

Houghton Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110680
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	325197
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Glynn Storer

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

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	171
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Melanie Young
Headteacher	Mrs Georgina Young
Date of previous school inspection	22 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Chapel Lane Houghton Huntingdon Cambridgeshire PE28 2AY
Telephone number	01480 463398
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This small primary school serves the neighbouring villages of Houghton and Wyton in rural Cambridgeshire, although about half of the pupils live outside the immediate vicinity of the school. Most pupils come from White British backgrounds and of those with minority ethnic heritage, none is at an early stage of learning to speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. The majority of children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage attaining standards normally expected of four-year-olds. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is lower than that in schools nationally, although the number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is about average for a school of this size. The school has experienced a high turnover of staff since its last inspection. Recent appointments include those of the headteacher and the deputy headteacher. A substantial school rebuilding project is due to begin in the summer of 2009.

The school holds the Activemark and has Health Promoting Schools and International Schools Awards.

Parents have access to childcare provision at an out-of-school club (HOOTS). The school's governing body does not manage this provision and so it will be subject to a separate inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Houghton Primary is a good school. In recent years, the turbulence caused by staff turnover resulted in a decline in standards and achievement. This unsettled period is now over. Under the highly effective leadership of the headteacher, ably supported by senior staff, the school has successfully rebuilt its teaching and leadership teams. The school is once again moving forward strongly. Standards are rising rapidly and the school's current pupils are making good progress. Consequently, overall standards are above the national average at the end of both key stages. The majority of pupils, including those who find learning difficult, are achieving well. The school has forged exceptionally constructive links with neighbouring schools and with an impressive range of outside bodies, all of which benefit pupils' learning and the care that staff provide for them. The school has the strong support and confidence of most parents. One parent summed up the views of many when commenting: 'My children are extremely happy at school. It has a safe, nurturing environment, which has allowed them to grow and blossom into independent, confident children.'

Pupils achieve well because teaching, learning and the curriculum are good. Most lessons are lively and engaging. An increasing emphasis on teaching pupils to learn through enquiry and investigation is paying dividends. Pupils are highly motivated and thoroughly enjoy their learning because teachers plan exciting practical activities that are both intellectually challenging and fun. Staff are working hard to spread this approach throughout the curriculum. However, they have not yet devised ways of tracking pupils' progress in the development of enquiry and subject specific skills in topics spanning the full range of curriculum areas. This limits their ability to ensure that such skills develop progressively and that all pupils do as well as they could.

The overall quality of care, guidance and support is good, although pastoral care and personal support are excellent. Relationships at all levels are exceptionally constructive and promote a strongly caring ethos throughout the school. But this school has gone the extra mile by putting in place effective systems to ensure that any child who is vulnerable, be it educationally or personally.... or who just has 'a bit of a wobble'.... gets the high quality support needed to see them through the sticky patch. The secret of this school's success is that it not only cares for all pupils, but also has enormously high expectations of them. Staff expect pupils to participate fully, to strive to succeed, to have opinions, to contribute to school improvement and to take responsibility for their own learning, behaviour and achievement....and they do! Pupils' personal development and well-being are excellent. By the time that they leave, pupils are mature beyond their years. They are true partners in the teaching and learning process and that is why standards are rising so strongly.

Leadership, management and governance are effective. A key factor in the school's current resurgence is the way that senior leaders have united the staff and created a culture in which all respond positively to extremely challenging targets for raising attainment. Individually and collectively, staff are totally committed to school improvement. Curriculum leadership teams are taking this drive to the next level and give the school a good capacity to improve further. However, these teams have not yet been in place long enough for the monitoring and development work that team members do to have a full impact on standards and quality.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Staff are effective in promoting children's welfare and personal development. Relationships with parents are good and many commented on the 'amazing progress' they feel their children make. Children arrive at Houghton with broadly average early learning skills. They love school and throw themselves into the interesting activities they are given. This, alongside constant encouragement to do things for themselves and to solve problems, ensures they make good progress. The recent focus on narrowing the gap between girls and boys is paying off. Boys continue to do slightly better, but the gap is no longer significant. Progress is particularly strong where the teacher works with children on focussed activities and investigations, such as the 'sweeties challenge'. However, the Reception class environment is rather cluttered. Equipment and resources are not always visible and presented in a way that invites children to select when they have problems to solve. Leadership of this provision is generally good. A particular strength is the quality and use of assessment as a means of evaluating children's progress and determining what needs to be done for children to improve even further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Devise methods of tracking pupils' progress accurately when they undertake topics based on enquiry skills that cover a range of curriculum subjects.
- Extend the role of curriculum leaders in checking on standards and quality and in planning for school improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

After the school's last inspection, standards dipped and pupils' achievement faltered. However, standards are now rising in both key stages and pupils throughout the school, including those who find learning difficult, are achieving well. The upturn began in 2008, when standards in writing and mathematics began to rise in Key Stage 1. However, in that year, standards in reading fell further and in all core subjects, too few pupils attained the above average Level 3. That improvement is continuing in the current Year 2, where pupils are firmly on course to meet the extremely demanding targets that the school has set. These pupils have made good progress in Years 1 and 2, with the result that virtually all are likely to attain the nationally expected standard for seven-year-olds in all core subjects. Considerably more pupils are set to attain above average scores. The upturn in standards was even more marked in Key Stage 2 in 2008. Overall standards were well above the national average and pupils' achievement during their time in school and in Years 3 to 6 was good. The school's tracking of current Year 6 pupils shows that, here too, pupils are responding extremely well to their challenging targets. Above average standards and good progress are being maintained.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils love coming to school and relish the challenges presented to them in lessons. This is apparent in consistently high attendance figures. Their behaviour is excellent and they are exceptionally thoughtful in their interactions with others. They speak clearly and thoughtfully and listen attentively to the ideas of others. This high quality of interaction helps them to

understand new ideas and solve problems. Pupils' rapidly develop enquiry skills in key areas of learning enabling them to work confidently and independently and, where solutions are hard to find, to be persistent in seeking answers. This excellent response is a key factor in pupils' effective learning. Pupils have a good understanding of safe and healthy lifestyles. They also play important roles in helping the school to operate and in making decisions about its future. They enjoy many opportunities to be leaders and respond with great maturity. Pupils show spirituality and sensitivity. They have exceptionally well-developed moral and social values, demonstrated in the extremely strong contributions that they make to the school, the local community and the wider environment. Positive attitudes, good levels of basic skills and a strong sense of community equip pupils well for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers plan lessons that are both challenging and enjoyable. Practical, 'hands-on' activities engage pupils' interests and bring out the best in them. Teachers have high expectations and work hard to instil highly effective learning behaviour. As a result, pupils are attentive and strive to succeed. Throughout the school, teaching assistants do a good job in supporting pupils who find learning difficult. These pupils are included fully in all activities and so make good progress alongside others in the class. In the best lessons, teachers use assessment information to plan work for pupils of different ages and abilities, although this practice is not consistently effective in all classes. In most lessons, teachers keep the pace of learning brisk by promptly identifying those pupils who need extra support. However, in a small minority of lessons, teachers' use of time or their monitoring of work in progress is not sharp enough to ensure that all make the best possible progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Staff plan appealing topics that enrich the curriculum. In geography, history and science, there is a strong focus on using pupils' enquiry skills to determine the way topics develop and how they can best gain subject specific knowledge and skills. This approach is comparatively new and is still being adapted and improved, but it is already benefiting pupils by helping them to become better learners, more self-confident and independent. Many topics combine subjects, which makes learning more coherent and adds to pupils' enjoyment. Because work builds on pupils' interests and previous knowledge, it maximises progress and achievement. A clear strategy for promoting community cohesion permeates the curriculum. For example, the link with a Kenyan school builds pupils' understanding of those living very different lives, while projects in the immediate locality increase their awareness of the needs and interests of different groups in the community. Opportunities such as these support pupils' personal development extremely well. Educational visits, outside speakers and club activities ranging from art to ornithology add to the quality of pupils' learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. The headteacher and staff track pupils' progress in core subjects closely to make sure no one falls behind. They identify any obstacles to progress and

introduce effective measures to help pupils overcome them. Consequently, there is an impressive range of support for any pupil who needs additional help. This can be a one off session of counselling for a troubled child, sustained support for a learning difficulty or help to achieve an academic target. Pupils have very precise targets in literacy as this is a current school focus. These targets are in language that the pupils understand so that they and their teachers can evaluate work together to determine whether targets are met, or not. This practice is still developing but is already having a positive impact on writing standards. However, there is currently no system for tracking the development of cross-curricular subject and enquiry skills, so guidance in this area remains limited. Staff take pupils' welfare and safety seriously and the school's robust safeguarding procedures ensure all legal requirements are met. The school monitors attendance rigorously and absence figures remain low.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Throughout a challenging phase in the school's development, the headteacher has been highly effective in rebuilding teaching and leadership teams. Together with the deputy headteacher, she has been instrumental in leading colleagues as, together, they developed a new vision and direction for school improvement. Governors have given their full support to this committed stand, which is now paying off as the team gels and standards rise in response to improvements in teaching, learning and the curriculum. A clear focus on raising achievement permeates the management of the performance of all staff. Setting challenging targets has been extremely effective in the drive to raise standards. This approach results in accountability and in a strong sense of teamwork because everybody is pulling in the same direction. The creation of leadership teams spreads the leadership role, develops the leadership potential of all staff and pupils and, along with the planned new school build, gives the school a good capacity to improve further. However, some curriculum leaders are still developing their roles and so the full impact of their monitoring work is yet to be felt in planning for school improvement. Nevertheless, self-evaluation is accurate and governors are rigorous in holding the school to account for the targets that it sets for itself. The leadership promotes the school's involvement in the community well but has yet to evaluate the impact it is having in detail. The school provides good value for money.

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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?	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?	1
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?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

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

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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
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	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
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?	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

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	1
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?	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	2
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**

27 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Houghton Primary School, Huntingdon, PE28 2AY

You may remember that I visited your school a little while ago with my colleague, Mrs Holden. Thank you for making us welcome and for taking time to talk to us and to answer our questions. We really enjoyed hearing about the work of the school council and seeing how well the playground leaders do their jobs.

I thought that you would like to hear what we found out about your school.

There are many good things happening in your school.

- Almost all of you make good progress and overall standards are above average.
- The school is extremely good at bringing in outside help to make learning more interesting and enjoyable.
- You are getting really skilful at learning by investigating and solving problems.
- You get on exceptionally well with one another and your behaviour is excellent.
- Groups such as the school council and the play leaders enable you to improve school life and to help the wider community.
- Your teachers and other adults care for you when you have problems, make sure that you are safe and help you grow into confident, independent learners.
- Mrs Young, the staff, governors and you, the pupils, work hard to make your school a better place.

There is not much that needs to be improved at Houghton Primary School. However, because Mrs Young would like everything to be perfect, we have suggested two things. We have asked your teachers to find ways of tracking exactly how well you are learning to investigate and solve problems, so that they can give you the help you need to get even better. We have also asked Mrs Young to help all the staff to play a full part in checking how well everybody is doing and how well things are working, so that their plans for improving the school focus on exactly the right things. You can help by being really thoughtful and sensible when staff ask for your ideas about how things should be when your new school is built.

I hope that you will all continue to work hard and enjoy your time at Houghton Primary School and that your new school will be a really great place to be.

Glynn Storer

Lead inspector