

Ambler Primary School and Children's Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100397
Local Authority	Islington
Inspection number	323269
Inspection dates	11–12 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Selwyn Ward

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	216
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	41
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Alex Bols
Headteacher	Ms Juliet Benis
Date of previous school inspection	4 July 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	2 May 2007
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Blackstock Road Finsbury Park London N4 2DR
Telephone number	020 7226 4708

Age group	3–11
Inspection dates	11–12 June 2009
Inspection number	323269

Fax number

020 7226 0229

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is of average size. Pupils come from a diverse range of different ethnic and national backgrounds, including a relatively high proportion of children from refugee families. Around half are learning English other than as their mother tongue. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. These include a number of pupils with speech and language delay and several with emotional and behavioural difficulties. An above-average proportion of pupils join and leave the school partway through their primary education, but there is less such mobility than at the time of the last inspection. Provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage (Nursery and Reception classes) is integrated within the children's centre that forms part of the school and also caters for babies and toddlers. The school offers an extended school day through breakfast and after school clubs. The headteacher was appointed in September 2008.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Ambler provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. Standards are below average, and still very low in some year groups, but this represents satisfactory achievement in relation to pupils' very low starting points. Although most are very new to their roles, the headteacher and other school leaders have already shown that they are not satisfied with 'satisfactory'. They have a precise picture of the school's strengths and of where improvements are needed, and they share an admirable impatience to drive the school forward. Their accurate self-evaluation, and the firm action that leaders have already taken to eliminate previous incidences of ineffective teaching, show the school's good capacity for further improvement. Leaders' monitoring of lessons focuses sharply on how much the pupils are learning, and feedback to staff is helping them to begin to raise the quality of their teaching. Attendance also has risen significantly. Several parents told inspectors that 'we have noticed a marked improvement over the past few months'.

Teachers mostly manage their classes well, so that even those pupils who have emotional and behavioural difficulties behave well and, increasingly, join in, so that they make similar progress to their peers. The introduction of 'creative learning journeys' has helped to make the curriculum interesting and exciting for the pupils, giving them more opportunities to develop their basic literacy and numeracy skills through other subjects. Teachers routinely set out 'learning intentions' at the start of each lesson with the aim that pupils should know what they are expected to learn. These are not always sharp enough. Too often they merely outline the task for the lesson. Very often pupils with widely different capabilities are given the same work to do. This is not so much a problem for the pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those at an early stage of learning English because the well-targeted adult support they benefit from in lessons helps them to keep up. It does mean, however, that more-able pupils are not challenged enough. This is reflected in the relatively small proportion of pupils attaining higher levels in the Year 2 and Year 6 national assessments.

The children's centre and the outreach programmes that work with families make a major contribution to community cohesion and to pupils' good personal development. Pupils certainly enjoy school and it is a feature of Ambler that boys and girls from quite diverse ethnic and social backgrounds get on so well together. The school makes very good use of its strong partnerships with outside agencies to support children from the baby room through to the Reception Year in the centre and from Years 1 to 6 in the main school. Workshops run for Somali families were evaluated by leaders as having been particularly effective, with an impact, too, on raising these pupils' attainment, so similar initiatives have been extended to families from other backgrounds, including sessions in mathematics with Turkish parents. Welfare arrangements are very strong, but the academic guidance given to pupils is less so. Targets have been introduced, and older pupils are generally aware of these, but marking varies too much in quality. Some, especially in English, gives pupils clear guidance on how they can move their work on, but too much merely acknowledges that pupils' work has been looked at.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Through its children's centre, the school offers a full range of services that benefit families and which cater for babies and toddlers as well as those in the Nursery and Reception Years. Staff have a clear understanding of the diverse needs of the community and ensure that these needs

are met through the use of family support and outreach work. One parent told inspectors, 'I feel less stressed because I have someone to talk to who will help me.' Progress throughout the centre is recorded through photographs and comments from family members in a shared portfolio. A parent described the centre as 'a tight ship'. Another parent described how 'everyone at the centre goes the extra mile to make it a very happy and inviting environment'. Good organisation enables the centre to run smoothly and there is a seamless transition as children move up from the baby room to the toddler room and then on to the Nursery and Reception. However, the quality of adults' questioning is better in the Nursery and Reception because it encourages the children to think more about their responses and so develop their speech and language. Children have access to a range of stimulating activities both indoors and outside, although some boys, in particular, do not always play purposefully when they are in the outdoor area. The majority of children enter the Nursery with skills well below those expected for their age. They make good progress, although standards are still below average standards by the end of the Reception Year. Parents are particularly pleased with their children's good personal and social development at the centre. As one explained of her son, 'When I come to pick him up, I find him playing, dancing or laughing. I am positive he enjoys his time at Ambler.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Match work in lessons to pupils' different abilities, particularly to ensure that more-able pupils are extended and challenged.
- Ensure that all pupils understand what it is that they are expected to learn in lessons so that they can better gauge for themselves what they have learnt and the progress they are making.
- Give all pupils clear guidance through marking that shows them what they need to do to improve their work.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

From a very low starting point, pupils make satisfactory progress, preparing them adequately for the next stage of their education. Standards are still low, however. In the Year 2 assessments results have been exceptionally low, although standards in the present Year 1 are higher, representing the better start these pupils had when they were in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Standards have also been very low in the past in the Year 6 national tests, but they are beginning to improve as an increasing proportion of pupils attain the basic targets set for them as they move up the school. The trend in standards is an improving one, especially in English, where the gap behind the national average is slowly narrowing as a result of the school's focus on writing. The marked improvement in attendance is also having a positive impact on pupils' achievement and standards. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, principally speech and language delay, make similar progress to the others in their class. Those pupils who join the school partway through their primary education, including refugees and others who join from overseas and who are new to learning English, are also helped to make similar progress to the other pupils because, like those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, they benefit from well-focused support. In some cases the progress that these pupils make is very good. It is more-able pupils who do less well than they should.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils really enjoy their time at Ambler. They grow in confidence and self-esteem. Pupils talk with enthusiasm about the range of activities on offer and particularly like the 'big summer event' because, as one pupil explained, 'we all get to do something'. While behaviour is generally good, some pupils can be slow to settle to individual work and pupils do not always listen as well to each other as they do to their teachers. They do not always take enough care in the presentation of their work. Pupils feel safe in school and are confident that adults will help them if they have any worries or concerns. Playground disputes are resolved by 'playground friends' mediating between pupils and offering support where necessary. The displays around the school reflect the cultural diversity of the community and illustrate pupils' keenness to learn about their own and each other's cultural heritage and beliefs. The award of Healthy School status attests to pupils' good understanding of the importance of healthy eating, and the whole-school exercise session that starts off every day has encouraged a positive attitude to fitness. Changes to the toilets and outdoor play area have been made due to the powerful voice of the school council. Even after the very sharp improvement in attendance this year, there is still too much avoidable absence.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers manage their classes well. They succeed in motivating their pupils so that they are increasingly eager to learn. As a result, the pupils listen well to their teachers, although they are not pressed to listen as carefully to each other's contributions in lessons. In the most effective lessons teachers plan varied activities that keep pupils interested and involved. In the main, however, teachers do not plan work that is matched closely enough to pupils' different abilities. This particularly affects more-able pupils because they are not challenged enough. Pupils who need extra help with their learning make at least similar progress to the others in the class because they benefit from good support from teaching assistants. The 'learning intentions' that teachers set out at the start of lessons are not focused enough on what it is that pupils are expected to learn. This limits the opportunities for pupils to evaluate for themselves and with their teacher the progress that they are making.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum has been shaped to appeal to pupils' interests, although it does not provide enough challenge for the most-able pupils. It is tailored to reflect the diversity of the school and local community. A good example of this is the choice of Jamaica as the subject of study in Year 2, when looking at island homes. Cooking with chocolate gave Year 4 pupils the opportunity to practise and apply their skills across a range of subjects, including numeracy as they plotted their favourite treats on graphs. The high-quality displays around the school help to value pupils' contributions and boost their growing self-esteem. Pupils are encouraged to think about personal safety, for example through the use of the internet, and healthy eating is a recurring theme in the 'creative learning journeys' through which different subjects are linked. Visits and visitors help to enliven the curriculum. The exchange with pupils from a school in France adds a frisson of excitement to Year 5 pupils' learning of French and the effort they

have put in to their striking models of the Eiffel Tower. There is a wide choice of after school clubs, including cooking, cricket and street dancing, and these are well attended.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school places a high priority on pupils' care and support and their general welfare. It works in very close partnership with outside agencies to ensure that every pupil is fully included. Safeguarding procedures are fully in place and all staff have had training in child protection procedures. School leaders and other staff have a good overview of pupils' needs based on analysis of their work and progress. They have established personalised programmes to support individual pupils as well as groups of learners identified as at risk of falling behind. Parents' views are sought and acted upon and the school is responsive to requests for help on a range of issues, such as bereavement and housing, that go beyond the school's everyday work but which still have a bearing on the pupils' learning. Pupils new to the country and learning English as an additional language are well supported from their point of entry to the school and good use is made of staff who speak a range of languages. Older pupils, in particular, are aware of the targets they now have that show the next steps for their learning. As a pupil explained, 'The targets help you to do something which is a challenge to see if you can achieve that next goal.' Marking is less helpful, however, because most gives insufficient guidance to pupils on what they need to do to improve their work.

Although attendance is still low, this is not due to any lack of effort on the school's part. Good attendance is celebrated and rewarded and the school is rigorous in chasing up absences - to the extent that some parents complain that staff are overzealous. Parents have been fined for their children's absences and even telephoned when abroad on holiday. The number of persistent absentees has been halved and there has been an impressive rise in attendance figures this year, taking them from below 87% to almost 92%.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has quickly recognised the urgency of accelerating pupils' progress. She has quickly built a dedicated team with a shared vision for school improvement. Although many are new to their roles, leaders have together assessed very accurately the school's strengths and the areas where change is needed to improve provision and raise standards. There is already clear evidence of success. Leaders' perceptive monitoring of lessons has helped to eliminate inadequate teaching and to increase the proportion of lessons where pupils make good progress. The headteacher and other leaders recognise, however, that they have only just started on this process and the areas that they have identified for development, particularly in relation to teaching, learning and marking, remain to be successfully tackled. An uncompromising approach to dealing with avoidable absence has resulted in the impressive rise in attendance rates. Governors are supportive and are especially proud of the way in which the children's centre and school have been integrated together, supporting not only pupils but also families and the local community. In the past governors have been less clearly focused on standards and achievement but they are now more aware of the importance of their role in challenging leaders over the school's performance.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	4
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

25 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ambler Primary School and Children's Centre, London, N4 2DR

Thank you for making us so welcome when we came to visit your school. Ambler provides you with a satisfactory education so that you make reasonable progress. The children's centre is making a real difference in helping many families and the children are getting off to a good start in the baby and toddler rooms and in the Nursery and Reception classes.

We were pleased to see that things have been improving at Ambler thanks to the good leadership of the headteacher and other management staff. That means that you are beginning to learn more in lessons. For some of you the work is still too easy, however, so we have asked teachers to make sure you all have work that stretches you so that you make the best possible progress. We have also asked teachers to make sure that the learning intentions that they give you at the start of each lesson really show you what it is you should be learning, not just what you will be doing in the lesson. That way, you will be better able to identify for yourselves how much you have learnt.

Behaviour at Ambler is good and you all get on well together. That makes the school a happy, safe and friendly community. Staff look after you well and the creative learning journeys are making learning interesting and fun, so that more of you are enjoying school. Attendance has improved a great deal over the last year, but it is still lower than it should be. We hope that you and your parents will do your very best to make sure that you do not miss school unnecessarily.

Many of you know and are making more use of your targets, but we think teachers' marking could give you more help by showing you how to improve your work. You can help, too, by always reading and following the advice that teachers give you when they mark your work and doing your very best to achieve your targets. You can also help by taking care with your handwriting and the presentation of your work.

Thank you again for being so helpful and friendly during our visit. Best wishes for the future.

Yours faithfully

Selwyn Ward

Lead Inspector