

Rathfern Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100700
Local Authority	Lewisham
Inspection number	354870
Inspection dates	28–29 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Sarah McDermott

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	383
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gill Sax
Headteacher	Naheeda Maharasingam
Date of previous school inspection	5 June 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The team observed 17 lessons taught by 14 teachers. The inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, members of the governing body, staff and groups of pupils. They scrutinised pupils' work and looked at the data the school had collected on pupils' academic progress and attendance. They also looked at the school development plan, investigated procedures for keeping pupils safe and analysed the responses to questionnaires from pupils, staff and 137 parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The extent to which different groups such as Black Caribbean pupils and higher attaining pupils progress as well as others.
- The extent to which pupils are making progress in writing.
- The consistency of the quality of teaching and learning in different classes.
- The effectiveness of leaders and managers in tracking the progress of different groups of pupils and successfully addressing any underachievement.
- The extent to which the school has been successful in tackling persistent absence.

Information about the school

Rathfern Primary is larger than most primary schools. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. Most pupils are from minority ethnic groups, predominantly Black African or Black Caribbean, and about a third of pupils do not have English as their first language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. Their needs mostly relate to speech, language and communication difficulties.

The Early Years Foundation Stage comprises a morning nursery session, an afternoon nursery session and two Reception classes. Among other awards, the school has the Healthy School and Active Sports awards. The school runs its own breakfast club and hosts an after-school club on site run by another provider.

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

Rathfern is a good school where attainment and achievement have improved significantly since it was last inspected. Children, many with lower-than-expected skills, get off to a flying start in the Nursery class because provision is good and they continue to make good progress until they leave at the end of Year 6. Parents and carers are pleased with the way their children are looked after and helped to make progress. One parent commented, 'My children's learning has come along very well under the school's love and care for learning and education.' Inspectors' judgements confirm that pupils are safe and secure in the school's care. The headteacher has a very clear vision for the school and high expectations for pupils. Together with her energetic and committed senior leaders, she has pulled attainment up from significantly low levels in previous years to levels above the national average in mathematics, with particular improvements in English in 2010. Improvement in writing has been dramatic because teachers have very methodically taught pupils basic literacy skills and planned activities that capture their imagination, giving them interesting opportunities to bring liveliness and sparkle to their writing. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because of well-pinpointed support to help them make the most of their learning. Pupils from all the ethnic groups in the school make the same good progress as their classmates. The headteacher and her team of leaders have an accurate view of the school's performance, have successfully tackled underperformance in writing and have moved the school from satisfactory to good. Consequently they are demonstrating a positive track record and good capacity to improve the school even further.

Pupils are polite, courteous and show a genuine interest in visitors. Behaviour is good. Most pupils behave well in lessons for most of the time. Pupils move around the school sensibly and invariably behave impeccably in assemblies. They know how to lead safe and healthy lives and take up a good range of jobs and responsibilities within school. Year 4 pupils proudly donned their aprons to serve at the salad bar and scrape the plates in the dining hall. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is good. Pupils from many different backgrounds get on well in lessons and out at play. They appreciate a wide range of cultures and look forward to taking part in the different celebrations.

Pupils enjoy their lessons because staff are welcoming and always ready to help out those who have questions or are struggling with the task in hand. Teachers model new skills carefully, so pupils are clear about what to do. Pupils know what levels they are working at and what to do to improve, because marking is helpful and they all have understandable learning targets in the front of their numeracy and literacy books. The curriculum is good because it concentrates on the key skills of literacy and mathematics, essential to pupils getting on in life.

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Senior leaders regularly monitor the quality of lessons, but do not always place sufficiently rigorous emphasis on how well each pupil has gained in knowledge by the end of the lesson. Consequently they are not all able accurately to pick out comparative weaknesses in teaching quality and ensure they are successfully tackled. The recent restructuring of the governing body is improving the means of systematically monitoring the pupils' achievement and safety. Governors are sufficiently clear about the school's strengths and weaknesses, but not all are yet challenging the headteacher and her senior leaders with confidence about the performance of different groups of pupils. Attendance has improved and is now average, although there are still a few pupils who are brought late to school by their parents and carers.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Embed the improvements that have produced average attainment and good achievement of pupils in English and mathematics by:
 - ensuring senior leaders consistently monitor the quality of learning against rigorous criteria
 - making sure senior leaders use the information gathered from lesson observations to improve teaching to a consistently good or better quality in all classes
 - working ever more closely with parents and carers to further raise attendance and improve punctuality.
- Ensure the governing body is clear about the achievement of different groups of pupils and develop governors' ability to challenge any dips in performance.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils come to school with a spring in their step and all pupils questioned said they love meeting their friends and teachers. A large proportion of pupils walk to school, good numbers join active after-school clubs and many have healthy, well-balanced eating habits. Playtimes are hives of activity as pupils make the most of the hoops, balls and sandpit. Pupils feel safe and know they can turn to adults in school or the peer mediators should they be worried. Behaviour is good because pupils are clear about rules and know what is acceptable and what is not. Pupils are proud to be school councillors and rightly feel they have a voice in school matters. However, pupils have limited opportunities to contribute to the immediate Catford neighbourhood to develop their roles as good citizens. ♦

Despite good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage pupils start Year 1 with skills below the levels expected for their age. All pupils, whatever their ethnic background, make good progress, although the rate of progress varies depending on the quality of teaching in different classes. In 2010, pupils left Year 6 with attainment above national averages in mathematics and English, a marked improvement on previous years. However, progress is slower in the younger classes because pupils are still hampered by their underdeveloped personal and social skills, often easily losing attention. Pupils who arrive mid-term, including those with English as an additional language, make good progress because the school has well-established routines to assess their learning needs and settle

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them in. More-able pupils also make good progress and achieve well. They benefit from carefully planned activities to stretch and test their thinking.

In lessons, pupils have good relationships with teachers and teaching assistants. They learn positively because they listen carefully to instructions, quickly pick up expected routines and get down to work promptly. Pupils work well independently and in groups. They make the most of their talking partners to spark ideas off each other. In a good mathematics lesson in Year 4, pupils relished the chance to tell each other what helped them learn better and made good progress as a result. On rare occasions, a few pupils become noisy and do not realise that they are spoiling learning for others. Pupils appreciate the encouraging comments when their work is marked, but do not always follow up the extra little exercises given in the 'brain bubble' to reinforce learning. They are knowledgeable about the levels they are working at and clear about what they need to do to attain even better results. Their average attendance, satisfactory punctuality and improving skills in literacy and numeracy prepare pupils satisfactorily for secondary school and life in general.

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	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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

How effective is the provision?

Teachers set up well-structured lessons, with all resources to hand, so learning time is not wasted. They place an important and necessary emphasis on improving pupils' basic skills in literacy and numeracy as a foundation for wider learning. Consequently, many lessons

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feature close attention to learning the sounds of letters, introducing new vocabulary or perfecting times tables. Most teachers make good use of assessment data to ensure work is pitched at the right level for each pupil. All pupils, whatever their ability, benefit from the teachers' high expectations. In an excellent Year 6 lesson, the teacher opened the lesson with, 'You teach better than I do!' before setting pupils off to explain to each other how to tackle a mathematics calculation. Most lessons move along at a good pace, as in a good Year 3/4 lesson when the teacher reminded pupils, 'You have 10 minutes left.' However in a few lessons, pupils sit on the carpet listening to lengthy directions when they could be actively learning by finding out for themselves and this sometimes results in attention wandering and limits pupils' progress.

Now that pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy are much improved, the school is concentrating on extending pupils' knowledge in other subjects. Teachers are clear that interesting activities and visits are a great boon to stimulating lively writing. The current topic of the Second World War incorporates not only history and art, but also descriptive writing and poetry. Visits, such as to the local Horniman Museum or further afield, are taken by public transport wherever possible to develop life skills and local knowledge. The small number of extra-curricular clubs are carefully monitored to ensure those pupils who would most benefit from participation are able to do so. The school has good systems to ensure pupils are well looked after and do not slip behind in their learning. Pupils greatly benefit from small group work to help them get back on track. The home liaison worker is a good bridge between families and school to ensure communication is regular and each pupil's care is uppermost. The school has worked successfully with parents and carers to reduce persistent absence to an average level. The breakfast club is well run, providing a safe, secure and stimulating place before school.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and her senior team are held in high esteem by pupils, parents and carers and staff. They are visible and approachable. One parent wrote, 'The headteacher is excellent and is always there when you need her.' The school works positively with parents and carers, supporting them and including them well in their children's education. Another parent commented, 'Coffee mornings have been useful and the various workshops have been great.' Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's performance. They make very good use of data on pupils' progress to come to strategic priorities on teaching and curriculum provision, incorporated clearly into the well-written school improvement plan. Senior leaders regularly check teachers' plans and pupils' work to ensure learning is up to scratch, resulting in improved progress for all

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pupils. They routinely monitor lessons, but do not all rigorously and consistently identify any common themes of weakness in teaching so that professional development can be introduced to increase the rate of progress in learning. The promotion of equal opportunities is good and results in all pupils making equally good progress in their learning. The school is attentive in making sure no pupil is discriminated against or misses out on any activity or trip they want to participate in.

The governing body, bolstered by several new members, is knowledgeable about the context of the school, but is not fully conversant with how different groups of pupils are performing against national comparisons. Safeguarding procedures are robust and effective and governors regularly check on the effectiveness of recruitment and child protection systems. The school works well with a wide range of outside professionals to bring creativity and added interest to the curriculum and to support pupils with specific needs. The school promotes community cohesion well. It is proud of the wealth of cultures and diverse backgrounds of its pupils and keeps a close eye on the achievement of different groups. The school is a happy, close-knit community with good links with families and interesting connections abroad. It does not yet have well-established ties with schools in different parts of the United Kingdom and this is an area for further development.

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	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

The Nursery and Reception classes are happy, welcoming places. Staff work closely with parents and carers to ensure children are well cared for and settle in quickly by offering home visits and encouraging parents and carers to remain with their children at the beginning of their first few days. Children enter Nursery class with skills well below the levels expected for their age. They make good progress and leave at the end of Reception with improved abilities but still below the expected levels for their age. They are close to

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having expected skills in the areas of learning linked to knowledge and understanding of the world and creative development because the staff place great importance on active learning and letting children find things out for themselves. Children make the most of opportunities to grow their own plants and thoroughly enjoy their trips to the local Forest School and the fire station. Activities in and out of the classroom cover all the required areas of learning in interesting and eye-catching ways, but space is cramped and means children sometimes get in the way of each other.

Plenty of opportunities are taken to stimulate communication and literacy skills. Most staff are expert at encouraging conversation and helping pupils to grow in confidence in their speaking and listening. Behaviour is nearly always good, particularly when children are given the chance to be independent and take responsibility, as when three children proudly returned the registers to the office across the big playground. Very occasionally children fall out with each other. Nevertheless staff are working effectively to develop personal and social skills so children are well prepared to move on to Year 1. Good leadership and management systems ensure each child is carefully tracked, so activities are planned to help children make good progress and to give extra support linked to their personal needs.

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 level of response to the questionnaire was average for primary schools. Most parents and carers are positive about the school. All who replied justifiably believe that their children are safe at school. A very small minority of parents and carers expressed concerns over the way the school deals with unacceptable behaviour. The inspection team judges behaviour to be good because the staff have high expectations and manage any instances of misbehaviour well.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Rathfern 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.

The inspection team received 137 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 383 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	99	72	30	22	6	4	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	82	60	52	38	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	81	59	49	36	3	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	62	45	62	45	8	6	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	70	51	62	45	2	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	68	50	62	45	2	1	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	60	44	69	50	5	4	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)	41	30	77	56	3	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	45	33	75	55	5	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	61	45	61	45	8	6	3	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	43	31	80	58	7	5	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	68	50	55	40	6	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	77	56	51	37	4	3	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 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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 pupils' 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.



30 March 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Rathfern Primary School, Catford SE6 4NL

Thank you very much for welcoming us to your school. Rathfern is a good school. You make good progress in English and mathematics, and especially in writing. Teaching is good because lessons are carefully organised and teachers make sure you know what you should learn. You have interesting trips and exciting residential visits arranged for you. Ms Maharasingam and her team of senior teachers lead the school well and they know what needs improving.

You behave well nearly all of the time and certainly know how to look after each other and keep yourselves safe. We particularly like the way some of you older pupils are trained as peer mediators to look after younger pupils. We are impressed with how you keep yourselves healthy by eating the tasty lunches and walking to school. Your attendance has improved and is now average, but a few of you are late to school too often.

To make your education better, we have asked your school to do the following.

- Keep up your above-average attainment and good achievement by ensuring the senior teachers regularly check that all your lessons are of good or better quality and find ways to improve them if they are not.
- Help your new governing body to build up experience of checking with the senior teachers that all pupils are making good or better progress.

We thoroughly enjoyed our visit to your school. We know that your teachers and their assistants make your school a very special place for you. You can do your bit by continuing to do your best all the time but especially by attending very regularly and not being late for school.

Yours sincerely

Sarah McDermott

Lead inspector

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