

INSPECTION REPORT

HOUGHTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

Houghton, Huntingdon

LEA area: Cambridgeshire

Unique reference number: 110680

Headteacher: Clare Stimpson

Reporting inspector: Barrie Mahoney
18175

Dates of inspection: 10 – 12 April 2000

Inspection number: 191260

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Infant and junior

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 4 – 11 years

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Chapel Lane
Houghton
Huntingdon
Cambridgeshire

Postcode: PE28 2AY

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Appropriate authority: Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Julie Walker

Date of previous inspection: January 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Houghton Primary School is situated in the rural village of Houghton, between Huntingdon and St. Ives in Cambridgeshire. Pupils attend the school from the village as well as from outside the immediate catchment area. A significant number of pupils are from families employed in the Royal Air Force and these families tend to move frequently, although this has reduced since the previous inspection. Since the previous inspection the school has reduced in size from 273 to 212 pupils. This is due to local reorganisation.

Pupils are taught in eight classes, all of which contain pupils of different abilities. There are 56 pupils on the school's register of special educational needs, with 21 pupils at stages 3 to 5 of the register, including six pupils with statements of special education needs.

Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is broadly average. The socio-economic circumstances of the area are above average, and three per cent of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals, a figure that is well below the national average. There are very few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, and one pupil for whom English is an additional language.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Houghton Primary School is a good school, with very good features. It is very well led and managed by the headteacher, and supported well by staff. The quality of teaching is good overall. The pupils achieve above national expectations in English and mathematics. Taking into account the broadly average standards of attainment of pupils upon entry to the school, the good progress that they make and the overall effectiveness, the school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- The headteacher and management team provide very good leadership. They are well supported by all staff.
- The quality of teaching is at least good in most lessons. For the under fives, teaching is very good.
- Standards of pupils' work are good, especially in English and mathematics.
- Pupils' attitudes to school, their personal development and relationships across the school are very good.
- Pupils' attendance is very good.

What could be improved

- The quality of acts of worship shared by all pupils. At present, these do not meet requirements.
- The use of assessment to measure pupils' progress, and to plan for their progress.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Since the previous inspection in January 1997, standards overall have shown a marked improvement and the school is on course to meet its targets. There have been a number of significant changes in the size of the school, its staff and its buildings. There has also been a period of instability in the senior management of the school before the appointment of the present headteacher in April 1999. The school has coped well with these difficulties, and has been effectively supported by governors.

There have been considerable improvements in the quality of teaching since the previous inspection. Most of the issues identified in the previous inspection report have been addressed successfully. In particular, an effective system for monitoring the teaching and pupils' work in classes has been implemented, and equally effective procedures have been introduced to evaluate children's attainment when they start school as under fives. Both these systems are having a positive impact in helping teachers to raise standards. The school has made a good start in improving its systems for assessment, particularly in English and mathematics, and has identified a programme for improving assessment procedures in other subjects, which was identified as a key issue in the previous inspection report.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 11 year olds based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
English	B	B	A	C
mathematics	C	B	A	A
science	B	C	B	C

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

The school's test results and assessments in 1999 indicate that at the end of Key Stage 2, standards are well above the national average in English and mathematics, and above average in science. Inspection evidence concludes that standards are above national expectations in English and mathematics. No science lessons were observed during this short inspection. The trend over time is one of improvement in these subjects. The school has set sufficiently challenging targets, and is making good progress towards meeting them. Overall, standards have improved sufficiently since the previous inspection.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils are proud of the school and want to attend. They are very eager to learn and engage in tasks with enthusiasm.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour within the school buildings is very good, and good in the playground. Most pupils meet the high expectations set by the staff.
Personal development and relationships	Very good relationships in the school are based on mutual respect. Numerous opportunities are provided to ensure very good personal development.
Attendance	Attendance is very good, and well above national standards.

Whilst the behaviour of pupils is good overall and very good in class, it is sometimes very boisterous in the playground, and a few pupils show some lack of consideration towards others.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged up to 5 years	aged 5-7 years	aged 7-11 years
Lessons seen overall	Very good	Good	Good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

The quality of teaching is mostly good and at least satisfactory (65 per cent). Thirty-five per cent of lessons observed are very good or excellent. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. The good quality of teaching is a strength of the school, and is a considerable improvement since the previous inspection.

For children under five, the quality of teaching is very good. Adults working with these children show considerable skill, work well together and have a good knowledge of children's needs.

The quality of teaching in English, including reading and writing, and mathematics, including numeracy, is good. Good and very good teaching in many lessons is characterised by high expectations of pupils' performance, well-planned activities that are closely matched to the needs of all pupils and a brisk pace. In the excellent and very good lessons, teachers have particularly good knowledge of the subjects they are teaching, and resources are well prepared and used.

The strategies for improving literacy skills in upper Key Stage 2 are sometimes unduly restrictive. There is some overuse of a restricted range of teaching materials and approaches used in this key stage.

The good, very good and excellent teaching support pupils' learning effectively throughout the school, and as a result they make good progress overall. Teachers provide a good level of challenge for pupils' learning. The pupils show interest in their work and are able to sustain their concentration well.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory overall. The curriculum provides pupils with a satisfactory range of learning opportunities, and meets statutory requirements. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory. Pupils with special educational needs are identified effectively, and supported well by teaching and support staff.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Satisfactory overall. There is very good provision for pupils' social development, good provision for pupils' moral development and satisfactory provision for pupils' spiritual and cultural development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Satisfactory overall. Pastoral care is good, but procedures for assessing how well pupils learn are not sufficiently developed.

The provision for pupils' spiritual development in the collective act of worship is underdeveloped.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher provides very good leadership and management and is well supported by the deputy headteacher and management team. The headteacher provides clear direction.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	They fulfil their statutory duties well.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. The school reviews its own performance effectively, and identifies accurately those areas where improvement is needed.
The strategic use of resources	Good overall. Good use is made of all staff, of time, of learning resources and of the building. The under fives do not have a suitable outdoor play area nor do they have large wheeled toys to help them develop their physical skills.

The headteacher has been in post since April, 1999. She has clearly identified the areas in need of improvement and provides a clear sense of direction and purpose. This vision is closely linked to the needs of pupils, with an appropriate emphasis upon promoting high standards and effective teaching and learning. There have been continuous improvements in the quality of teaching, the learning environment and the curriculum provided since the previous inspection.

The headteacher is well supported by the deputy headteacher, senior management team and governors. A team approach is well developed, and all staff work hard to improve the quality of education provided by the school.

There are effective procedures to review and evaluate the effects of financial decisions, and governors use best value principles in the management of resources well.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children like school. • Parents feel comfortable about approaching the school with problems or concerns. • The school expects children to work hard. • Good quality teaching. • The school is well led and managed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some parents are concerned about mixed age classes.

Inspectors endorse parents' positive views. There is no evidence to suggest that pupils' progress is being hindered by mixed age classes.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The headteacher and management team provide very good leadership. They are well supported by all staff.

1. The headteacher has been in post since April, 1999. She has clearly identified the areas in need of improvement and provides a clear sense of direction and purpose. This vision is closely linked to the needs of pupils, with an appropriate emphasis upon promoting high standards and effective teaching and learning. There have been continuous improvements in the quality of teaching, the learning environment and the curriculum provided since the previous inspection. The headteacher has made the monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning a priority, and this has had a significant impact upon standards.
2. The headteacher is well supported by the deputy headteacher, senior management team and governors. A team approach is well developed, and all the staff work hard to improve the quality of education provided by the school. Equality of opportunity is promoted, and the pupils with special educational needs are well supported. The school ethos is very good, and there is a firm commitment to raising standards.
3. There are a number of recently appointed governors. However, the governing body is effective and making a good contribution to the life of the school; for example through regular and well focused visits to the school. A range of their responsibilities is delegated to committees that support the work of the school appropriately. The governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities well.

The quality of teaching is at least good in most lessons. For the under fives, teaching is very good.

4. The quality of teaching is mostly good and sometimes very good or excellent. The good quality of teaching is a strength of the school, and is an improvement since the previous inspection.
5. For children under five, the quality of teaching is very good. Adults working with these children show considerable skill, work well together and have a good knowledge of children's needs. Activities are planned to meet the needs of all children, and there is an appropriate emphasis on learning through well-planned play activities, practical activities, movement and dance.
6. Good and better teaching in Key Stages 1 and 2 is characterised by high expectations of pupils' performance, well-planned activities that are well matched to the needs of pupils of all ages in the mixed age classes, together with a brisk pace. In the best lessons, teachers have good knowledge of the subject, and resources are very well prepared and used. The good and better quality teaching supports pupils' learning effectively throughout the school, and they make good progress overall. The pupils show interest in their work, and most are able to sustain their concentration well.

7. Teachers throughout the school have good knowledge and understanding of the subjects that they teach and they plan activities well to meet the needs of pupils with different levels of attainment. The teachers work hard to provide for the needs of their pupils, and improve their understanding by the effective use of questions which challenge and extend pupils' learning. Expectations are high subjects in the subjects inspected, and the pupils are offered work that really challenges them to learn.
8. The management of the pupils in lessons is good throughout the school, and pupils respond positively to the tasks they are given. The teachers make their expectations of behaviour clear, and the standard of discipline is high. Good behaviour is noted and praised, and effective strategies are in place to raise pupils' self-esteem; for example, in the way older pupils help to supervise younger pupils at lunchtime. Classroom assistants and helpers are given good instructions, and they work effectively, and interact positively with pupils.
9. The teaching of literacy is good across both key stages. The teachers have successfully implemented the National Literacy Strategy in Key Stage 1. However, there is sometimes too heavy a reliance upon a restricted range of teaching materials and approaches used in upper Key Stage 2. The school has already identified this as a concern and is addressing the issue. An appropriate emphasis is placed on teaching language skills; for example, in one good lesson in Key Stage 1, the class teacher placed an appropriate emphasis upon the use of appropriate expression when reading dialogue. The pupils were asked to take part in the reading, and could easily identify speech marks and other punctuation, and give reasons for their use. There are good opportunities identified for extended writing activities throughout the school.
10. The teaching of numeracy is good across both key stages, and the school is using the National Numeracy Strategy effectively. In one very good lesson in Key Stage 2, the class teacher's effective use of well-prepared resources ensured a brisk pace to the lesson. Challenging questions and high expectations ensured effective learning, and pupils made very good progress in creating their own biggest and smallest numbers from the three digits provided.
11. Throughout the school, the teachers assess pupils well during lessons through discussion and observation. The teachers use their assessments to plan tasks that are well matched to the needs of the pupils, including higher attainers and those with special educational needs. However as yet, assessment is not used sufficiently across the curriculum to tell pupils how they are doing or to help teachers plan future programmes of work.
12. Homework is used well to extend and enrich the pupils' learning throughout the school. The pupils regularly take books home to read, and parents and teachers complete reading diaries appropriately.

Standards of pupils' work are good, especially in English and mathematics.

13. At the end of Key Stage 1, the test and teacher assessment results in reading, writing and mathematics in 1999 were well above the national average. In comparison with similar schools, the pupils' results in mathematics are well above average, and in reading and writing they are above. The trends over time indicate results that are above the national average. Inspection findings indicate that standards are above expectations in English and mathematics. The school has effectively introduced the National Literacy and Numeracy strategies in this key stage, and this is having a good impact upon raising standards.
14. At the end of Key Stage 2, the school's test results and assessments in 1999 indicate that standards are well above the national average in English and mathematics. Inspection evidence concludes that standards are above expectations in English and mathematics. The trend over time is one of improvement in these subjects. Pupils' speaking and listening skills are well developed through this key stage.
15. The school has effectively introduced the National Numeracy Strategy throughout the school, and has recognised the need to revise the introduction of the Literacy Strategy in Key Stage 2. The school has set sufficiently challenging targets, and is making good progress towards meeting them. Standards have improved in these subjects since the previous inspection.
16. Pupils' speaking and listening skills are well developed throughout the school. The way pupils of all ages express their views about their work, and about school life in general, is indicative of the sophistication of their use of language. They use words accurately and have a good knowledge of technical language across the curriculum.
17. Pupils enjoy stories and quickly learn to read. The very good start that children are given in the reception class is built upon and extended throughout the school. By the age of seven, pupils know how to tackle unfamiliar words and enjoy reading different forms of writing such as stories and poetry. Older pupils read for pleasure and to gather information to extend their own interests. Reading is used effectively to support learning across the curriculum. Writing skills are taught well across much of the school and pupils learn how to improve their written work. However, the quality and range of written work in upper Key Stage 2 is sometimes restricted by the overuse of a limited range of published texts.
18. Numeracy skills are effectively taught across the school. Pupils in Key Stage 1 have a good understanding of place value and demonstrate a good understanding of number skills. They also have a good understanding of space and shape, and identify the basic symmetry of two-dimensional shape. In Key Stage 2, older pupils display good data handling skills, using tally charts and graphs to illustrate data they have collected. Measuring skills are good and most pupils use a range of units of length, mass, time and money competently.

Pupils' attitudes to school, their personal development and relationships across the school are very good.

19. The pupils are enthusiastic about coming to school and are eager to learn. Their good behaviour in the classroom and around the school, with the exception of the playground at lunch time, reflects their confidence and certainty that they are liked and valued by all school staff. The pupils ask good questions and listen carefully to each other's answers, and frequently contribute their own good ideas.
20. The pupils' behaviour is good overall. It is particularly good in classrooms, although sometimes less thoughtful towards others in the playground. They have a clear sense of right and wrong, and know what is expected of them. The consistently high standards of behaviour from the oldest pupils are particularly good; for example, in the way they look after younger pupils at lunchtime.
21. The pupils listen to each other well and show respect. They are friendly in their conversations, and welcoming to visitors. Older pupils encourage younger ones to conform to the school's expectations of pupils' work and behaviour; for example, when helping to supervise the lunch break. There are good opportunities for the pupils to contribute in small ways to the smooth running of the school. The pupils with special educational needs also have positive attitudes towards learning.

Pupils' attendance is very good.

22. The attendance rate at the school is very high in comparison with other schools nationally, and the rate of unauthorised absence is below the national average. Pupils enjoy coming to school. Parents' are supportive of the school's procedures for monitoring attendance. Pupils attend punctually and lessons start on time, and this is having a positive impact upon raising standards.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The quality of acts of worship shared by all pupils. At present, these do not meet requirements.

23. The collective acts of worship observed during the inspection did not meet statutory requirements, because they did not encourage pupils to explore questions about meaning and purpose, values and beliefs, nor the recognition of a deity.
24. One of the acts of worship observed did contribute successfully to pupils' moral and social development with a reflection upon a theme of "hope", although lacking in Christian content. A second assembly observed successfully celebrated pupils' achievements and birthdays and, although there was a brief opportunity for reflection, there was no religious or spiritual content to the assembly, nor the recognition of a deity.
25. Pupils are well behaved and listen attentively in assemblies. Although there is no focus for worship, the use of music at the beginning and end creates a satisfactory atmosphere. Pupils are ready and eager to learn from worship, but at present opportunities are often missed to promote this area of their development.

The use of assessment to measure pupils' progress, and to plan for their progress.

26. Although the assessment policy was reviewed after the previous inspection, the school recognises that it is not working effectively throughout the school. A new and well-considered scheme for assessing pupils' progress is being introduced throughout the school, together with a process of whole staff training and regular sampling of pupils' work.
27. There are now effective assessment procedures in use for English and mathematics, and this is presently being developed in science. Effective procedures are now in place for assessing children's knowledge, understanding and skills when they start school as under fives. However, at present there are limited assessment procedures established for other subjects, including the development of skills in information technology. As yet, assessment is not used sufficiently across the curriculum to tell pupils how they are doing or to help teachers plan future programmes of work.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

28. In order to improve the standard of education further for the pupils, the headteacher, staff and governors should focus upon the following:
 - 1) Ensure that the daily act of collective worship meets statutory requirements by:
 - providing opportunities for pupils to explore questions about meaning and purpose, values and beliefs;
 - ensuring that reference is made to a deity, and that worship is wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character.
 - 2) Develop effective assessment procedures for all subjects, and ensure that this is used as the basis for lesson planning and for helping pupils' to understand their progress.*

* This has already been identified as an area for development by the school.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	23
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	15

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
17	17	43	22	0	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Nursery	YR – Y6
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	0	212
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	0	6

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Nursery	YR – Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0	6
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	0	56

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	1

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	20
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	25

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	3.1
National comparative data	5.4

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0
National comparative data	0.5

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 1 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999 [1998]	13 [21]	12 [10]	25 [31]

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		Reading	Writing	Mathematics
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	11 [18]	13 [19]	13 [21]
	Girls	10 [10]	10 [10]	12 [10]
	Total	21 [28]	23 [29]	25 [31]
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	84 (90)	92 (94)	100 (99)
	National	82 (80)	83 (81)	87 (84)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 2 and above	Boys	12 [19]	13 [19]	13 [21]
	Girls	10 [10]	12 [10]	10 [10]
	Total	22 [29]	25 [29]	23 [31]
Percentage of pupils at NC level 2 or above	School	88 (91)	100 (100)	92 (100)
	National	82 (81)	86 (85)	87 (86)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999 [1998]	24 [30]	21 [21]	45 [51]

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	21 [25]	23 [23]	23 [27]
	Girls	19 [16]	18 [15]	19 [14]
	Total	40 [41]	41 [38]	42 [41]
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	89 (82)	91 (75)	93 (80)
	National	70 (65)	69 (59)	78 (69)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	20 [*]	21 [*]	23 [*]
	Girls	20 [*]	18 [*]	19 [*]
	Total	40 [*]	39 [*]	42 [*]
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	89 (*)	87 (*)	93 (*)
	National	68 (65)	69 (65)	75 (71)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

* These results are unavailable.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	1
White	192
Any other minority ethnic group	0

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	0	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

This table gives the number of exclusions of pupils of compulsory school age, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	9.1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	23.3
Average class size	26.5

Education support staff: YR – Y6

Total number of education support staff	11
Total aggregate hours worked per week	245

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1998/99
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	£
Total income	432235
Total expenditure	433664
Expenditure per pupil	1681
Balance brought forward from previous year	84197
Balance carried forward to next year	82768

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	300
Number of questionnaires returned	100

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	53	45	2	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	47	44	8	1	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	43	49	1	4	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	32	59	8	1	0
The teaching is good.	55	41	2	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	40	49	10	1	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	74	24	2	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	58	40	2	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	35	55	8	1	1
The school is well led and managed.	49	47	2	0	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	40	53	1	2	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	25	61	10	2	2

Other issues raised by parents

Some parents are concerned about mixed age classes. However, there is no evidence to suggest that pupils' progress is being hindered by mixed age classes.