

Lower Halstow Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118341
Local Authority	
Inspection number	339197
Inspection dates	24–25 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Graeme Bassett

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	131
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter G Marshall
Headteacher	Cathy Walker
Date of previous school inspection	13 November 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited nine lessons and observed all five teachers teaching. Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, subject leaders, teachers, other staff, governors, groups of pupils and some parents and carers. They looked at pupils' work, teachers' planning and assessment files, school statutory policies, the school improvement plan, curricular planning documents, pupils' tracking and assessment records, evaluations of teaching carried out by the school and the minutes of governors' meetings. Observations were made of pupils in assembly, on the playground and at lunchtime. The team also analysed questionnaires, including 73 returned from parents and carers, 74 from pupils and 11 from staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the effectiveness with which leaders and managers monitor and evaluate the work of the school, promote high expectations and raise attainment, especially in writing and mathematics
- whether teachers plan sufficiently challenging work for all pupils in the mixed aged classes
- how effectively assessment is used to plan appropriate work in mathematics for pupils in mixed-age classes
- the extent to which writing is developed across all areas of learning.

Information about the school

Lower Halstow Primary School is a small primary school serving the local village and some other communities including parts of Sittingbourne. Pupils are taught in five classes, four of which from Reception to Year 5 are of mixed-age groups. Whilst most pupils are of White British heritage, a very small number are from minority ethnic backgrounds or are the children of Travellers.

The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. These needs mostly link to specific and moderate learning difficulties and emotional and social difficulties. The school has National Healthy School status, and a Gold Travel Plan award.

There are privately organised breakfast and after-school clubs on site which are attended by children from the school.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school. There are some excellent aspects and, as a result, the school's reputation is growing in the local area. The headteacher has established a very clear direction to the work of the school. Because of her good leadership and management, significant improvements have been made since the last inspection in developing teaching and in the establishment of an exciting and inspiring curriculum. The headteacher fosters a shared vision resulting in leadership at all levels being good. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and rightly identifies the development of writing and mathematics as priorities. The rigorous monitoring and evaluation of teaching enable the staff to set challenging targets. The governors ensure that the school's safeguarding procedures are satisfactory and that all statutory requirements are met. As a result of all of these strong features, the school's capacity to sustain improvements is good.

It is very evident that all staff provide good care, guidance and support for everyone, which results in pupils being very happy. The good partnership with parents helps pupils to share their work, learning and interests and contributes much to this being a thriving and happy school. Pupils say they feel safe in school and know who to talk to if they have problems. They enjoy coming to school and have extremely positive attitudes towards their work. They readily demonstrate open and supportive relationships with each other. The behaviour of nearly all pupils is outstanding and contributes extremely well to the purposeful working atmosphere. Pupils' social, moral and spiritual development is good. However, the school has not yet developed any links to promote national and global cohesion, and pupils are not sufficiently aware of the customs and traditions of other people within the United Kingdom and internationally.

Given pupils' attainment on entry, all pupils, including Traveller children and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are making good progress. The proportion of pupils exceeding the expected levels throughout the school is improving and is currently above the national average in English, mathematics and science. Occasionally lower attaining pupils are not set tasks that are carefully structured with small enough steps to meet their needs and which build on their prior attainment in order for them to attain a higher level in literacy and numeracy.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the lower attaining pupils are set more carefully structured tasks which build on their prior attainment and help them attain a higher level in literacy and mathematics.
- Ensure that pupils are better prepared for living in a multi-faith and

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culturally-diverse society by developing links both nationally and internationally.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils' learning, progress and achievement are good. Good progress ensures pupils have the skills in English, mathematics and science that prepare them well for their futures. From observations in the classrooms, the improving quality of teaching is resulting in a steady rise in attainment across the mixed-aged classes and in Year 6. More pupils are now exceeding the expected levels for their ages throughout the school. Most pupils do particularly well in learning to read. In Year 6, pupils particularly enjoy writing and, because of the good and often excellent teaching, they are inspired to write at greater length. This was evident in their well thought out story boards to support their writing of the biography of Mary Anning, the fossil hunter. Other pupils were observed tackling mathematical problems and were seen competently demonstrating their use of a protractor on the interactive whiteboards.

Pupils are polite and courteous. Their contribution to the school is good with many accepting monitor roles. Pupils are enthusiastic about their 'buddy' role to help Reception children settle in and they spontaneously appreciate the efforts and talents of others in the reward assemblies. Pupils have strong connections with the local community but do not have sufficient understanding of different cultures in the world beyond their own neighbourhood. They do have, however, a little understanding of the life of primary children in Tanzania and each class are preparing a book to send to them which shows memories including the snow around Lower Halstow over the past year. Pupils' good understanding of how to remain healthy by eating healthily and taking part in regular exercise is reflected in the school's award of Healthy School and the work they have done on a travel plan.

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	3
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	2
Pupils' behaviour	1

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

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms	
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 Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

There is a lot of fun in lessons and on nearly all occasions the teachers match the levels of work to the needs of different ability groups of pupils extremely well. Teachers and teaching assistants ask searching questions to develop pupils' ideas, vocabulary and skills. For example, Year 5 pupils were challenged imaginatively to put forward arguments for retaining their playtimes. This caused much heated discussion and generated some very good persuasive writing. Assessment information and marking comments are used systematically to set challenging targets, particularly in literacy and numeracy, that help pupils understand what they need to learn next.

The curriculum is good overall and particularly strong in the promotion of the creative arts and cross-curricular links when subjects are interwoven to make learning more meaningful and relevant. With these links developing well, especially through history and geography, the curriculum is inspiring greater interest and enthusiasm among the pupils. Occasionally the curriculum is not adapted sufficiently well with simpler tasks to build on the prior attainment of pupils, particularly lower attaining pupils. Visits and residential visits enhance pupils' learning and social development effectively.

The staff have very good relationships with pupils. Pupils say, 'We are treated like adults and staff look out for us to make sure we are safe.' Good support for the pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities enhances their achievements. All pupils are involved in all that goes on in school. Many parents and carers report that they have good relationships with teachers and inspection evidence shows that in nearly all instances, home/school support and communication, including frequent information about their child's achievements, are good.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

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How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher, with the extremely good support of the other staff, sets challenging targets that drive the school forward. Headteacher and senior staff share their ambitions for the future with the wider school community effectively. Clear priorities and initiatives identified in the school development plan are improving teaching, learning and the curriculum, resulting in rising attainment in writing and mathematics in all classes including those with mixed aged groups.

Frequent analysis of pupils' achievement is used effectively to identify those pupils who need greater support through small group tuition and booster lessons. Staff have devised good action plans to develop their subjects. These developments are having a marked impact on pupils' work and bringing about improvements.

The governors are aware of the strengths and weaknesses in the school and they make a valuable contribution. The school promotes equality of opportunity while tackling discrimination effectively and it is working to make sure that all pupils do as well as possible. Risk assessments are carried out frequently and thorough preparation is made for pupils' visits away from school. However, the governing body is not rigorous enough in organising its files to ensure that the school can make easy reference to each policy and to review them systematically over time. The governors ensure that the school's safeguarding procedures are satisfactory and continually assess the security of the school site.

There is good community cohesion between pupils, parents and carers and the local neighbourhood. This is especially evident through the involvement of the local community in the use of the community sports hall. Nevertheless, the school is very aware of the need to foster national and global links to enhance their promotion of community cohesion.

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	3
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	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3

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The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2
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Early Years Foundation Stage

Children's skills on entry to the Reception class are below expected levels in most areas of learning and particularly low in their numeracy, communication, language and literacy skills. Children quickly settle to the routines of the class and, because of the good care and guidance, their social and emotional development improves rapidly. Provision for children's welfare, especially for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, is good.

Teaching is good and enables children to learn basic skills in a secure way. Reception children work alongside some of the pupils in Year 1, but the teacher ensures that they experience joint themes in a way to enable them to draw upon their own ideas. Consequently, there are many opportunities for them to follow their own investigations or to initiate their own learning. Attainment in the Reception class is currently broadly in line with expected levels for the children's age in their personal, social and emotional skills, their physical, creative skills and knowledge of the world, but in writing and calculation it is still lagging below expectations by the time they enter Year 1. Good leadership and management are leading to improved provision, but there is more to do to ensure that achievement in writing and numeracy accelerates more quickly. Leaders have correctly identified the need to extend the facilities for the children in Early Years Foundation Stage with the proposed building of better outdoor facilities.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account: Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers returning the questionnaire was high. Almost all who replied to the questionnaire or spoke to the inspectors expressed their full support for the school. Parents frequently said how much the school had improved and that this is a good and caring school. All said that teaching is good and that their children were learning well, making good progress and are prepared well for the future. They all say children are kept safe. Very few expressed concerns. A very small number of questionnaires showed these parents had some unease about how well the school helps parents to support their child's learning and that the school does not take account of

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their concerns and suggestions. The inspection team found that teachers formally meet most parents each term, provide good support to pupils and endeavour to involve parents and carers on a day-to-day basis in their child's education. With the exception of a small number of parents, the inspection team found that nearly all parents reported that they are impressed by the open nature of the school and the willingness of the headteacher and staff to listen if they had concerns or suggestions.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Lower Halstow Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	42	58	29	40	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	47	64	26	36	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	34	47	35	48	1	1	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	23	38	42	58	1	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	31	42	42	58	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	28	38	40	55	4	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	33	45	39	53	1	1	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	16	22	51	70	0	0	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	24	33	43	59	2	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	27	37	37	51	4	5	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	23	32	39	53	6	8	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	25	34	37	51	4	5	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	38	52	34	47	1	1	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for 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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

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 were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

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 pupil's 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.



26 March 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Lower Halstow Primary School, Sittingbourne ME9 7ES

Thank you for helping us when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you and finding out about your school. We found that your school provides you with a good education. Thank you for telling us your very positive views when you completed the questionnaire. It helped us to get a good picture of your school. Well done!

These are the things that we judged to be good in your school.

- Your headteacher provides good leadership and management.
- The teachers and other staff in your school work well as a team and support your headteacher well.
- You work and play together very well and show you enjoy your work in school.
- You are very polite and make visitors feel very welcome. Your excellent behaviour helps you to create a positive family feeling around the school.
- Teaching is good and your teachers encourage you to answer questions. Because of this, you make good progress and your work is steadily improving. More and more of you are reaching standards in your work that are above average.
- The adults provide good care, guidance and support, especially for those of you who find work difficult at times. As a result, you are all developing very positive attitudes towards your work and towards each other.
- You have a good understanding of how to remain healthy and keep safe.

There are still some ways in which your school could be better. We have asked your headteacher and governors to:

- ensure that, for those of you who occasionally find work difficult, your teachers set you work that more closely matches your needs and builds on what you already know and can do so that you can do better in literacy and mathematics
- help you to be more aware of the customs and traditions of other people by ensuring that the school develops community links across your neighbourhood, the country and the world.

Once again, thank you for your help. You can help further by asking your teachers how you can make your work better.

Yours sincerely

Graeme Bassett

Lead inspector

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