

George Mitchell School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103096
Local Authority	Waltham Forest
Inspection number	355315
Inspection dates	25–26 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Robin Hammerton HMI

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

Type of school	All-through
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	842
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr M Zafar
Headteacher	Mrs H C Jeffery
Date of previous school inspection	5 June 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. They observed 35 lessons taught by 34 teachers, including two joint observations with senior staff members. They observed the school's work including assemblies and tutor periods, and met with staff, governors and pupils. They looked at school documents, including assessment data, reports and minutes of meetings and considered the 208 parental questionnaires returned.

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

- How well the work of school leaders, at all levels, contributes to raising students' attainment at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4.
- The accuracy of the school's own self-evaluation and how this influences subsequent improvement work.
- How effectively students' English language skills are developed across the whole curriculum.
- How well the large number of students identified as needing support at School Action Plus level are supported in their learning.

Information about the school

Since the previous inspection, the George Mitchell secondary school assimilated a nearby primary school to form a small all-through school, which operates across five sites in a local neighbourhood. The two main sites are for primary and secondary provision respectively. The secondary phase has four forms of entry and the primary phase has one, except in Reception, where there are two classes. The primary phase is expected to grow to two forms of entry in future. The nursery has two groups: mornings and afternoons. This pattern means that pupils enter the school at different points.

The school serves a richly diverse area, with many ethnic groups and languages represented. The proportion of pupils whose first language is not English is very high, as is the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals. About twice the average proportion of pupils are identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities, with a particularly high number of them assessed as needing support at School Action Plus level. The school has recently acquired specialist status in media arts and holds the Artsmark gold award.

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****3**

Main findings

This is a good and improving school. In the secondary phase and the Nursery and Reception classes, pupils make good progress as a result of the school's good and, in some respects, outstanding provision. From Years 1 to 6, pupils make satisfactory rather than good progress because the curriculum and quality of teaching are less highly developed. However, this shows improvement from the predecessor primary school which, when it closed, was in an Ofsted category of concern. The legacy of past underachievement means that pupils' attainment at Year 6 is low but is beginning to show some improvement. At GCSE, a marked improvement in recent years means that the proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics is close to the national average. From its assessments, the school expects this improvement to continue. All groups of students achieve well. English language is being well developed across subjects through a managed strategy. Almost all students gain worthwhile qualifications and develop good personal skills which enable them to move quickly into further education, training or employment. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to their learning are good, particularly in the secondary phase. They have an excellent awareness of issues related to safety.

Students are well taught in the secondary phase. Lessons are well paced. Teachers draw on their good subject knowledge to ensure high expectations of all groups of pupils. In Years 1 to 6, teachers are committed and hardworking but their skills are not yet as well developed; they often dominate lessons, reducing the pupils' opportunities to think for themselves and progress well. Across the school, the work of teaching assistants is not always well enough targeted to meet closely the specific needs of particular pupils. In the primary phase, these staff do not yet have the opportunity of formal management of their performance.

Accurate assessment data are available for every pupil; each is known well by staff. The individualised care, guidance and support pupils receive across the school are outstanding. However, the assessment data is used inconsistently in lessons to provide work which is well matched to each pupil's precise needs.

The headteacher and her senior team articulate a clear vision and set of values, leading by example. These are well understood by staff and students, helping to create a very cohesive and outward-looking school community. As a consequence, students contribute exceptionally well to community activities and by helping others, nearby and globally. School self-evaluation is honest and accurate in identifying strengths and weaknesses. It is suitably used to inform a carefully constructed school improvement plan, which helps galvanise the enthusiasm of staff towards achieving shared aims. There have been consequent notable improvements across the whole school. However, there is too little specific primary expertise within the senior and middle leadership teams, and insufficient

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focus on the primary phase within the otherwise highly effective governing body, to ensure the further swift improvement which is now needed in the primary provision. Hence, the school's capacity to sustain improvement is satisfactory rather than good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- In Years 1 to 6, raise standards so that attainment reaches the national average by summer 2013, by:
 - ensuring there is sufficient primary specialist expertise at senior and middle leadership level to lead and guide further improvements in curriculum and teaching
 - refocusing the work of the governing body so that it better supports and challenges the development of the primary phase
 - developing the skills of teachers, so that they better engage pupils and develop their thinking at a higher level
 - designing the curriculum discerningly, so that it challenges and excites pupils more
- Across the whole school, improve provision by:
 - using assessment data more consistently in lessons to match set tasks closely to pupils' needs
 - ensuring that teaching assistants are always sure of the objectives of their work with particular pupils and groups and are then held appropriately accountable for reaching these objectives.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

By the end of Early Years Foundation Stage, children acquire good skills in personal and social development, which are then developed well throughout the whole school. The considerable strengths identified in the last inspection of the secondary school in pupils' behaviour, support of others and sharing together have been fully sustained and built on. Pupils are very friendly and welcoming. They feel exceptionally safe, secure and well looked after. They show real understanding of the needs of others, from all backgrounds, whether in school or much further afield. They are very keen to involve themselves in many activities in the community and make a genuinely excellent contribution. They enthusiastically raise money for charities, including the school's own charity which raises money for the poorest countries attending the 2012 Olympic Games.

At all points of entry, pupils typically join the school with low attainment. In Nursery and Reception, children learn to participate independently in a wide range of activities, initiating ideas and sustaining concentration. They make good progress across most aspects of learning, though their attainment is lower in understanding letters and sounds and early reading than in all the other areas. Their skills serve them well in Key Stages 1 and 2, where they behave appropriately and continue to enjoy working together. However, pupils' progress, attention and alertness are lower in lessons in Years 1 to 6 as the provision in these year groups is not as tightly focused to their needs. In the secondary phase, students' progress accelerates again. They respond with energy and

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enthusiasm in the many lessons and activities where they are well challenged and actively involved in tasks. In most lessons, they are confident and keen to succeed. They are well prepared for their next stage after leaving the school.

Pupils of all ages who are identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities respond well to specific provision for them. This enables them to progress as well as their peers. Pupils placed on the School Action Plus level access the extensive specialist support available within the school and/or that provided by external agencies. This is appropriate, given the needs of the pupils concerned. However, the school recognises that weaknesses in the way teachers provide different tasks for pupils with different attainment levels in a minority of lessons can make successful pupil progress at School Action level harder to achieve. Pupils who speak English as an additional language are well engaged. They also progress as well as other groups. There is no underachievement amongst any group of pupils.

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	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
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?

In the secondary phase, teachers' expert subject knowledge is well used to challenge students and convey a passion for learning. Lessons are well paced in a friendly and supportive learning environment. Teachers often use open ended and well-targeted questions to extend students' thinking. They highlight and use appropriate vocabulary to engage all students, whatever their literacy levels or stage of learning English. They also

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share learning targets explicitly with students, which helps raise expectations and guides learning. These strengths of teaching are to be found in the primary phase too; however, they are less widespread and developed. In Years 1 to 6, lessons tend to be slower paced, with lower expectations. Teachers sometimes talk for extended periods, using too many closed questions, which reduces the pupils' levels of interest and engagement. Pupils' activities, whilst valuable, can be too short to be fully effective.

In some lessons and subjects, especially in the secondary phase (mathematics, for example) there are cases of exemplary practice in using the accurate data about pupils' attainment levels to set individuals or groups challenging work specifically suited to their needs. However, in other lessons, all pupils do the same work, missing opportunities to accelerate their progress. Marking of pupils' work is usually thorough but does not always provide clear guidance as to how pupils can improve their learning. Teaching assistants are committed and play an important role in helping the smooth running of the school. However, too often, their work in lessons is not sufficiently well planned, with the result that they provide general support to groups, rather than having clear objectives to reach. In the primary phase, they are sometimes inactive while teachers are addressing the whole class.

The secondary curriculum provides a wide range of options and courses adaptable to students' needs. The focus on economic education and life skills, and motivating students to believe in themselves, is well considered. The new specialism in media arts is beginning to have a positive impact, as is the focus on language across the curriculum, with students improving their literacy skills through several subjects, such as technology. The primary curriculum is more basic; it covers requirements and has, understandably, a firm focus on literacy and numeracy. However, it is not sufficiently well developed and integrated to inspire pupils and significantly raise standards. It lacks rigour in some subjects, such as music. Across the whole school, pupils benefit considerably from interesting visits out, and many participate in a wide range of out-of-school hours activities. The school does not fully analyse the take-up of such activities by groups of pupils.

There are very effective systems for meeting the needs of any pupils who become especially vulnerable, using, as needed, very well coordinated partnerships with external agencies. Parents and carers are involved quickly. Peer mediation systems, to sort out any problems, are very well established. Primary pupils are looked after very well, without being overprotected. Secondary students value the excellent advice on their options, including for post-16 learning or employment. Support for students for whom English is an additional language is of very high quality. Induction and care for pupils at times of transition are excellent.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

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How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher, and her well organised senior and middle leadership teams, provide strong and ambitious leadership for the whole school. This has at its heart inclusion and equality of opportunity. Given it has five sites, it is most impressive that the school has quickly become one very cohesive community. Good management systems enable this shared purpose to translate into higher outcomes for pupils, whatever their background or needs, especially in the secondary phase. Pupils are effectively involved. One said, 'The best thing about this school is we have a say in how teaching and learning takes place.' Pupils are always involved in interviewing prospective new staff. Others are involved in observing lessons, to help the teachers see the pupils' perspective. This supplements the good processes by which senior staff guide teachers in further improving their practice.

Subject and pastoral leadership in the secondary phase is strong. Secondary specialist managers and teachers have also become keenly involved in the primary phase. Inadequate primary teaching has been virtually eliminated through robust processes. Similar systems to the secondary phase for assessing primary pupils' progress have been adopted. However, only one of the school's senior leadership team, the head of phase, is a primary specialist. Middle leadership within the primary teaching staff is at an early stage of development. Thus, despite the capacity provided willingly by staff with secondary experience, there is too little phase-specific experience and expertise available to ensure the rapid improvements in primary provision now expected.

The school's procedures for safeguarding pupils and child protection are clear, properly managed and effective. The school operates an extensive and very successful anti-bullying programme, appropriate to each age group.

The good governing body regularly ratifies and checks policies and practices, including those for safeguarding. It is very well organised and provides shrewd challenge and support for the school. However, despite these important strengths, governors have not sufficiently developed their own expertise, or pattern of work, to cater fully for the needs of the school's primary phase.

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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	2
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	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children in Nursery and Reception classes make consistently good progress. They enjoy a wide range of well-planned activities, indoors and out, building on their existing skills and needs. Staff carry out assessments and observations systematically and expertly, so that they know what the children need to learn next. They know, too, that focusing on early literacy skills remains a priority. The children themselves are confident to suggest ideas and enjoy trying out new activities. They are very respectful of each other's needs and feelings. Staff interact positively with children, though occasionally they could use more open-ended questioning, or other structured opportunities, to help them expand on their ideas. Parents and carers receive good communications from the school, but opportunities for them to contribute their insights to the staff's assessments are limited.

The Early Years Foundation Stage is led and managed in an encouraging and effective style by its knowledgeable leader, with useful support from the head of phase. She has limited opportunities, however, to observe and work with Reception staff directly as she is usually busy in the Nursery on a different site. The accommodation is well managed and stimulating on both sites and includes a safe, mature garden outdoor area for the Nursery. The Reception outdoor area is rightly being enlarged and enhanced.

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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

Parents and carers are pleased with the school. Negative comments from them were very few. Of those who responded to the questionnaire, most were clear their children enjoy school and are safe. They feel that their children are well taught and make enough progress. Inspection evidence supports this view, albeit that these aspects are not as strong in the primary phase as in the secondary phase. Most parents and carers who responded feel that the school provides sufficient information about pupils' progress and communicates well. Inspectors found that there is very high and increasing attendance by parents and carers at events to discuss their children's progress.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at George Mitchell 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 208 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 842 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	83	40	109	52	8	4	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	75	36	110	53	16	8	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	79	38	101	49	21	10	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	65	31	111	53	21	10	6	3
The teaching is good at this school	70	34	104	50	24	12	4	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	67	32	100	48	31	15	4	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	67	32	102	49	28	13	6	3
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)	59	28	119	57	12	6	15	7
The school meets my child's particular needs	54	26	112	54	25	12	15	7
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	70	34	96	46	24	12	8	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	49	24	112	54	25	12	13	6
The school is led and managed effectively	61	29	115	55	21	10	8	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	76	37	109	52	18	9	2	1

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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 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 2010/11 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.



29th May 2011

Dear Pupils and Students

Inspection of George Mitchell School, London E10 5DN

Thank you very much for looking after us when we came to inspect your school recently. You were really friendly and very helpful when we asked you questions or we needed to be pointed in the right direction. Your warm welcome matched the bright sunshine when we arrived. However, we finished the inspection in a huge storm (do you remember it?) ? the first real rain for many weeks. During the storm, we fed back to senior staff that your school is good and improving. It is a great community and you contribute excellently to it. The school cares for you very well. Teaching is good and helps you to gain useful qualifications from a good range of options at Key Stage 4. You also develop really good personal skills. Hence you are ready, by the time you leave the school, for further education or a job.

For those of you in Years 1 to 6, things are a bit different from the rest of the school. Teaching and the curriculum have improved for you too. We could see you like your lessons as well as the visits out and clubs. However, there is more for the school to do to bring Key Stages 1 and 2 up to the same standard as the secondary phase and the Early Years. This is nothing for you to worry about; your teachers are working hard at this and you can help them by working hard in lessons and doing your best.

We made some suggestions to help the school to get better still. These are:

- improve the level of expertise about primary teaching amongst the senior school staff and governors, so that they can help make the lessons and the curriculum even better for you
- across the whole school, help the teaching assistants to be even clearer about how they are helping you learn, and support the teachers in providing work which is at just the right level for each of you.

Finally, for those who looked at my name badge and asked me this, I am afraid I do not know the Queen personally. But I am glad I came to know some of you instead and wish all of you well for the future!

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton

Her Majesty's Inspector

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