



St Mary's CofE Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 101323
Local Authority Barnet
Inspection number 276498
Inspection date 13 November 2006
Reporting inspector Nick Butt

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Dollis Park
School category	Voluntary aided		Finchley
Age range of pupils	3-11		London N3 1BT
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	02083430866
Number on roll (school)	458	Fax number	02083463825
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Patrick Moriarty
		Headteacher	Mr Rob Allen
Date of previous school inspection	31 January 2000		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This larger-than-average school serves an affluent residential suburban area. Just under half the pupils come from White British backgrounds. There are many minority ethnic groups represented, Japanese and Black African being among the largest. Almost a third of pupils speak English as an additional language, which is high. A greater than usual proportion of pupils have learning difficulties. The number who are eligible for free school meals is very low. More pupils join and leave the school outside normal times than is found in most schools. In the past two years there has been a very high turnover of teaching staff. The school has an award for promoting healthy lifestyles.

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 that attains high standards by the end of Year 6. The leadership of the school has been focused on the personal development and well being of its pupils, which is outstanding. The headteacher has also done much to ensure the high quality enrichment pupils receive through the curriculum and in extra-curricular activities. The achievement of pupils, while good, is not as outstanding as it once was and has been gently declining over time. This was marked in Year 2 in 2006, when a combination of inadequate teaching and inaccurate assessments led to a sharp fall in reported results. The leadership of the school is tackling this situation and achievement is now satisfactory, but the initial response was not as rigorous as it might have been.

A stimulating curriculum interests and engages pupils, and they thoroughly enjoy the wealth of activities that are available. Participation in sport is particularly strong, with all pupils having the opportunity to learn tennis. With the exception of Year 2, teaching across the school is good and pupils make good progress in their learning. While teaching is now satisfactory in Year 2, the more able pupils are not always sufficiently challenged to attain the highest levels. Children get off to a good start in the Nursery and Reception classes, where the spacious accommodation has been put to very good use in providing exciting and fun opportunities to harness children's natural curiosity.

The headteacher is supported by a committed and enthusiastic leadership team, who are beginning to influence standards and achievement in their areas. The governing body is more aware now of its vital role as a critical friend. In the past, it did not always receive the information it needed to ask probing questions. The day-to-day monitoring and evaluation of the school's work is satisfactory, but the tracking of pupils' progress is not as rigorous as it could be. Strategic plans do not always highlight the key priorities for improvement. The school has identified the declining trend in achievement and is beginning to tackle it. Capacity to improve is consequently satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement of the more able pupils in Year 2 by giving them more challenging work to do.
- Improve the school's strategic leadership by:
 - focusing on key priorities for development through more rigorous monitoring of the school's work;
 - ensuring governors hold the school to account more.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

By the end of Year 6, standards are well above average in English and mathematics and exceptionally high in science. This is because of consistently good teaching, especially in Years 3 to 6. Achievement is good. Pupils meet their challenging targets. The year group that suffered last year has made good progress in Year 3 this year,

although their standards still reflect an element of that underachievement. In Year 2, pupils make satisfactory progress, but the more able pupils are not always given work that sufficiently challenges them to excel. Children enter the Foundation Stage with skills and abilities that are generally above those expected. They make good progress because of the good quality provision they receive. Pupils with learning difficulties are well supported and make good progress. The many pupils who speak English as an additional language are fully included in lessons and do as well as other pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils have an outstanding awareness of how to live healthy lives, and enjoy plenty of exercise. They say they feel safe and get on well together. One pupil commented, 'there's lots of friendly people in this school'. While a very few parents expressed concerns about discipline, inspection findings are that pupils' behaviour is excellent, both in class and around the school. Pupils are polite and considerate, and have extremely good attitudes to their learning. They help one another in practical ways, such as being 'playground friends'. The school council has a positive influence on school life, and meets school councils from other schools. One success has been the renovation of the toilets. A pupil noted, 'before, the toilets were a bit smelly, but now they're a lot more pretty!' Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils nominate charities to support and help out in the local community. The environmental group is especially active. Pupils leave the school as well-rounded confident individuals and have well above average basic skills. They are very well prepared for a life of learning.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers are enthusiastic and pupils respond well to their interesting and well-planned lessons. The majority of the teaching is good. New technology is used confidently to motivate pupils, and teachers often plan real-life problems to make learning relevant. For example, Year 3 pupils added up a week's house points, and Year 6 pupils calculated the price of a holiday to Portugal using charts to assist them. Teaching assistants are well deployed and give valuable support to pupils with learning difficulties. Occasionally, teachers get carried away and talk too much, when pupils could take more part in discussion. In Year 2, teaching is satisfactory, but the more able pupils often have work to do which does not challenge them sufficiently. Teachers across the school give good verbal advice to pupils, but marking in books is sometimes inconsistent.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It is enriched by an outstanding range of clubs and visits and visitors, giving pupils many enjoyable and exciting experiences. This contributes very well to their outstanding personal development. The school excels in music and sport, with many different clubs and many pupils learning musical instruments. Themed weeks, such as the recent science week, give pupils opportunities to study in depth and broaden their knowledge and understanding. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has improved greatly since the last inspection, with sets of mobile laptop computers in regular use, as well as a modern ICT suite. The curriculum in the Foundation Stage is creative and fun, and helps children to develop a love of learning. In Year 2, the curriculum lacks imagination, with missed opportunities to challenge and excite pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

One parent wrote, 'the time and effort the staff have all made have been beyond and above the call of duty,' reflecting the high levels of care present in the school. One child said, 'the teachers will always help you no matter what'. Much of the energy and focus of the leadership team have been on ensuring pupils are happy and enjoy school, and in this they have been very successful. There is good provision for pupils with learning difficulties, an improvement since the last inspection. Detailed records are kept for these pupils and their progress is carefully tracked. The monitoring of other pupils' performance is not as rigorous as it could be, although there are plans to improve this. Until recently, there was only one annual review of progress, which is partly why the underachievement in Year 2 last year was not identified in time. Pupils have targets to improve and generally know how well they are doing.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. While leaders have greatly influenced the positive ethos of the school, and the quality of its enrichment activities, they have not always been as focused on raising standards and achievement. The good work of individual teachers ensures that standards remain high and pupils continue to achieve well. The disappointing performance of Year 2 last year alerted the school's leadership of the need to become more rigorous in its approach to monitoring pupils' progress. Leaders are now dealing with this situation, and have brought it back to a satisfactory position. Governors have relied too heavily on incomplete information and not asked the searching questions necessary to hold the school fully to account. While parents are justifiably proud of much of what the school does, a significant minority expressed concerns about the progress of their children in Year 2 last year. They are reassured by the good quality work in Year 3, and these pupils are now achieving well. There are

satisfactory systems to monitor the school's work. Strategic planning tends to identify too many priorities, rather than highlight the key ones.

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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

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 disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	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	1

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

¹ 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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
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

Thank you very much for making me so welcome in your school. I enjoyed visiting you. Yours is a good school, and there is much you can be proud of.

- Your behaviour is excellent and you look out for one another very well.
- You enjoy your lessons and want to learn.
- You make good progress in your work and reach high standards.
- The youngest children get off to a good start in the Nursery and Reception classes.
- You are well cared for and have someone to go to if you have a problem.
- The teaching is good, and teachers make lessons exciting and fun.
- There are lots of clubs for you to enjoy, and exciting things for you to do, especially in music and sport.

The headteacher and other leaders work very hard to help make you happy at school, and to provide lots of interesting things for you to do. I believe they could do more to make sure you achieve your very best. I believe some of the pupils in Year 2 who find work easy could do even better if the work made them think more. I also think teachers need to follow your progress more closely, so that they know exactly how well you are doing. I am sure they would welcome your views about your progress. The governors also have an important part to play in the life of the school. I think they should be asking more questions about what goes on.

Many thanks again for your help. My best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Mr. N. Butt

Lead Inspector