

Comet Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	100213
Local authority	Hackney
Inspection number	376371
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2012
Lead inspector	Clive Dunn

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

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3–4
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	82
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fran Paffard
Headteacher	Lisa Clarke
Date of previous school inspection	20 May 2009
School address	20 Halcomb Street Hoxton London N1 5RF
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Age group	3–4
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Introduction

Inspection team

Clive Dunn

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector spent nearly six hours evaluating learning and teaching first hand, observing the work of three teachers. Discussions were held with staff and members of the governing body. The inspector also spoke with parents and carers, and talked with children as they worked and played. He took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. The inspector observed the school's work, looked at a range of the school's records and policy documents, teachers' planning, assessments and observations of children's learning and development, and analysed questionnaires that were returned by staff and 51 parents and carers.

Information about the school

This is an average-sized nursery school offering a mix of part-time and full-time places. Approximately three quarters of the children come from a wide range of minority ethnic groups. Just over two thirds speak English as an additional language. There are high proportions of disabled children and those with special educational needs. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The school provides and manages a breakfast club and tea club. The headteacher joined the school in January 2011. The co-located children's centre shares the same governance as the school. It was inspected at the same time and the findings of this inspection are available in a separate report.

The Nursery operates as a completely integrated unit across three indoor classrooms and an outside area.

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	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key findings

- This is an outstanding school. The exceptionally stimulating environment, both inside and out, promotes children’s independence highly effectively. Staff are extremely skilled and effective. Together, they have sustained and built on the high quality of provision. This has included tackling the issues arising from the previous inspection, with great success.
- Children make rapid progress in all areas of their learning and development. Disabled children and those who have special educational needs, children who speak English as an additional language and children already attaining beyond the expectations for their age all achieve exceptionally well.
- Outstanding quality teaching promotes children’s learning especially well when they choose their own activities. This is a key factor in children’s outstanding achievement because it is how they spend a large proportion of their time in school. Excellent knowledge of each child enables adults to support, challenge and extend their play very effectively. Occasionally, as children play, adults miss opportunities to develop first steps in calculating numbers, or promote awareness of a wide variety of different sounds in preparation for reading.
- Children’s conduct as they learn and play together is excellent. The atmosphere is overwhelmingly purposeful, positive and harmonious. Any sort of unkind behaviour is very rare. A high focus on politeness and manners means children are extremely courteous. Supported by an outstanding curriculum, adults promote children’s spiritual, moral, social and cultural development exceptionally well.
- Leaders and staff are consistently looking for ways to raise the quality of what the school provides still further. This is highly focused on looking for ways to ensure every child reaches his or her full potential in every area. Excellent leadership of teaching and management of performance keep the school driving forward and ensure there is no sense of complacency.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Consistently make the most of opportunities as children play to reinforce and

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develop their early calculation skills and awareness of different sounds, including distinguishing sounds made by letters and words.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

The large majority of children have skills below those expected for their age when they start. They make rapid progress across all areas of learning so this gap closes significantly. By the time children leave, most have developed the range of skills expected for their age. Nearly a third of the children exceed this and demonstrate skills beyond those usually seen in Nursery. From often lower starting points, boys quickly start to catch up and reduce the gap between them and girls by the time they leave.

Children's independence develops quickly as they find their own names to register their attendance and immediately select their first activities. They have free choice of an extensive range of easily accessible equipment and materials. Parents and carers talk about this as their typical daily experience. The overwhelming majority feel their children are making good or better progress. Children sustain activities for remarkable periods. When they are ready to move on, they do so with a strong sense of direction and purpose.

Children engage well in plentiful opportunities to explore numbers and counting throughout the environment. They develop a real love of books and enjoyment of stories. Some ask adults to read a chosen book aloud, while others enjoy books individually in one of the attractive reading areas inside and out. Children engage enthusiastically making patterns in 'gloop', drawing with chalks on the ground and in other mark-making activities. Displays of their achievements, including pictures and writing about favourite stories such as 'The Three Billy Goats Gruff' or 'The Gruffalo', reflect their rapid progress towards writing. Extremely careful and thoughtful collages, paintings and other creations demonstrate children's excellent creative development.

Parents and carers feel that the school is particularly effective at meeting their children's individual needs. Disabled children and those with special educational needs thrive, as do those eligible for free school meals. Their achievement is outstanding. Children already demonstrating age-appropriate skills continue to achieve exceptionally well, often extending their skills towards end of Early Years Foundation Stage expectations. The high priority rightly given to developing children's communication, language and literacy skills effectively promotes rapid progress for children who speak English as an additional language.

Quality of teaching

Parents' and carers' views of the quality of teaching are rightly unanimously positive. Wide-ranging opportunities in the extremely carefully planned environment are

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highly effective in promoting children's development in all areas of learning, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Indoor and outdoor areas are equally vibrant and stimulating; a development point from the previous inspection. Excellent use is made of time and children never wander aimlessly or appear lost in the extensive environment.

Adults' interactions with children are of consistently high quality. As children played with foam house bricks trying to build the tallest tower, an adult prompted them to find ways to make it stronger. Inspired by this, the children started with two bricks together before realising they could make it even taller if they laid the bricks in alternating directions. Elsewhere, some boys had produced treasure maps, reflecting the outside area with considerable accuracy. With guidance from the teacher, this prompted some excellent questioning from another boy who wanted to know what symbols on the map represented. There are plentiful opportunities to develop children's recognition of number or counting, though just occasionally, adults miss opportunities to extend this, for example prompting children to work out 'one more' or 'one less' than a given number. Similarly, adults do not use every available opportunity to encourage children to listen carefully to sounds. This sometimes includes the chance to prompt children to listen to the sounds of letters and words.

Daily discussions between adults to review their observations of children's development are of high quality. In this way, planning for the following day takes excellent account of the next steps individual children need to take. The curriculum's themes are mostly driven by children's interests, such as the extremely popular and highly successful 'hospital'. In role play areas such as this, excellent resources and, on almost all occasions, highly effective modelling from adults lead to significant developments, particularly in children's language and social skills. Children's achievements are extremely well valued and celebrated, acting as a constant encouragement for them to do their best. One teacher successfully prompted children to be considerably thoughtful and reflective as they selected what to stick in their beautifully presented 'special books'.

Disabled children and those with special educational needs are fully included through meticulous planning and highly effective support. Crucially, though, considerable care is given to allowing these children plenty of scope for independence. Highly structured small-group sessions, developed in partnership with the speech and language therapist, significantly enhance their achievement. In one such session, the learning support assistant's skilful management of the pace sustained children's interest but allowed them thinking time when needed.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The school's success in securing outstanding behaviour contributes significantly to children's outstanding achievement. Those that have experienced sessions at the children's centre typically settle particularly quickly. Children are eager to engage, extremely friendly and mix very well together, sharing games and ideas. Where the occasional minor disagreement or very infrequent unkind behaviour occurs, adults

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seize the chance to model and teach children how to negotiate appropriately. This is extremely effective in creating the overwhelmingly positive and harmonious atmosphere. There is no evidence of behaviour that amounts to any type of bullying.

The effective development of children's manners is exemplary. Children are exceptionally polite and courteous. This is especially so at mealtimes, including breakfast and tea clubs, which are extremely positive social occasions. Children conduct themselves safely with considerable freedom and independence, such as on the large climbing apparatus or scooters and tricycles. They are adept at conducting themselves differently according to the area they are using and extremely familiar with routines. Children have a very strong awareness of safety and are in the excellent habit of wearing protective clothing where relevant and rarely need any reminders. Parents and carers are unanimous in their view that the school keeps their children safe and overwhelmingly positive about behaviour.

Leadership and management

Leaders at different levels are highly effective at developing and sustaining outstanding provision. The school has an extensive track record of success. Together with leaders' accurate and precise understanding of the school's current performance and areas of focus, this reflects an outstanding capacity to secure further improvement. The headteacher has quickly earned the respect and confidence of the whole school community. Parents and carers appreciate that they understand much more about how well their children are doing and how they can support them at home. This was an area for development identified at the previous inspection. Individual consultation meetings with parents and carers are highly focused on their children's development and next steps. The school rightly has plans to build on the success of the exceptionally well-attended curriculum evening. The overwhelmingly positive views of the much higher than average proportion of parents and carers that returned an inspection questionnaire reflect the school's excellent links with them.

The school's monitoring of its own performance is rigorous and extensive. Leaders draw together points for improvement well to identify priorities for further training. Recently this has led to the identification of the need to increase the opportunities to for children to develop their number skills as they play. This initiative is already bearing fruits of success. Excellent links with other organisations and professionals significantly enhance the curriculum and promotion of children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This includes children's recent 'Hakuna Matata' performance at a local dance festival. A visiting author built on children's existing love of books, inspiring a high quality shared illustration. Typical of the school's high expectations and aspirations, children have access to skilled specialist teaching, for example for physical development and movement.

The school is extremely successful at breaking down potential barriers that might prevent any child being fully included. Strong links with other professionals, including the children's centre, promotes children's welfare effectively. Considerable knowledge of every child supports the school's drive to ensure they all reach their full potential.

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The school leaders and staff do not tolerate discrimination of any kind and the whole-school commitment to equality of opportunity is reflected in the highly successful strategies and provision aimed at reducing, and often completely closing, any gaps in the performance of different groups, such as those who start with little or no English.

The governing body is knowledgeable, well informed and extremely supportive of the school's work, including where its aims overlap those of the children's centre. They have a very clear understanding of the school's performance and share in leaders' high aspirations to sustain and build on exemplary practice. They are unafraid to question and challenge leaders in this shared determination. Governors and school leaders ensure that safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements. Records of background checks on staff are thorough and staff are well trained in child protection issues.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



23 March 2012

Dear Children

Inspection of Comet Nursery School, London N1 5RF

You may remember that I came to visit you a short time ago. Thank you for being so friendly and making me feel very welcome in your Nursery. I had a lot of fun meeting you and watching you play. Thank you to the many of you who came and talked to me and shared what you were busy doing. You told me how much you enjoy coming to school.

I could see that you were having a really good time. You are also learning lots of things as you play. You are getting better at doing lots of things very quickly. This is why I have judged your school to be outstanding. It is the highest judgement the inspection can give.

I especially liked seeing how busy you are all of the time. There are so many interesting things to choose, indoors and outdoors. The adults are exceptionally good at helping you develop important skills as you play. You are also extremely polite and have excellent manners, especially at meal times. I also enjoyed watching the video of your 'Hakuna Matata' dance and looking at your special books and all the lovely displays of things you have done.

All the people that run your school are always looking for ways to make it the best it can possibly be. To help them with this, I have asked them to make sure that when you are playing, they find more times to get you to listen carefully to different sounds. This might be listening to the sound a letter or word makes. When you are counting in your games, I have asked them to see more often if you can work out things like, 'What is one more than two?' You can help by always trying your best when adults ask you to do these things.

Yours sincerely

Clive Dunn
Lead inspector

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