

Robert Blair Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100422
Local Authority	Islington
Inspection number	335537
Inspection dates	13–14 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Glynis Bradley-Peat

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

The registered childcare provision, 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	0–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	243
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Daniel Levenson
Headteacher	Mark Miller
Date of previous school inspection	8 October 2006
School address	Brewery Road Islington London N7 9QJ
Telephone number	020 76074115
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Age group	0–11
Inspection dates	13–14 October 2009
Inspection number	335537

**Number of children on roll in the registered
childcare provision****Date of last inspection of registered
childcare provision**

Not previously inspected

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 13 lessons, and held meetings with the headteacher, senior leadership team, teaching staff, governors and pupils. They observed the school's work, looked at documents including the school improvement plan, systems for tracking the pupils' progress, safeguarding documentation and school policies; and analysed information from the parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- what leaders and managers are doing to ensure that pupils' attainment by the end of Year 2 (Key Stage 1) continues to rise and that progress accelerates
- whether teaching is better for pupils in Years 3-6 (Key Stage 2) than in Years 1-2 (Key Stage 1)
- what strategies the school is using to combat poor attendance and what impact these are having
- the strengths in the school's work

Information about the school

Robert Blair Primary is an average-sized primary school. There is provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage in both Nursery and Reception classes. The school provides a Children's Centre and extended school services throughout the year, including childcare for nine babies and 12 toddlers, all-year wrap around care for 3 to 8 year olds and a term-time breakfast club and play centre for 5 to 11 year olds.

The proportion of pupils in receipt of free school meals is much higher than that usually found. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups, and the number with English as an additional language, is also much higher than usually found. The number of pupils with special educational needs/and or disabilities is above average. The majority of these pupils have speech and language difficulties, developmental delay, attention & listening difficulties and behavioural and emotional difficulties. The percentage with a statement of special educational needs is very high. This is because the school has a Language and Communication Resource Base (LCR), serving the whole of London Borough of Islington for 28 children with specific speech, language and/or communication needs; this includes children on the autistic spectrum.

The school has gained the Healthy School award which reflects a commitment to promoting pupils' healthy lifestyles.

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

Robert Blair Primary is a good and improving school. The combined effect of strong leadership, accurate self-evaluation, improved teaching and outstanding care have played a major part in raising attainment and improving progress since the time of the previous inspection. Results in the 2009 national tests show marked improvements in both Years 2 and 6, continuing the rising trend. Attainment now meets national averages in both English and mathematics.

Overall, pupils make good progress, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, but the amount of progress made in each year group is sometimes uneven. There is accelerated progress evident in Years 5 and 6 in particular. The quality of teaching is good and improving as there is a growing proportion of good and outstanding teaching. Senior leaders monitor this aspect rigorously and there is no evidence to suggest that teaching is particularly better in Key Stage 2 than in Key Stage 1. Indeed, the best teaching seen during the inspection was in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Children receive a super start to their education which immediately tackles low levels of skills on entry to school in the Nursery. Together with the good curriculum, pupils experience interesting and stimulating learning experiences which promote their good progress and increasing attainment. Some of the art work in the school is of an exceptionally high standard.

Parents are clearly impressed with the work of the school and wrote many words of support and praise in the parent questionnaires. For example, 'So far I am very pleased with things. My child loves being at school, his teacher and mentor are fabulous at their jobs.' Another said: 'Our son loves school and we feel valued as members of the school community. No child is invisible at Robert Blair. That's what they get right!' This is most certainly the case and agrees with inspection evidence. Pupils receive outstanding care, guidance and support which is instrumental in ensuring that those pupils with particular difficulties, and sometimes substantial barriers to their learning, are able to move on successfully. Pupils and staff clearly enjoy school and again many positive comments on questionnaires are testament to the respect teachers have for their leaders.

Strong teamwork has contributed well towards raising standards because everyone in the school shares and aspires towards the same vision. Senior leaders monitor and evaluate their areas of responsibility exceptionally well, but middle managers new to the school have yet to fully develop their roles. Leaders have ensured that issues from the previous inspection have been tackled well. Mathematics, English and science results have improved alongside the quality of teaching. There is good capacity for further improvement. Governance is satisfactory but there is work to be done to ensure that governors are more able to evaluate the work of the school through gathering their own

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first-hand evidence. Members of staff are well trained in aspects of child protection. Procedures to ensure the well-being, health and safety of pupils are good. The school promotes community cohesion satisfactorily, but it has yet to conduct a formal audit of its provision in the local area or rigorously monitor the impact of its work.

Levels of attendance at the school are not good enough. Despite the school's best efforts to reduce holidays taken during learning time, too many families persist in taking their children away from their learning time for extended periods. Clearly, when children are absent, they cannot learn and this adversely affects their achievement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the impact of governance by:
 - implementing a rigorous programme of training to ensure that governors are able to evaluate the work of the school more effectively
 - developing their ability to challenge the school so that they become more influential in determining its strategic direction.
- Improve attendance by:
 - building upon the good links with parents to discourage holidays in children's learning time
 - working closely with external agencies to ensure that strategies used have maximum impact on attendance levels.
- Improve the effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion by:
 - planning a set of actions to extend the school's outreach into the local area
 - monitoring the impact of these actions.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Pupils make good progress in many lessons. This is because their behaviour is good overall and they want to learn. Although pupils' responses are generally positive, there were some momentary lapses where this was not the case. Sometimes, they find difficulty working together and lose concentration which results in a lack of focus. Pupils know what they are expected to learn in lessons and clear targets identify the next steps in learning; this ensures good progress. They were keen to speak about how teachers set targets and how it helped them to learn better. Pupils whose first language is not English are provided with a rich array of visual experiences and resources which help them to learn, and teachers encourage spoken English. For example, in a mathematics lesson, there was a good focus on speaking and listening through partner talk and this was accompanied by visual resources used well to build a pictogram. These pupils and others with special educational needs and/or disabilities make as good progress as other groups.

Attainment is rising across the school and is now average by the end of Year 6. This trend of improvement is set to continue according to the school's own accurate tracking

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data. After entering the Nursery with exceptionally low skills, pupils receive a good start to their education. However, despite this, relatively few reach national expectations by the time they enter Year 1. There is still ground to be made up. Because teaching and learning are good during Key Stage 1, pupils continue to catch up and they make good progress, which means that most reach the average level expected. However, their attainment is still below average overall by the end of Year 2 because not as many reach very high levels in their work. An excellent variety of extra intervention work during Key Stage 2, coupled with good teaching, ensures that gains in learning are good, resulting in average levels of attainment in 2009.

Pupils clearly know right from wrong and in the main treat each other with respect. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good. Pupils have a good understanding about the importance of fitness and exercise and realise that healthy lifestyles encompass eating healthy foods. The annual 'Health Week' serves to challenge children, families and staff in their thinking about living healthy lifestyles. Pupils contribute well to the community by raising money for charity and they enjoy taking on extra responsibilities such as being school councillors. Although pupils acquire an average level of basic skills, including information and communication technology (ICT), low levels of attendance affect their future economic well-being.

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	2
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	4
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.

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How effective is the provision?

Pupils are mostly given challenging things to do that are well matched to their abilities. As a result, they show high levels of confidence in learning new things. Occasionally, teachers did not plan activities to challenge more able pupils sufficiently. Teaching in the LCR is good and pupils are integrated into mainstream classes where appropriate. Those with speech and language difficulties, autism and those whose first language is not English are well taught and receive a good level of support. In the main, pupils have positive attitudes to their work and make good progress. Teachers model what they want pupils to do and so pupils learn well. For example, some pupils, whose first language was not English, were able to move on well with their learning because the teacher demonstrated addition in a highly visual way using dolls. Pupils have a good understanding of the targets they have been set. Teachers mark pupils' work well and ensure that their comments guide pupils towards improvement. Teachers use interactive whiteboards effectively to enhance learning. Teaching assistants are deployed well to ensure that those pupils who require particular support move on positively in their learning.

Pupils' art and design work shows real talent and is of very high quality. The school makes good use of art specialists and all pupils have the chance to work alongside an artist. There is an emphasis on pupils' personal, social and health development which contributes to pupils' positive attitudes and there is good provision for the learning of key skills, including ICT. The curriculum is well planned to promote group work and independent learning. Those pupils with special educational needs are taken into account, as are the requirements of pupils whose first language is not English. Themed weeks enable pupils to focus closely on aspects of the curriculum, for example 'International Week'. The curriculum is enriched by a good range of activities during and after school. Pupils really appreciate these opportunities and they are well attended. Educational visits are regular features that enhance learning.

Pupils' welfare and well-being are paramount at Robert Blair. Staff are allocated thoughtfully, according to their expertise, which ensures that pupils' progress and learning are the number one priority. Those vulnerable pupils who require particular help and support are catered for exceptionally well. This is because of the well-organised and utilised available external support. Those children in the registered childcare provision, including the Children's Centre, are also well cared for because of effective systems in place to safeguard their welfare.

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

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The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1
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How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders demonstrate a very strong drive and ambition to bring about improvement and so move the school along its path towards being outstanding in the future; this vision is clearly shared by all staff. The headteacher and the deputy headteacher both have a clear view of the quality of teaching and know what needs to be done to sharpen provision. This is because monitoring procedures are rigorous. Weak teaching has been tackled effectively with both support and challenge. Newly appointed and inexperienced teachers are supported well. Tracking of pupils' achievement over time is thorough and senior leaders analyse data carefully, identifying any dips. Teachers are proactive and ensure that sensible strategies and interventions are put into place to promote improvement. Pupils' achievement reflects the school's good promotion of equality. All pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, benefit from the school's commitment to provide equal, stimulating opportunities for every child.

Governors know the school's main strengths and areas for development but they too readily accept what the headteacher tells them. For example, they have not independently investigated the school's performance data and are not clear what it shows. This does not enable them to formulate an independent view of how the school is doing in order to promote really high quality challenge.

Safeguarding requirements are met well. Engagement with parents is good. The school has developed a range of links within its local community and beyond, but there has not yet been a detailed audit of provision resulting in a clear policy for promoting community cohesion. Leaders evaluate the impact of links on the outcomes for the pupils in general terms and they know that this needs formalising more as part of their work to make community cohesion good in the future.

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

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	
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children experience a good range of stimulating activities in the Early Years Foundation Stage because it provides a rich and vibrant learning space and teaching is good. The children's own interests and needs are reflected in these activities, for example a group of children thoroughly enjoyed making 'potions' using a variety of exciting ingredients. Children's learning is extended well consistently because staff use the outside areas to best effect.

A high percentage of children arrive in the Nursery with exceptionally low levels of skills, especially in personal development and communication and language. However, they make good progress from their very low starting points. This is the result of good and better teaching which clearly emphasises acquiring basic skills and which promotes social development. The school has worked hard to provide a language-rich environment which is having a good impact on children's communication skills. Even so, many do not reach expected levels by the time they enter Year 1.

Staff work together as a team, led by an enthusiastic and committed Early Years Foundation Stage leader. The leadership team, particularly the Early Years Foundation Stage leader and her staff, have been instrumental in bringing about positive changes and constantly strive for improvements in provision. This results in highly personalised individual planning for pupils' needs, which translates into engaged children who make consistent strides in their learning.

The quality of the learning and development for children in the Children's Centre and other extended services is also good. The spacious, well-resourced Children's Centre provides babies and toddlers with good learning experiences which are stimulating and well planned. There is evidence of good links with parents. Leaders and managers have secured good improvements since the time of the last inspection.

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

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Forty-two parents and carers responded to the Ofsted questionnaire. The vast majority of parents were happy with the education provided for their children. Parents were particularly pleased with the way the school meets the individual needs of their children. This was very well supported by inspection evidence and the outstanding care, guidance and support was confirmed. Comments like: 'My child made excellent progress and we had very good communication between his teacher, teaching assistant, speech therapy team and transport team' are testament to this.

A small number of responses pointed to some issues surrounding children's behaviour. Inspection evidence showed this not to be substantiated and behaviour was found to be good overall during the inspection. Nevertheless the school is ever vigilant about safety and behaviour.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Robert Blair 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 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 44 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 243 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	29	64	14	33	1	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	20	48	20	48	2	5	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	17	41	22	52	3	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	18	43	21	50	1	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	18	43	23	55	1	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	16	38	21	50	3	8	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	17	51	24	47	1	2	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)	14	33	20	48	1	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	19	46	20	48	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	17	41	20	48	1	2	2	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	14	33	21	50	5	12	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	17	41	19	45	2	5	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	24	57	17	41	0	0	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 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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

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 were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

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 pupil's 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.



15 October 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Robert Blair Primary School, Islington, London, N7 9QJ

We enjoyed our visit to your school and thank you for the friendly way you spoke to us. We met groups of pupils and we were very interested in what you had to say. You told us about what you liked and enjoyed, and why.

We saw that you behave well in class and round the school and enjoy your lessons. You told us how important it is to do your best and to be helpful and polite. You enjoy going on trips and attending after-school clubs. You also told us about how you enjoy taking responsibility, particularly as school councillors. Your headteacher leads the school well. Along with his team of leaders, he aims to help all of you do the best that you can. Teachers teach you well, particularly those who teach the youngest children. They prepare interesting activities for you to participate in during lessons. We saw all your beautiful art work displayed around the school; you should be really proud of it '.

We think Robert Blair is a good school. This means it does lots of things well, but also needs to make a few things better.

- The one that affects you most is the amount of school some of you miss. Missing school stops you from learning, so perhaps some of you can persuade your parents to see that you come to school every day, if possible. If you are ill, you and your parents cannot help it, but there are other times when some of you could have gone to school but your parents took you away on long holidays.
- The governors need to attend some training to help them understand how well the school is doing, so we have asked the headteacher to arrange this.
- We have asked your school to help you all to understand more about the community and world in which you live.

We hope you continue to enjoy your time at Robert Blair.

Yours faithfully

Glynis Bradley-Peat

Lead inspector

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