

Hillcross Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102655
Local Authority	Merton
Inspection number	331177
Inspection dates	4–5 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Michael Lynes HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	339
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	60
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	Interim executive
Chair	Mr Simon Withey board
Headteacher	Mrs Sandra Baxter
Date of previous school inspection	5 February 2008
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Ashridge Way Morden SM4 4EE
Telephone number	020 8542 6936
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Hillcross is a large primary school, serving a socially and ethnically mixed community. Just over half 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 of learning English. A significant number of pupils have a statement of special educational need, mostly related to speech and language difficulties or autistic spectrum disorders. An executive headteacher has led the school in an acting capacity for the past year and the school is currently advertising for a new headteacher. The local authority (LA) replaced the governing body with an Interim Executive Board (IEB) following the last inspection. Hillcross is a Keys to Success school, having been identified as working in challenging circumstances. As a result, it receives support from the City Challenge programme.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures. Hillcross is now a satisfactory and improving school. This is a result of strong leadership by the executive headteacher. She has developed a highly effective senior team that demonstrates good capacity to continue the recent rapid improvement. The school has received highly effective strategic support from the LA, and the opportunities for professional development offered by the City Challenge programme have been a key component in the recent improvement to the quality of teaching.

Hillcross has been transformed over the past year. Parents and pupils were keen to tell inspectors of all the positive changes. One parent, reflecting the views of many, said, 'I am very happy with what the school is providing. My child can't wait to get to school.' Parents and carers now have full confidence that staff will do everything in their power to help their children succeed. Some were particularly complimentary about the improvement in the provision for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Two parents of children with statements of additional needs told inspectors that the school now delivers exactly what it says it will. These parents clearly felt that this had made a significant difference to the lives of their children. Pupils were able to articulate the improvements that have been made to ensure that they feel safer. They like the new arrangements at break-times and lunchtimes, which provide a more secure, organised environment in which they can play. They told inspectors about the much improved way in which the school deals with any misbehaviour and rewards good behaviour. They report that bullying has, as a result, decreased significantly. Pupils also recognise that teaching has improved and that teachers are using a wider range of strategies in the classroom. They are proud of their work, and are able to see the progress they are making. A pupil in Year 6 eagerly volunteered to show an inspector his handwriting, which had clearly improved since the beginning of the year.

The school is well aware that there is more to do to ensure that pupils make up for the poor progress made in previous years, especially at Key Stage 2. In particular, the progress of boys in reading and writing is slower than that of girls. This means that some pupils do not maintain the excellent start they made in Nursery and Reception. The school's much improved monitoring systems ensure that every pupil's progress is now regularly tracked. And, just as importantly, high-quality professional dialogue between teachers ensures that strategies are employed to adjust teaching to match the needs of individual pupils. The work of the numeracy and literacy coordinators has been instrumental in this regard.

The IEB has recently strengthened its ability to hold the school to account for the performance of pupils. The chair has worked closely with the LA to ensure that the newly constituted shadow governing body will have the necessary expertise and confidence to grow into its role as a critical friend. The newly appointed vice-chair demonstrates a high degree of commitment to the school and a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. It will be crucial to the school's further success that governance continues to develop.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

There is a warm and friendly atmosphere for the children when they arrive in the morning and this continues throughout the day. Close contact with families leads to positive relationships

between home and school that begin before the children start school. This ensures that they settle into the daily routines, gain confidence and quickly start to make excellent progress. The children enter with skills, knowledge and understanding that are well below those expected for their age in language and mathematics and are in line with those expected for personal, social and physical skills. They are eager to participate in all that is provided for them and work with enthusiasm to make outstanding progress. As a result, they leave Reception with skills, knowledge and understanding well above that expected for their age. Outstanding teaching underpins this excellent progress. A carefully balanced programme of activities, which are well led by adults, complement a range that children can choose for themselves. Children are developing good strategies for independent learning and are beginning to take an active role in their assessments, identifying their own progress in aspects of their learning. Core skills, including phonics, are taught well through whole-class and small-group activities. The learning environment in the classrooms is very attractive and stimulating and effective use is made of the outside learning area. All staff interact extremely well with the children and take every opportunity to ask open-ended questions to present them with the chance to express their ideas more fully.

The coordinator provides excellent leadership and, with her dedicated team, plans stimulating activities that are well matched to their children's collective and individual needs. Their planning is well informed by highly skilled observation, assessments and effective self-evaluation. Parents are safe in the knowledge that their children's welfare is given a very high priority and is of outstanding quality.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards by improving the quality of reading and writing in Key Stage 2, particularly of boys.
- Ensure that the governing body develops the ability to challenge and support the senior leadership team effectively.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards at Key Stage 1 in 2008 were well above average, a significant improvement on previous years. They were higher in reading and mathematics than in writing, where they were average. There was a marked improvement in the 2008 Key Stage 2 results, where standards were broadly average. Standards in English and mathematics were average, but standards in writing, particularly of boys, are weaker than those for reading in Key Stage 2. These results represent much better progress than that achieved in 2007.

Observations during the inspection confirmed that very good progress continues to be made in Key Stage 1. Pupils at Key Stage 2 are now achieving good rates of progress in lessons. Internal assessments show that attainment in English, mathematics and science continues to improve, with more pupils achieving age-related expectations. This is the result of rigorous and well-used systems for tracking each pupil's progress, identifying individual needs and instituting sharp and effective strategies to bring about improvement. The school is well aware that, while progress is being made, there is still more to be done to make sure that all pupils are making

the progress towards the standards they ought to be achieving. There are regular reviews, including the involvement of all staff in pupil-progress meetings, to ensure that everyone is fully aware of what has been achieved. As a result, targets for further improvement and what needs to be done to achieve these targets are agreed. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are provided with equally good provision to make similar progress to their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school a great deal and are attentive and enthusiastic in class. Relationships between pupils and their teachers are warm and supportive. Pupils were unfailingly polite and friendly to inspectors. Teachers are highly committed to ensuring pupils' well-being and, as a result, pupils feel safe and secure. Recent changes to the organisation of the playground and the introduction of pupil play leaders have ensured that behaviour has improved significantly and is mainly good. Pupils told inspectors how much they appreciated both these changes and the introduction of clearer rewards and sanctions. Behaviour in classrooms is often exemplary, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1 classes. Many pupils express their feelings and opinions honestly and articulately. They are learning to work both independently and together in highly effective ways. This will stand them in very good stead for the next stage of their education. They are engaged in some aspects of the local community but the school acknowledges that this area of its work is still developing.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching seen during the inspection ranged from satisfactory to outstanding. The strongest teaching was observed in Reception, Nursery and Key Stage 1 classes. Teaching at Key Stage 2, while improving, is not consistently of the same high quality. Relationships between teachers and pupils are built on mutual respect, which provides a strong foundation for pupils to make the good progress that was seen in most lessons. Teaching is not yet good overall because the quality seen during this inspection has not been sustained for a long enough period to ensure that pupils catch up after the poorer progress made in previous years.

Most lessons are very well planned and are closely matched to the individual needs and abilities of pupils. Teaching assistants are used very effectively. These are significant changes from the last inspection. Some of the most stimulating teaching was characterised by skilful questioning by the teacher which drew the best out of many pupils, regardless of their ability. An outstanding example of this was seen in a mathematics lesson where the teacher modelled what students needed to do highly effectively. Then a range of strategies were used to ensure that all students were able to contribute to the lesson and make very good progress. In a Year 2 lesson pupils were tackling challenging mathematical concepts and in a Reception class children were assessing their own work. This is teaching of the highest order. Pupils confirm that teaching has improved since the last inspection and that they like the 'partnered' activities that they now take part in. They also say they would like to have more fun in lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets all statutory requirements. The improvements that were beginning to be seen at the last inspection with regard to the systems to improve reading, handwriting and mathematics have been sustained. In particular, this is exemplified by the enthusiasm and commitment that pupils now demonstrate in mathematics lessons across the school. Teachers' planning is now consistently good and provides well-targeted activities for a full range of pupils' abilities. This is a significant improvement since the previous inspection and an important factor in ensuring greater academic progress. There are a wide range of clubs and sporting activities which are well attended. Careful monitoring by senior leaders ensures that all pupils have the opportunity to benefit from them.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The commitment of all the adults in the school community to the care, guidance and support of pupils is fully appreciated by pupils and their parents. The school has a friendly atmosphere, with caring staff who offer valuable support. The arrangements for child protection are robust and secure and the school meets requirements relating to safeguarding. The school works effectively with outside agencies to ensure all pupils are enabled to take a full part in the life of the school. Parents are kept well informed of their children's learning through regular review meetings and the informal daily opportunities provided by teachers. The school now has effective systems for promoting good behaviour to ensure that pupils have very positive attitudes to learning. New systems have been introduced to track pupils' progress carefully and target support to help pupils achieve. Pupils have a clear understanding of their targets and the guidance provided by their teachers is good. The marking of the pupils' work now gives positive feedback and provides good advice on how to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The outstanding leadership of the executive headteacher has been a key factor underpinning the school's significant improvement over the past year. She has achieved this by carefully nurturing the talents of existing staff and making shrewd appointments of new ones. This is best exemplified by the way in which the deputy headteacher has grown effectively into his new responsibilities and the manner in which the newly appointed teachers are growing in confidence and expertise. Numeracy and literacy coordinators feel empowered and, as a result, have increasing influence in the school. They are highly knowledgeable about the progress of individual pupils and use this information to challenge and support their colleagues. The newly appointed head of Early Years, who is also the inclusion manager, has sustained the outstanding quality of work in the Reception and Nursery. Leaders at all levels work and plan together in a highly effective manner. This gives the school a cohesive, calm ethos and a continuity of care that is a pleasure to witness. The quality of governance has improved since the last inspection. The chair of the IEB has a good strategic overview of the school and enjoys the confidence of the staff. However, the shadow governing body is in its infancy and is just beginning to get to grips with its roles and responsibilities.

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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?	3
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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
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

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	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

11 March 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Hillcross Primary School, Morden, SM4 4EE

Thank you very much for talking to us about your school when we came to inspect it. It was really lovely to see you all learning more and having fun. You and your parents told us about all the wonderful things that have happened over the last year and how much you enjoy school. We were really impressed by how friendly and polite you were to us. We also thought that the Nursery and Reception classes were excellent places for you to learn and enjoy yourselves. The school is now a happy place which you really enjoy coming to.

I know that you like the new computers and the way the playground has been organised. You also like the way that teachers have introduced new ways to reward good behaviour and make sure that bad behaviour does not continue. So you feel much happier and safer now. As a result, we have removed the special measures from the school. This means that we do not need to come back again soon, because we could see how well all the teachers and the other staff are looking after you. So, well done to you, and I know you really appreciate all the hard work of the adults in the school.

We have asked the school to make two more improvements:

- Boys in Years 3 to 6 need to make more progress in their reading and writing.
- The governors need to help the teachers to make sure that you continue to learn and have fun.

Well done to everyone in the school and I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours faithfully

Michael Lynes

Her Majesty's Inspector