

Higham Ferrers Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121828
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	382295
Inspection dates	2–3 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Stephen Abbott HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills (HMCI) the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	324
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sean Reedman
Headteacher	Andrew Brown
Date of previous school inspection	20–21 October 2010
School address	Saffron Road Higham Ferrers Rushden NN10 8ED
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. During the inspection, 12 lessons were observed, taught by 11 teachers. Meetings were held with groups of staff and pupils, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. The inspector observed the school's work and looked at pupils' work, the school's assessment records, the single central record of safeguarding checks, the bullying log, the incident book, the minutes of the governing body, meetings and action plans produced by subject leaders and the special educational needs coordinator and the school's self-evaluation and planning documents.

The inspector reviewed many aspects of the school's work, with a particular focus on the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection.

- How much improvement has there been in pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics?
- To what extent has the quality of teaching and learning improved, including teachers' use of information and communication technology and the quality of marking and target setting?
- Are leadership and management, including the work of middle leaders and the governing body, having a greater impact on the quality of education provided?
- Do pupils feel safe in school?

Information about the school

Higham Ferrers Junior School is an above average-sized junior school in an urban setting. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage, with very few from minority ethnic backgrounds. All speak English as their first language. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average; a reduction since the last inspection. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The school holds the Artsmark and International Schools awards and has Healthy Schools status.

When the school was inspected in October 2010, it was judged to require special measures. Subsequently, the school was inspected on two occasions. At the last monitoring inspection, the school was judged to be making satisfactory progress in tackling its areas for improvement. Since then, two teachers have left the school and two experienced replacements have joined.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

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. Since its last monitoring inspection in June 2011, the school has made good progress in addressing the areas for improvement identified at its last inspection. Higham Ferrers Junior School is a good school where pupils enjoy learning and now make good progress, both academically and in their personal development.

The improvements over the last year have been achieved by the hard work of all the staff, pupils and members of the governing body. Four important changes have transformed the school.

- There is now a reliable and well-understood system for assessing pupils' attainment and tracking their progress.
- Leadership is more widely distributed, with clear roles for the literacy and mathematics coordinators and year team leaders.
- Teaching and learning is more effective, due to a well-designed programme of professional development.
- Leaders and the governing body are monitoring much more rigorously the impact of provision on pupil outcomes, so that self-evaluation is now good.

Overhauling the school's assessment system was the vital first step in the school's improvement. Teachers now assess accurately and moderate their assessments with each other and with other schools. They use the assessment information to plan lessons that meet the needs of each pupil. Year group leaders and class teachers scrutinise the progress of each pupil to identify any who are falling behind. The procedures for identifying pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities have also been sharpened, resulting in a reduction in the number of pupils classified as having special educational needs. Learning support is now well targeted to help those most in need.

Leadership is more effective because there are now clear roles for the year team leaders and the key subject coordinators. These middle leaders now make a major contribution to driving forward improvements, allowing the headteacher more time for strategic thinking. Year team leaders work closely with class teachers to plan lessons that are creative and engaging, with consistent progression across each year group. The literacy and mathematics coordinators are constantly seeking to improve teaching and learning and to devise ways of helping pupils who need to catch up or improve their progress.

Teaching and learning are monitored through lesson observations and scrutiny of

pupils' work. The headteacher, deputy headteacher and the literacy and mathematics coordinators check that teachers are following the agreed procedures and implementing any new initiatives consistently. Prompt action is taken to tackle any weaknesses that emerge. Professional development is increasingly linked to the findings of lesson observations. Each teacher now maintains a 'learning log' to record their own professional development. The advanced skills teacher has devised a mechanism for teachers to support each other by sharing their expertise through 'open-door' lessons and paired coaching sessions. In addition, visits to other schools are allowing various members of staff to learn from good practice elsewhere. Consequently, teachers are developing their expertise in teaching mathematics and in using information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance learning.

Accurate assessment information has transformed the way that senior leaders and the governing body monitor the effectiveness of the school. They now focus relentlessly on pupil outcomes, checking that the average progress across year groups and subjects is in line with the school's challenging targets, and monitoring the performance of different groups of pupils, including pupils known to be eligible for free school meals. In addition, the governing body has made itself far more effective in holding the school to account, through a mix of training and some new appointments.

The transformation of leadership has brought about a steady increase in the quality of teaching. This has been complemented by curriculum changes in mathematics and ICT that are making learning more active and engaging. This effective provision is leading to good achievement. Learning and progress are now good in a large majority of lessons, and attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is currently above average in every year group. These changes provide clear evidence of the school's good capacity to improve.

The quality of teaching and assessment is now good overall. Nevertheless, a few inconsistencies remain, which is why senior leaders are continuing to sustain the professional development programme. All teachers mark pupils' work regularly and pupils are guided increasingly well on how to improve their work, especially in literacy-based subjects, but there is still some variability in teachers' marking of mathematics. While mathematics teaching is improving, it is not consistently good. For example, pupils sometimes need more time to master a topic than the scheme of work allows, but not all teachers have sufficient confidence to adapt their planning. All lessons now include different activities to meet the needs of pupils working at different levels, but the most-able pupils in some classes are not always challenged in every lesson to produce their best work.

As lessons have become more engaging, pupils have responded enthusiastically and behaviour is good in most lessons. Pupils feel safe most of the time and know how to report their concerns. Most feel that reports of bullying are taken seriously and are usually dealt with effectively, but some feel that the 'bully box' report system is too public. Year 3 pupils speak highly of the 'Year 6 buddies' system, which eases the transition from infant to junior school. However, a few pupils raised concerns about safety in the cramped playground. Pupils naturally like to run around but some do not look out enough for others, for example when playing football or running round corners. The school's accident records show that minor scrapes and bruises are not

uncommon. The school has mitigated the problem by staggering break and lunchtimes. The new coordinator for personal, social and health education is taking a pro-active stance on bullying and use of the playground, but developments are at an early stage.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Consolidate the improvements in teaching and learning, especially in mathematics, by:
 - further developing the use of coaching, 'learning logs' for teachers and the sharing of good practice within the school and with other schools
 - ensuring that enough time is spent on each topic in mathematics to allow pupils to master the key skills
 - making sure that marking consistently provides guidance to pupils on how to improve further
 - ensuring that the most-able pupils are challenged in every lesson to produce their best work.

- Increasing pupils sense of feeling safe by:
 - further developing the school's anti-bullying programme
 - developing strategies to reduce the number of minor accidents in the playground.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils' attainment on entry is above average. The judgement that achievement is now good is based on the good learning and progress of pupils currently in the school. Pupils were captivated in an outstanding Year 4 poetry lesson by a video clip of Michael Rosen reading his own work. The teacher made excellent use of short bursts of paired discussion to allow pupils time to gather their thoughts before drawing from them their 'top tips'. The well-briefed teaching assistant made sure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities made a full contribution. Pupils then selected their best lines from the previous days' writing to create their own performances. The teacher moved among the groups to identify any that needed extra support or challenge.

The improvements to teaching mean that pupils now understand what they are trying to learn and are motivated to succeed. The school has taken concerted action to tackle the underachievement that previously affected certain groups. As a result, boys are making better progress in reading and writing, and girls are making better progress in mathematics. However, the pupils who were in Year 6 last year did not have time to make up for the inadequate progress of the previous three years. Despite making much better progress in their final year, their Key Stage 2 test results were well below average. The school anticipated that this would be the case, and made sure that teachers continued to work intensively with the pupils after the tests, in May, to prepare them as well as possible for starting secondary school. Attainment is above average for pupils currently in the school.

Over the last year, the learning and progress of pupils with special educational needs

and/or disabilities has improved and is now good. The summer term assessments had highlighted continuing underachievement in mathematics for Year 5 pupils in this group, but the latest assessments show a remarkable transformation, with the pupils making six months worth of progress in less than a term, as a result of carefully targeted support.

Pupils are polite, well-mannered and, apart from occasional boisterousness in the playground, they are considerate of each other. They have a good knowledge of how to keep themselves healthy and fit. Older pupils run a healthy tuck shop. All pupils engage in physical activity and sports clubs are very popular. Pupils contribute to the wider community by raising funds for charity and through their involvement in Remembrance Day. They contribute well to the school community through the school council, as sports leaders, playground buddies and in the anti-bullying squad. Pupils speak highly of the recently introduced ‘transformers’ groups, where high attaining pupils help boys to improve their literacy and girls to improve their mathematics. The daily assemblies provide good opportunities for reflection. The curriculum helps pupils to learn about the diverse range of cultures in modern Britain and other parts of the world, despite their limited direct experience.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils’ behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is now good in a large majority of lessons. Teachers have begun to internalise the high expectations set out in the teaching and learning policy and this has led to greater consistency across the school. Every lesson now has clear learning objectives that are shared with pupils. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively. Pupils’ work is marked regularly but marking is still more effective in literacy than in mathematics. Teachers increasingly look out for any gaps in pupils’ knowledge and

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

arrange individualised catch-up sessions. Teachers work together to devise interesting and varied lessons that include tasks tailored to pupils’ needs, such as an effective Year 6 mathematics lesson on estimating and weighing pieces of fruit, where pupils were engaged by the practical nature of the task and its relevance to a forthcoming lesson where they would go on to make fruit salad. Mathematics teaching is improving as teachers develop their expertise through joint planning, peer observation, coaching sessions and work with other schools.

In literacy, the best teaching is outstanding. For example, a Year 6 lesson on news reporting was brought alive by use of video clips, including one where the school business manager read out a news story about the theft of sweets from their classroom. This ‘crime’ formed the basis for the pupils’ own reports, which were filmed to allow pupils a later opportunity for peer assessment and reflection.

The curriculum has been improved by the promotion of literacy and numeracy in subjects other than English and mathematics, and by teachers’ use of ICT to enhance learning. This includes regular use of ‘visualisers’ that enable a pupils’ book to be displayed on the whiteboard for others to see and comment upon.

The biggest improvements in care, guidance and support have been in the much improved monitoring of pupils’ progress and in the tightening of procedures in identifying pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Behaviour management in the classroom has improved, helped by the more interesting lessons. Pupils and families who find themselves in challenging circumstances benefit from good care. Transition from the infant school and to secondary school are well organised.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account:	
The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The leadership and management of the school have been transformed over the last year. Armed with accurate information about pupils’ learning and the quality of provision, senior leaders and the governing body now have a good understanding of the school’s strengths and weaknesses. They promote equal opportunities well, making good use of data to monitor the progress and well-being of different groups of pupils and devising a range of intervention programmes to tackle inequality. As a result, gaps between different groups of pupils are closing. The governing body holds the school to account effectively, challenging senior leaders to take decisive action to improve pupil outcomes, which are now seen as the ultimate measure of the school’s success.

Good support from the local authority has helped the school’s leaders to crystallise their ambition for the school. Senior and middle leaders consistently communicate high expectations to all staff so they understand and share the vision for the school. Productive partnerships with other schools are enabling the school to learn from good practice elsewhere. The school now demonstrates its own good practice to other schools. Partnership with parents and carers is good. For example, parents and carers of boys recently attended an open evening to help them support their children’s learning.

All requirements for safeguarding are met. Policies and practice exceed government requirements and are regularly reviewed. Child protection training is effective. Issues about safety and risk, including internet safety, are well integrated into the curriculum so that most pupils have a good knowledge of how to keep themselves safe. The school has good procedures for recording and dealing with the slightly higher than usual number of minor accidents. These occur because the school site is small, with limited playground space and no playing field.

The promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory. It is strong within the school and the local and global communities, but less well developed in respect of the national community.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

This inspection was planned as the third monitoring inspection since the school was made subject to special measures. Since monitoring inspections do not include a parental questionnaire, it was only possible to speak to a small number of parents and carers. These parents and carers commented that the school had improved considerably since its last inspection. This inspection confirms their view.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Parental questionnaires are not normally distributed for monitoring inspections conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005, unless inspectors have specific reasons to request that the school does so.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.

4 November 2011

Dear Pupils



Inspection of Higham Ferrers Junior School, Higham Ferrers NN10 8ED

I am writing to tell you about your school's latest inspection. When the school was inspected in October 2010, it was not doing very well and was put into 'special measures'. I have been visiting each term to see how the school is improving. The good news is that the school has got better. The teaching has improved a lot and you are now making good progress. I am confident that the school can carry on getting better and that it no longer needs me to keep visiting.

Four things have helped the school to improve.

- Teachers assess your work carefully and help anyone who is falling behind.
- The senior teachers have shared out their work sensibly, so everyone knows what they should be doing.
- Your lessons are better planned and more interesting because the teachers have worked together to learn from each other
- The school leaders and the governing body are better at checking that you are all making good progress and making changes where necessary.

You are learning more in lessons because your teachers are better at explaining the work and telling you how to improve. Your behaviour in lessons is good because the lessons are more enjoyable. You told me that you usually feel safe from bullying, and know who to talk to if you have problems. However, some said that a few pupils run around the playground without taking enough care.

I have asked the school leaders to carry on improving the teaching, especially in mathematics. I have also suggested that they help you feel even safer through the new anti-bullying work and by reducing minor accidents in the playground. You can all help by taking more care at playtimes.

I would like to thank all of you who made me so welcome and took time to answer my questions. Everybody involved with the school, both adults and pupils, deserves congratulations for working so hard.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Abbott
Her Majesty's Inspector

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