mathematics is particularly slow. Leaders have started work to improve these areas and since January 2008, pupils' writing is of much better quality than in the previous term. However, progress is still too slow in mathematics and only half of all Year 6 pupils are on track to reach the expected level for their age. Pupils do better in science due to specialist teaching and interesting investigation work.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 4

Pupils develop spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness satisfactorily. They are willing to take on extra responsibilities such as being part of the school council and they take their responsibilities seriously. Pupils enjoy lessons, where they usually behave well. They also enjoy taking part in many sporting activities, visits and clubs, which help them to develop their social skills and fitness. They contribute to the local community through sport, music and charity fundraising. Pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills are not promoted well enough and they are inadequately prepared for their future economic well-being.

A significant minority of pupils sometimes show very rough and aggressive actions to other pupils and occasionally to staff. There have been instances of swearing, a few racist comments

and name-calling. This kind of behaviour has a direct impact upon some other pupils' enjoyment of school and their well-being.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Teaching and learning have recently improved and this is helping to improve pupils' progress. However, it is not yet good enough to raise achievement rapidly. Teachers clearly have higher expectations of the presentation of work. Younger pupils are being taught letters and sounds more effectively, which is helping them with their reading, writing and spelling. Pupils need more opportunities to explain how they solve mathematical problems. Relationships between teachers and pupils are generally good. In lessons, teachers set clear rules and routines so that pupils do not waste time. Lesson planning does not always ensure that tasks are suitably challenging for all ability groups. In some lessons, pupils spend too much time listening to the teacher and this limits independent work.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 3**

Literacy and numeracy activities are becoming more suitable, these include better systems for the teaching of reading, handwriting and mathematical problem solving. There is still more to do. For example, spelling is not taught systematically enough, mathematical problem solving could be extended and supported by rigorous learning and application of tables. Special events, including those organised on healthy eating in each class, and various theme weeks, such as environment week and science week, help to increase pupils' enjoyment and knowledge. Links between subjects are developing. There is a consistent approach to year group planning but because of the different make up of classes, the activities provided do not always fully match pupils' needs and capabilities. This sometimes has a negative impact on the pace of pupils' learning. A very good range of clubs and activities enriches pupils' lives.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 4**

New assessment systems have been in place since September 2007 to help leaders and teachers to check pupils' progress. However, staff are not always using this information well enough to identify pupils for specific extra support. For example, too many lower ability boys, in Key Stage 1 have made inadequate progress and have not been given extra support to help them to catch up with their writing skills. Opportunities are missed to encourage pupils to talk about their ideas so that adults can assess their learning and then adjust their teaching. There is too little guidance for pupils about how to edit, extend and enrich their writing. Generally, teaching assistants provide appropriate support for pupils with learning difficulties, but sometimes this support is not as effective as it could be. There are good links with local support agencies and effective child protection.

Staff are committed to ensuring that children remain safe. However, a significant proportion of parents noted that they did not feel confident that the school would take direct action to confront bullying or bad behaviour. A significant minority of pupils reported to inspectors that they do not feel safe in school because of the poor behaviour of some pupils. Leaders have

tried to avoid exclusions because they want to include all pupils, but the systems to ensure that all pupils feel safe are not yet good enough.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 4**

Improvement in the school has been inadequate since the last inspection largely due to weaknesses in leadership and management and staffing difficulties. The new acting headteacher is very committed and keen to learn, but has no experience in managing a school with complex needs. There is no acting deputy headteacher to share the workload. Members of the senior management team are still developing their own roles in order to be more accountable for standards and achievement. The consultant headteacher provides helpful guidance but this only started four weeks before the inspection. The improvement plan identifies most of the key areas for improvement but lacks precise detail. There is still much to do to improve the school's own self-evaluation. Target setting is not challenging enough, especially in mathematics. The targets for higher ability pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 are not as ambitious as they should be. Overall, leadership and management are beginning to improve, but it is too early to confirm a sustained impact of their work on developments.

Governors are not clear enough about their roles. Performance management has only recently been introduced and there had been a breakdown in communication, especially with staff. In the last year, the post of chair of governors has changed twice. Just before the inspection, a new acting chair of governors took over. Following local authority advice communication is beginning to improve and one governor is working enthusiastically to help to raise standards in mathematics.

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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

### Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	4
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	4
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	4
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4

### The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	4

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	Yes
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

## Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

17 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Hillcross Primary School, Morden, SM4 4EE

You may remember that three inspectors came to your school recently. Thank you for telling us about your school. I am writing to let you know our findings.

We agree with your acting headteacher and other adults that it has been a difficult year at the school. The school is not yet as good as it should be for most of you. However, we found the Nursery and Reception classes to be excellent. The inspectors have decided that some very important improvements and special support will be needed to help the rest of your school to improve. You need more help to make faster progress. Too many of you are not doing well enough in English and mathematics to help you to do as well as possible in the future. Teachers are working hard to make learning more challenging but there is still much more to do.

However, we like the improvements in your writing books since January. Well done and please keep this up. When your teachers suggest ways for you to improve your writing, please follow them. Well done for beginning to talk more about how to solve mathematical problems and keep this up. You enjoy the many exciting visits and extra activities that adults provide, these sound fun! Most of you behave well, but a few of you do not behave well enough at playtimes. We were very concerned to hear from some of you and your parents that some children are scared of bullying. It is wrong for any pupil to be rude, unkind or aggressive to others.

We have asked your acting headteacher and all of the adults in your school to do the following things:

- make sure that you are helped to do better in English and mathematics
- make sure that the governors work closely with all other leaders to improve the school
- improve teaching even more and make sure that you all have challenging, suitable and fun work to do
- make sure that bullying stops and improve behaviour when you are outside of lessons, so that everyone enjoys coming to school every day.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Simmons

Lead inspector