

Robert Blair Primary School

Brewery Road, Islington, London, N7 9QJ

Inspection dates 27–28 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics has been low in recent years and pupils' progress has not been good enough.
- Some inadequate teaching in the past has had a long-term impact on achievement.
- Improvements in teaching over the past year have not yet led to consistently good outcomes.
- Pupils' performance across the school is not consistently good. There is still some variability in pupils' progress in lessons. Work is not always challenging enough, which leads to some pupils losing interest.
- Behaviour is not managed consistently well, and is not good enough outside the classrooms. Pupils do not always feel safe.
- Attendance is still lower than it should be.

The school has the following strengths

- Much of the teaching is now good. Attainment and progress have improved significantly over the past year with most pupils now making good progress in lessons.
- Children make a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage due to consistently well-planned teaching.
- Pupils attached to the language and communication resource base receive very effective teaching and support.
- Leaders and managers have introduced much more rigour in tracking pupils' progress and setting high expectations for staff. They make good use of monitoring and evaluation and have deployed staff effectively to improve pupils' achievement.
- Governors have increased their effectiveness. They are well organised and well informed.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 20 lessons, visiting all classes, some of them more than once. Five lessons were jointly observed with the school’s senior leaders.
- Inspectors held discussions with two groups of pupils, senior staff, subject leaders, a group of parents and representatives from the governing body and local authority.
- They analysed a sample of pupils’ work from all classes and listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors looked at the school’s self-evaluation summary, data showing pupils’ attainment and progress and attendance information. They looked at a sample of case studies and records charting individual pupils’ behaviour over time.
- There were too few responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) for inspectors to look at. They received one written communication from a parent. They also considered the responses from 31 staff questionnaires.

Inspection team

Barnard Payne, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Paula Protherough	Additional Inspector
Veronica Young	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is an above-average-sized primary school. It includes a children's centre that provides childcare for babies and toddlers, before- and after-school and holiday care for three- to five-year-olds and after-school and holiday care for five- to 11-year-olds. The children's centre is subject to a separate inspection.
- The school's provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage is based in a 52-place Nursery offering full and part-time places and a Reception class.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is high compared to the national average. This is additional government funding provided for pupils eligible for free school meals, those looked after by the local authority and those with a parent in the armed services. In this school the only group represented is pupils eligible for free school meals.
- Over 70% of pupils are from minority ethnic groups, mainly from White backgrounds other than British, and from Bangladeshi and African heritages; over half speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils who are disabled or who have been identified as having special educational needs is much higher than average, and 15% of pupils are supported through school action plus or have a statement of special educational needs. These needs are predominantly speech, language and communication needs.
- The school has a language and communication resource base, a 28-place provision for pupils from across the local authority with statements of educational needs who have been diagnosed with speech, language and communication disorders. At the time of the inspection there were 21 pupils attached to the resource base.
- The school is currently below the government's floor standard, which is the minimum expected for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve rates of progress to bring attainment up to levels at least in line with, or exceeding, the levels expected nationally in English and mathematics by:
 - ensuring that teaching is of consistently good quality and makes use of assessment information and targeted support to enable pupils to catch up quickly if they fall behind.
- Improve behaviour, safety and attendance by:
 - ensuring pupils feel consistently safe outside the classrooms, including in the playground
 - raising attendance to at least the national average for primary schools.
- Set consistently demanding work to challenge and stretch more able pupils by:
 - making the most effective use of information on pupils' progress and personal targets
 - providing consistently challenging tasks in lessons.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics has shown a downward trend since the school was previously inspected. In the most recently published national tests at the end of Key Stage 2, attainment was significantly below average in English and mathematics; attainment in English has been low for the past three years and in mathematics for the past two years. Progress has been too slow because pupils have not built sufficiently on their prior attainment; too many have not made the progress they are capable of by the end of Year 6. Writing has been a particular weakness.
- Over the past year attainment and progress have risen as a result of more effective teaching and use of assessment to track progress. Attainment is still below the nationally expected level, but the gap is closing.
- Children start school with skills, knowledge and understanding that are much less developed than expected for their age. Staff create an environment that enables children to develop these skills effectively; in the Nursery, activities based around a baby clinic and surgery enabled children to have focused discussions, make marks on appointment cards and read information about doctors, babies and equipment. They make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage so that by the end of Reception their attainment is much higher, although still below the level expected nationally. Effective teaching of letters and sounds (phonics) is enabling children to make good progress in reading and writing.
- At the end of Key Stage 1, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics has been well below the national average. In 2012, the results of the phonics screening at the end of Year 1 were also much lower than the national average. However, rates of progress have improved, and continue to do so, because teaching is more effective and provides the pupils with clear targets.
- Good phonics teaching enables pupils to develop their spelling, writing and reading. When reading, pupils in Year 2 applied their knowledge of phonics to attempt unfamiliar words, but levels of reading are still below average. In writing, the higher-attaining pupils spell and use punctuation correctly and develop some vivid descriptive writing, for example 'the rat had beady eyes and big round ears'.
- In mathematics, pupils at Key Stage 1 learn effective strategies to work with numbers. Mathematics books show that tasks are set for different levels of ability; in one activity, the more able sorted objects in Carroll diagrams into four possible categories, but the less able into two categories.
- By Year 6, pupils are much more confident in their reading, developing fluency. They sometimes guess words when they hurry, but where this happens the pupils correct themselves. Pupils enjoy reading a range of books. One pupil talked at length about *Theodore Boone* by John Grisham, showing a good understanding of the story.
- Writing at Key Stage 2 is supported through well-structured and varied activities so that lower attainers demonstrate good variety in their writing and the higher attainers can write extensively, using complex sentences and atmospheric descriptions, for example, 'I looked at my doll. Her hair was scattered across her face, with her big brown eyes staring at me'.
- Pupils' literacy skills at Key Stage 2 have been significantly helped through effective staff deployment over the past year, with use of smaller ability groups and regular guided reading lessons. This deployment has also led to improvements in mathematics, where fast-paced, well-planned lessons are accelerating pupils' progress.
- Different groups of pupils perform at similar levels. Pupils who speak English as an additional language and those eligible for the pupil premium achieve as well as other pupils, but the progress of both groups has been less than expected and their current achievement, although better than in previous years, requires further improvement. In 2012, the gap between pupils eligible for the pupil premium and their peers in English narrowed, with those eligible for the pupil premium achieving a little better than others; but, in mathematics, they did a little less

well. There are no marked differences in the current classes.

- The progress of pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs is in line with national progress figures for similar pupils. In the language and communication resource base their achievement is good, and in some lessons outstanding, because specialist support and resources are used well to enable pupils to improve their literacy and numeracy skills.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Pupils still have some catching up to do in order for their achievement to be good and this is why teaching still requires further improvement.
- Teaching has been uneven in quality over the past three years and this has led to low attainment and slow progress. While this has had a lasting impact on some of the current groups of pupils, the school has successfully eradicated inadequate teaching and most teaching is now good.
- Teachers mostly have high expectations, although the most able pupils are not consistently challenged in lessons. Teachers plan lessons well, with clear targets for pupils to reach. Reading, writing, communication and mathematics are taught effectively and pupils are mostly interested and engaged.
- Teachers assess pupils' learning and progress regularly and accurately. There has been significant improvement in their use of progress information to set targets for pupils and the school has accurately identified, as a priority, the need for further improvement to set challenging targets for the top of the ability range.
- Pupils' books show effective marking, with clear evaluative comments and additional challenges set for all groups. Targeted support and intervention are matched well to most pupils' individual needs and this has led to much better progress in Key Stage 2, where ability sets have enabled staff to focus on the different needs of each range of ability.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- Behaviour and safety are not yet good because pupils have some concerns that behaviour is not managed consistently well. Pupils' attitudes to learning are mostly positive and disruption in lessons is uncommon. However, while parents and staff have not voiced concerns about behaviour and safety, pupils are sometimes worried about some of the behaviour and their own safety.
- Behaviour in lessons is mostly good; but outside, pupils find some behaviour unacceptable and they do not always feel safe. Observations in the playground confirm that pupils do not all understand what is appropriate behaviour. Whilst adults do provide control, the atmosphere is too volatile for some pupils and older pupils do not always show respect for younger ones.
- Some pupils have been bullied and they do not always feel well supported by adults. Pupils have a good awareness of different forms of bullying and say that although they learn about it in lessons and assemblies, not all pupils meet the school's expectations.
- Behaviour is therefore not managed consistently well because a small minority of pupils with particular needs are frequent offenders and current strategies are not leading to sufficient improvements in their behaviour.
- Attendance has improved over time and the school has reduced the number of pupils who do not attend school regularly. However, it is still too low when compared to other schools nationally.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Achievement, teaching and behaviour all require further improvement in order to be good, which shows that leadership and management also require improvement. However, over the past year,

the school's leadership has tackled the major weaknesses in achievement and teaching successfully and focused on the right priorities to bring about improvements.

- The school has worked well with the local authority in order to make the changes necessary. There is much more rigour in the collection and use of progress information and effective use of monitoring and evaluation of teaching.
- Taking these improvements into account, the school's leaders and managers demonstrate the capacity to bring about further improvement.
- Staff are set clear targets as part of their appraisal and these are directly linked to whole-school priorities. There are strong links between pupils' performance and salary progression; teachers on higher grades model the professional standards expected.
- There is consistent application of policies to improve literacy and numeracy, ensuring that pupils now make better progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils have a good range of learning activities. The school has established strong partnerships with external providers to promote the arts. The curriculum is now well matched to pupils' needs overall, but this is not yet leading to consistently good achievement and behaviour.
- The school's curriculum and staff deployment have led to improvements in equality of opportunity for all pupils. No groups stand out as underperforming when compared to others and the more vulnerable groups have effective support in most lessons, particularly for literacy and numeracy. Relationships between different groups are good and pupils do not experience discrimination due to their abilities or backgrounds.
- Apart from some shortcomings in behaviour, the school effectively promotes the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all pupils. This is evident in lessons and in pupils' written work where, for example, pupils show the ability to see things from other people's points of view and to assess their own feelings and how this might influence their behaviour.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirements.
- The school carries out an annual survey of parents to seek their views, and these are positive. Parents spoken to find the school very easy to approach and have a high level of confidence in its leadership and management.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has improved its effectiveness and is now in a much better position to support and challenge the school. Governors have established systems to monitor the quality of teaching and accurately judge that the school is much more systematic in its management of information on pupils' progress and teaching performance. They have a secure understanding of pupils' attainment and progress and how these compare to similar schools. They recognise that, in the past, school has not been quick enough to raise the performance of struggling teachers and have supported the strategies to improve this. The performance of pupils eligible for the pupil premium funding is a direct responsibility of the leadership and management committee and governors track the impact of spending well. They challenge the school where required and demand clarity about how the money is spent. They receive a breakdown of teaching performance alongside rates of pay, and are, therefore, in a good position to judge value for money. Training for governors is appropriate and has ensured that new governors receive induction and that each committee is suitably skilled.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	100422
Local authority	Islington
Inspection number	411787

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	275
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Maggie Riley
Headteacher	Mark Miller
Date of previous school inspection	13–14 October 2009
Telephone number	0207 607 4115
Fax number	0207 607 5395
Email address	admin@robertblair.islington.sch.uk

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