

# Higham Ferrers Junior School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	121828
<b>Local Authority</b>	Northamptonshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	314114
<b>Inspection dates</b>	27–28 November 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Kevin Hodge

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>	Junior
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	344
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Geoff Moore
<b>Headteacher</b>	Peter Grindrod
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	20 October 2003
<b>School address</b>	Saffron Road Higham Ferrers Rushden NN10 8ED
<b>Telephone number</b>	01933 312748
<b>Fax number</b>	01933 418703

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

This is a large primary school with a wide social mix. Few pupils come from minority ethnic groups. In the recent past, standards when children entered the school were below average but have just recently begun to rise to levels that are nearer to national averages. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is high at around 40%. The school has recently been awarded Healthy School status.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

This is a good school. The headteacher, staff and governors have been successful at forging a school with a shared commitment to improve. They foster very good relationships between all. This develops confidence in the children, who want to do well and really enjoy attending. Pupils value their teachers highly, often describing them as 'the best'.

There are several ingredients that contribute to this success. Firstly, good teaching and learning ensure that most pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress and achieve well in most areas. As a result, at the end of Year 6, standards are now broadly average. This is a marked improvement since the last inspection. In mathematics, pupils reach broadly average standards, but some, particularly those who are more able, are not always confident enough in applying their skills to solve 'real life' problems. Throughout the school, pupils attain particularly well in science and information and communication technology (ICT). They also achieve well in subjects such as history, geography, design and technology and art.

Secondly, there are very good welfare arrangements, especially for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Good pastoral support is combined well with close attention to making the school feel safe and welcoming. Pupils have good day-to-day guidance to help them improve, but the high quality marking and guidance on how well they are meeting their targets found in some of their work, are not evident in all classes. This means that they are not always clear about how to improve more quickly. Pupils' personal development and well-being are very good because pastoral care is matched very closely to individual needs and therefore very effective. A broad curriculum, enriched with French language teaching, special theme days and visits away from school, builds upon the focus on developing pupils' basic skills. Activities to help them apply their number skills are too few and this is a key factor that affects their confidence in tackling mathematical problems. Lessons that combine different subjects help make activities fun, while extending pupils' learning.

Lastly, the headteacher and staff work well as a team and have accurately identified areas that need improving. As a result, effective action has been taken to remedy most past weaknesses. Governors have promoted significant building improvements, but they do not have secure enough systems to check on the school's effectiveness. This hinders their ability to be a 'critical friend' to senior staff. However based on the track record of general improvement and the clarity of further priorities generated by the senior leaders, the school has good capacity to improve. One parent, typical of many, aptly noted the 'strong desire to continually improve the quality of education'.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Give pupils, particularly those who are more able, further activities that raise their confidence in applying their mathematical skills and knowledge to solve 'real life' problems.
- Ensure teachers develop consistent approaches to their marking and target setting so that pupils can improve their work more quickly.
- Ensure that governors gain regular first hand knowledge of the progress of priorities for improvement so they can help to support these more effectively.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils achieve well in relation to their starting points. Their good progress enables them to reach average standards in English, mathematics and science by the time they leave and this is an improvement on recent years. This is due to effective teaching, a good emphasis on making learning fun and pupils themselves being well motivated. Children get off to a good start in Year 3, where they settle in quickly. By the end of Year 6 pupils read fluently and write confidently in an increasing range of styles. Pupils are accurate in their number calculation work and knowledge, but some, particularly the more able, are less secure in applying their skills to solve 'real life' problems. The school's own checks indicate that most pupils make good progress and are on course to meet their challenging targets. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) make good progress in line with classmates, as their needs are identified accurately, addressed skilfully and monitored closely.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils' moral, social and cultural development is good which means that they behave very well and show good consideration for others in the playground, around the school and in lessons. Their spiritual awareness is comparatively less well developed. Pupils greatly enjoy school. They find lessons interesting and describe them as 'fun', particularly when they are studying science or topics such as the Egyptians. Though pupils concentrate hard when listening to teachers and each other in small groups, some take time to get down to work. Pupils feel really safe in school, and safe from worries of bullying. They particularly appreciate the 'peer mediators', 'buddy bench' and 'worry boxes' to help solve difficulties if they arise. 'It helps to know that someone will help you if you are feeling sad,' they say. Pupils have a good understanding of the need to choose healthy food for their packed lunches. They understand the importance of exercise for good health, and many pupils like making use of the activity equipment in the playground. Pupils contribute well to the school community through the influential school council, and further afield by choosing different charities to support. Their good personal qualities help prepare them for their next schools, although they are not always confident in using their mathematical skills.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

A strong focus on enhancing teaching and learning has improved the quality since the last inspection. Teachers' planning is clear and covers a good range of activities, although more able pupils are not always challenged sufficiently in their mathematical work. Teachers are good at creating a conducive atmosphere for learning that encourages pupils to make thoughtful contributions on a range of issues. This was evident in a literacy lesson where pupils were keen to improve their discussion skills about the relative merits of child labour in third world countries and came up with some good insights. Practical work in subjects such as art and design and technology make learning interesting and relevant. Teachers have very effective strategies for encouraging good listening by, for example, praising those who are attentive. All make good use of audio-visual equipment to enhance lessons. Teaching assistants are used very well. They

provide particularly good support for pupils with LDD who learn quickly and confidently. Teachers regularly assess pupils' work and some marking is of very high quality. This is not evident in all classes or subjects, making it harder for some pupils to know exactly what they need to do to improve.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

A rich curriculum covers all the required elements, plus quite a bit more! Creative links are often made between subjects, which help make learning fun. However, too few opportunities are planned to encourage pupils to apply their numeracy skills to solve real life problems. Pupils especially enjoy the way teachers succeed in giving subjects extra sparkle. For example, Year 3 pupils enjoyed making sandwiches in design and technology. Older pupils recalled the enjoyment of making instruments in work that linked music, science and design and technology. Others enjoyed visiting a local village to assess its environment quality. Many activities actively promote pupils' speaking and discussion skills to good effect. Good links are forged with local schools and outside agencies to enhance the curriculum. French language lessons extend pupils' familiarity with the language so that they are better equipped for their residential trip to Normandy next year. Parents commented favourably on the number and range of after-school clubs and they are right. They offer pupils good opportunities to develop academically and socially, and extend their levels of exercise.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

Children are prepared for a smooth start to school life when entering the Year 3 classes, when they visit the school for a 'taster day' and take part in extra-curricular activities. Good links with the secondary school aid the transfer for older pupils when they leave. Teachers and teaching assistants show a consistent approach to caring for pupils. Many parents expressed appreciation of the quality of care for their child. 'My shy child has now blossomed' and 'My child with a specific disability is really helped to achieve' were typical comments. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are robust. The school takes health and safety issues seriously when raised by staff, pupils or parents. Staff keep a close eye on the progress of pupils with LDD and ensure there is a good range of support, drawing on professional expertise beyond school where necessary. Whilst pupils have many clear targets set for them, particularly in science, the way these are recorded and monitored varies between subjects and classes. As a result, not all pupils are equally clear about how to improve their work.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The headteacher has successfully steered the school's improvement since the last inspection. Parents greatly appreciate how far the school has come, describing it as 'commanding a great deal of respect in the community'. The headteacher has built a strong team which works well together. Staff openly talk about the good atmosphere in the school. Much has been achieved, particularly in raising standards and improving the school buildings. However, the school is not complacent and wants to get even better. Self-evaluation is good and leads to clear priorities such as strengthening procedures to monitor pupils' progress more closely. This is still comparatively new and not all the information is distilled clearly enough yet to enable a clear

view of which pupils need that extra push or support. Parents regularly give their opinions via questionnaires sent out by the school. Many appreciate that the school often acts upon their suggestions, such as giving more notice of events. Governors keep a general finger on the 'pulse' of the school, but they are not proactive enough in gathering their own information on the school's effectiveness. This hampers their ability to be a robust 'critical friend' to the school. Governors' links with the school council to gain some insights into their current issues are appreciated by the pupils themselves.

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## 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?	2
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

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

### Personal development and well-being

How good is 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
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

### The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
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

<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>	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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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

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

27 November 2007

Dear Pupils

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

I am writing to let you know about the findings from the inspection we carried out recently. We really enjoyed looking around. We think that Higham is a good school. Lots of your parents and carers agree with me that your school looks after you very well. Many said it was 'caring', 'fair' and a 'fun place to be' and they are right.

Here are some of the highlights.

- You make good progress in your work and you reach expected levels at the end of Year 6.
- You said the staff make sure that you feel safe and are very well looked after.
- You really like your 'buddy bench' and peer mentors who help you.
- You really like your work, particularly in subjects such as design and technology, geography, history and art.
- The teachers make lessons interesting and your topic-based work is fun.
- You all behave well and most work hard. Some of you could settle down to work more quickly.
- The headteacher, staff and governors work well and have helped to improve the school and are trying to help it become even better.

I have asked the school to look at these things to improve.

- To give you more activities where you apply your number skills to solve some 'real life' problems, particularly if you are able to do harder work.
- To make all of the marking really good and help you understand how well you are doing in relation to your targets so that you know how to improve your work more quickly.
- For governors to get a better 'first hand' view of how things are going so they then know how to support the school better.

Best wishes

Kevin Hodge Lead inspector

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