

Inspection of an outstanding school: Howe Dell Primary School

The Runway, Hatfield, Hertfordshire AL10 9AH

Inspection dates:

11 and 12 July 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. Inspectors are recommending the next inspection to be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Howe Dell are welcoming and open. They are kind to visitors and considerate to each other. They are eager to learn and share their knowledge, which they can express with confidence. They have a developed sense of right and wrong, which staff help them to learn.

Most pupils respond well to the high expectations of staff, and they behave well. Pupils listen carefully to each other during lessons and in small groups. They understand this is an important way to show respect to, and care for, their peers. Bullying does not happen often. When it does, pupils know that adults will support them and stop it from happening.

Leaders have high ambitions for all pupils to follow a broad, ambitious and rich curriculum. This has a high priority. However, some subject development is newer, and there is some inconsistency in teachers' subject knowledge.

Pupils can participate in the 'eco-committee', which links to the eco-credentials of the school buildings. Pupils learn from this. For instance, they know how and why water is collected for school use. Pupils understand that 'they are all unique, like their fingerprints'. This helps pupils to understand and celebrate their differences.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The leadership team has developed subject plans and adapted the expected teaching approaches in some subjects over the last two years. The monitoring of subjects and staff training are ongoing. However, some changes are in the earlier stages of development. This means that there is a difference in teachers' subject knowledge. Where this is

weaker, teachers do not give the clear explanations and expert questioning that help pupils to remember.

Leaders and staff carry out regular checks on pupils' knowledge. Gaps are tackled by teachers adjusting what they teach. Teachers also make sure that pupils have regular opportunities to recap on and recall past learning. In this way, pupils can retain new knowledge and link this to what they have learned in the past.

Leaders in the early years foundation stage have created engaging environments. Consequently, children show a high level of concentration when completing learning tasks. Staff use books as the basis for teaching and ensure that pupils' interests are sparked. Staff are skilled at using these interests to develop children's language and communication skills. Pupils are generally well prepared for Year 1. However, in some subjects, curriculum thinking does not link fully from Reception to older year groups. This means that language development in, for example, geography does not begin as early as it could. Plans are already in place to address this.

Leaders have prioritised early reading, and this is a strength. Staff are well trained. They teach using consistent approaches. Leaders regularly check the teaching, and the progress, of pupils. This means that any weaknesses in teaching are addressed with training, and any pupils who fall behind receive catch-up sessions. When pupils practise reading, they read books that closely match their phonics knowledge. This enables them to practise blending and decoding independently. This gives pupils the confidence they need to help them learn to read.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are identified quickly and accurately. This allows teachers and support staff to adapt what they do to ensure that pupils with SEND have the support they need. Support staff have been well trained, and many provide a high level of care and support to pupils while also maintaining pupils' dignity and developing their independence. This means that pupils with SEND achieve well.

Pupils are taught about healthy relationships and their growing and developing bodies. They learn about diversity and the importance of helping others. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Leaders have made some changes, introducing, for example, a more 'restorative approach' to behaviour. For the most part, pupils are well behaved. They understand their role in making the school community positive and safe.

Over the last two years, governors have had support from the local authority, improving their ability to provide the essential 'critical friend' role. Leaders and governors work closely together to carry out school improvements. However, they have not kept all parents on board with the changes they are making. Some parents do not agree that the changes are positive.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff understand how to identify any pupils who may be at risk of harm. Staff are well trained and understand what needs to be reported to leaders. Staff have a secure understanding of the national and local risks.

Leaders work together to carry out actions quickly. Regular team meetings keep vulnerable pupils safe. Leaders have support systems for all pupils who need it, such as well-being groups.

Pupils understand how to keep safe online. They know they need to be considerate of others in the real and online worlds.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a few subjects, leaders have not fully developed all the small steps of knowledge that pupils need to learn from Reception to Year 6. This means there will be a disconnect between what pupils learn in Reception and what they learn in Year 1. Leaders need to implement and monitor the effectiveness of their plans to address this.
- In a few subject curriculums, teachers' subject knowledge is not consistently strong. This means that pupils sometimes do not get the precise instruction or deepening questioning they need. Leaders need to ensure that teachers' subject knowledge is prioritised and that regular checks are carried out to ensure that teaching is consistently effective.
- Leaders have not communicated effectively to parents the reasons for, and impact of, the changes they are making. Consequently, some parents do not feel positive about the progress the school is making towards its development priorities. Leaders should enhance their approach to communicating with parents to enable them to better explain the decisions that school leaders and governors make.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually, this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in September 2017.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	117220
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10288454
Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	446
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Julia Ellis-Hall and Katie Fox
Headteacher	Tracy Prickett
Website	www.howedell.herts.sch.uk/
Date of previous inspection	September 2017

Information about this school

- Leaders do not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, who is also the designated safeguarding lead. The inspector met with some members of the governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and art. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspector examined a range of documents provided by the school, including leaders' school development plans.

- The inspector spoke to leaders and viewed a range of documents and information, including minutes of governing body meetings, school policies, and documentation and records relating to safeguarding.
- Pupils talked to the inspector about their views on the school. The inspector also observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime, lunchtimes and in lessons.
- The inspector considered the 99 responses and 70 free-text responses made by parents to the survey, Ofsted Parent View. The inspector also considered the 42 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire. The inspector spoke to members of staff.

Inspection team

Jessie Linsley, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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