

Tower Bridge Primary School

Fair Street, London, SE1 2AE

Inspection dates 7–8 November 2013

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Pupils' overall achievement is not good. The school does not do enough to ensure that pupils make consistently good progress, and reach the highest levels that they could.
- The quality of the teaching is not always strong enough to raise pupils' achievement to good.
- Lessons occasionally move too slowly. Time is sometimes wasted.
- Tasks are not always set at the right level of difficulty. Some tasks are too easy for the most able pupils.
- Pupils' writing needs improving. They have too few chances to write on a wide enough range of interesting topics. Spelling is weak.
- Play activities and materials used by children in the Nursery and Reception classes are not exciting enough to promote good learning.
- School leaders are not always rigorous enough in their assessment of how well the school is doing, and their plans for improving teaching and learning are not always sharp enough.
- Leaders do not always judge the quality of teaching rigorously enough.
- Governors do not always hold leaders to account for the quality of teaching and the impact it has on pupils' progress.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils behave well and get on well with one another. They have positive attitudes to learning. The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- The school has introduced effective programmes to help weaker readers.
- Aspects of the subjects and topics that pupils learn about, such as philosophy for children, are stimulating and effective in promoting pupils' independent thinking. Pupils have a wide and enjoyable range of activities outside the classroom.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 19 lessons across a range of subjects, most observed jointly with the headteacher or the deputy headteacher.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read, looked at samples of their work, and attended an assembly.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, teachers with responsibilities for specific subjects, two representatives of the local authority, and groups of pupils. A meeting was held with the Chair, Vice-Chair and another member of the governing body. A fourth member of the governing body attended the final summing-up meeting, and a fifth member sent his views by email. Inspectors took account of the views of staff in nine questionnaires.
- There were 35 responses to Parent View, the online survey of parents and carers. Inspectors considered these, and also spoke to a number of parents during the inspection.
- Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documents, including the school's own views of how well it is doing; its plans for the future; information on pupils' attainment and progress; safeguarding information; records relating to behaviour and safety; and minutes of meetings of the governing body.

Inspection team

Natalia Power, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Angela Podmore

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Tower Bridge is a little smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Around three quarters of pupils are currently known to be eligible for the pupil premium. This premium provides schools with additional funding for children looked after by the local authority, for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, and for those with a parent in the armed services. At Tower Bridge, nearly all of the pupils who qualify for the pupil premium do so through eligibility for free school meals, and the proportion entitled to additional support through this funding is considerably higher than the national average.
- Around four out of five pupils come from a wide range of minority ethnic heritages, and this proportion is much higher than average. Half of pupils speak English as an additional language, and this proportion is higher than average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported at school action is higher than average, as is the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better by making sure that teachers:
 - keep lessons moving at a brisk pace, making sure that no time is wasted, so that pupils learn well and make good progress
 - plan tasks carefully so that they match the abilities of pupils, particularly making sure that the most able pupils always receive work that is sufficiently challenging
 - give pupils plenty of chances to write on a range of topics, and focus on improving weak spelling.
- Ensure that leaders improve important areas of the school's work by:
 - making sure when they visit lessons that they clearly convey to teachers their strengths and areas for development, and do not overpraise them
 - making clear and focused plans for how pupils' learning can best be improved, starting from a realistic understanding of how well they are currently doing and what the school needs to do to speed up their progress.
- Improve, as a matter of urgency, the play activities and materials used in the Nursery and Reception classes, in order to give the children more inviting activities to speed up their learning and stimulate their curiosity.
- Make sure that governors hold school leaders more rigorously to account for improving the quality of teaching and the progress made by the pupils by asking searching questions about the link between the performance of individual teachers and pupils' progress.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Pupils do not make rapid enough progress from their starting points, which is why achievement requires improvement. With relatively small class sizes, the progress that pupils make from the end of Year 2 to the end of Year 6 tends to fluctuate. Over the past three years, progress has been generally in line with that normally expected. However, too few pupils make the rapid progress they need to gain the highest grades. This is because school leaders do not always make sure that teaching is challenging enough to raise pupils' achievement.
- Pupils' attainment in the national tests taken at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 tends to be below average. Too few pupils gain the highest grades. This is because the strongest teaching tends to be focused on those who struggle with their work, but sometimes provides too little challenge for the most able pupils.
- Pupils tend to do less well in writing than they do in reading and mathematics. This is because they do not always have enough opportunities to write at length on a variety of topics, and because basic errors of literacy, including weak spelling, are not always picked up quickly enough.
- Children begin the Nursery and Reception classes with language, number and social skills which vary but which are typically below those expected for their age. The teachers and other adults, particularly in the Nursery, make sure that the children learn to get on with one another and develop their speaking and listening skills well. However, the play materials and the activities provided for the children do not enable them to learn new skills quickly enough.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs receive helpful support in class and in small withdrawal groups. They make similar progress to other pupils.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language also receive effective support, tailored to their needs, throughout their time at the school. This helps them to make progress in developing their language skills. Overall, their achievement is in line with that of other pupils.
- The school successfully teaches the youngest children their sounds and letters (phonics), and how these combine to form words. As a result, pupils in Year 1 did a little better than average in the phonics screening checks in 2013. The school takes active steps to promote the reading skills of those in danger of falling behind, and the reading recovery programme is particularly successful in helping pupils to make sound progress. Reading skills by the end of Year 6 are generally average. The school promotes a love of reading, and makes sure that pupils read a range of good-quality books.
- The pupil premium funding is used effectively to benefit the pupils concerned. As a result, pupils supported by this extra funding do as well as or better than others in the school. For example, in Year 6 in 2013, there was little difference in their attainment in English and in mathematics compared to others not eligible for the additional funding.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because, over time, it has not been strong enough to secure good achievement. Though some teaching is good, enabling pupils to make good progress in their learning, other teaching is less effective.
- Where teaching is best, pupils learn quickly and with enjoyment. In one Year 6 science lesson, for example, pupils were asked to decide whether materials were solids, liquids or gases. They were actively engaged in debating whether, for example, a cream soda could be both a liquid and a gas, or whether powder could be described as a liquid if it could be poured and take the shape of a vessel. In this fast-moving lesson, no time was wasted and the pupils were actively engaged in their learning.
- Sometimes, however, lessons move too slowly and time is sometimes wasted in moving the youngest children about the large building, giving children unnecessary breaks, or keeping them

sitting on the carpet for too long. In such instances, the pace of learning slows down, and pupils receive too little challenge.

- In some lessons, teachers are careful to match the difficulty of the tasks to the abilities of the pupils. In one lively Year 1 English lesson, for example, which used the traditional Red Riding Hood story to stimulate pupils' own vocabulary, the teacher skilfully matched his questions to the abilities of the pupils. The teacher also used the topic successfully in a philosophy lesson, where he posed the question, 'Was the wolf good or bad?' This stimulated a high-quality discussion among the pupils.
- However, teachers do not always pay such close attention to the differing abilities of pupils, and sometimes set them tasks that are not demanding enough to enable the most able pupils to forge ahead rapidly.
- Children in the Nursery and Reception classes are given some tasks that are inviting and that promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. For example, it was lovely to see Nursery children learning to sing a Spanish song with enjoyment and a sense of shared fun. Overall, however, the play activities, both indoors and outdoors, are not inviting enough to encourage children to explore and experiment for themselves, and this limits their opportunities to use their imagination and creativity to the full.
- Marking generally provides clear guidance on what pupils should do to improve. However, teachers do not always make sure that pupils spell correctly, and so pupils get into the habit of not considering spelling important.
- Teaching assistants provide helpful assistance to class teachers, supporting pupils who struggle or have a range of additional needs to learn and make progress in line with others.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour is good because pupils' attitudes to learning are positive, but it is not exemplary at all times, particularly when teaching does not challenge or motivate them.
- Pupils enjoy school, and this is reflected in their consistently above-average attendance.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. For example, a lively assembly led by the deputy headteacher successfully engaged every pupil, from the Nursery class to Year 6, in celebrating themselves and the school through song. As a result of this inclusive approach, pupils from a wide range of backgrounds and heritages get on very well together, and leaders ensure that there is no discrimination.
- Pupils told the inspectors that they feel safe and happy at school, and that they enjoy their lessons. Inspectors observed good behaviour in lessons and around the school, and pupils confirmed that this is typical. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour well, and there are positive attitudes to learning in the classroom.
- Pupils are polite and respectful towards visitors and considerate towards one another. Even the youngest children in the Nursery and Reception classes quickly learn to share and take turns.
- Pupils have a clear understanding of what bullying means and of different types of bullying, such as cyber or racial bullying. They told inspectors that there was scarcely any actual bullying, although occasionally a few pupils bothered others in the playground. In these instances, the adults sorted things out quickly.
- Most of the parents and carers who spoke to inspectors or responded to Parent View said that they were happy with the school, and felt that it keeps their children safe and happy. This is also reflected in the school's own survey of parents' views. However, a few parents told inspectors that they felt that school leaders did not always listen well enough to their concerns about the school. Inspectors checked each complaint thoroughly with school leaders and judged that the school had followed correct procedures. However, inspectors considered that it is important for school leaders to convey fully to parents that they are approachable and that their concerns will be heard sympathetically.

The leadership and management require improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because leaders have not yet ensured that teaching and pupils' achievement are consistently good.
- School leaders respond quickly when there is a dip in results, or when visits from the local authority indicate that extra support is needed for specific groups of pupils. Programmes to improve the reading skills of weaker readers, for example, are effective and have resulted in measurably improved progress in reading for these pupils. Such swift actions indicate that there is secure capacity for further improvement.
- Overall, however, leaders tend to be too generous in their assessment of the school's strengths and areas for development. As a result, their plans for improving important areas, such as the quality of teaching, are not as sharply focused as they need to be.
- Leaders have not had enough success in raising the quality of all teaching and learning to the level of the best. They visit classrooms often and provide copious feedback to teachers. However, their judgements tend to err on the side of generosity and they do not always make clear enough to teachers what they need to do to improve. As a result, weaker teaching is not always improved quickly enough.
- Though the school has sound procedures for managing staff performance and linking this to movement up the pay scale, this has not yet had enough impact on improving the overall consistency and quality of teaching.
- As the school is a little smaller than average, the role of middle leaders tends to be taken by the headteacher and the deputy headteacher, who does not have a class of her own. The school has not had a middle manager with specific responsibility for the Nursery and Reception classes for a year. Consequently the play activities have not improved swiftly enough, and this slows the learning of the youngest pupils in the school.
- The local authority provides helpful advice to the school and understands it well. Its recent thorough review of the quality of teaching and learning has been particularly valuable.
- Leaders are committed to providing equality of opportunity for all, taking particular care to ensure that those pupils who have complex needs do not fall behind.
- The school keeps pupils safe and ensures that those who work with them have been properly checked.
- The curriculum has an appropriate focus on reading and mathematics. Pupils told inspectors that the subjects they most enjoy, such as researching topics on computers and writing their own stories, are the ones which give them most opportunity to do their own research and forge ahead at their own pace. However, pupils are not given enough chances to write extensively on a range of topics, sometimes being asked instead to fill in and colour worksheets. As a result, pupils' writing tends to be a relatively weak area of their achievement.
- Though the school has not yet received its additional sports funding, it has acted swiftly to develop a sports partnership with a nearby secondary school in order to increase the popularity of sport.
- The school makes good use of its location in the centre of London to introduce pupils to a wide range of opportunities outside the classroom, building partnerships with businesses, a ballet school, with music and sporting partnerships, and taking pupils on many exciting and worthwhile trips. This ensures that the curriculum develops pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural qualities well, giving them good opportunities to explore the world around them and to understand how a wide variety of people live their lives in modern Britain.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The Chair, Vice-Chair and a parent-governor who spoke to inspectors are relatively new to their roles, but have made a promising start in identifying the school's strengths and areas for development. They make no excuses for areas of underperformance, and demonstrate energy and commitment to school improvement.

- They do not take at face value assertions by school leaders that the school is good and moving towards being outstanding. Instead they look at the information about how well pupils are doing, and have a clear understanding of how well the school compares with others.
- However, governors recognise that they have not done enough to ensure that they see enough of the work of the school for themselves. They recognise that they do not sufficiently probe the link between teachers' pay and the progress made by all pupils, or hold the school sufficiently to account for the lack of improvement in the quality of teaching since the previous inspection. Since pupils' achievement is not good, there is not a close enough match at present between pupils' outcomes and how well teachers are paid to ensure good value for money.
- Governors keep a firm hand on the school's budget. They carefully check the uses to which pupil premium funding is put, making sure that it benefits those for whom it is intended. They have already set up plans for good use of the additional primary sports funding when it arrives.
- Governors are well trained and carry out their statutory duties effectively, including safeguarding and ensuring equality of opportunity.

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	100813
Local authority	Southwark
Inspection number	425513

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	218
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Patrick Voss
Headteacher	Rosie Compton
Date of previous school inspection	9 November 2011
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