

Dollis Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101355
Local Authority	Barnet
Inspection number	276505
Inspection dates	14–15 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Sheila Nolan

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	401
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ian Webster
Headteacher	Mr Colin Dowland (acting)
Date of previous school inspection	7 February 2000
School address	Pursley Road Mill Hill London NW7 2BU
Telephone number	020 8959 4728
Fax number	020 8906 1376

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors

Description of the school

Dollis Junior School mainly serves local families. The majority of pupils join the school from the nearby Dollis Infants School. Years 5 and 6 have a full complement of pupils but in younger year groups the school is undersubscribed because of demographic shifts. There has been rapid change in leadership with the retirements of two headteachers in three years. The school is led by an acting headteacher.

Two thirds of pupils are from minority ethnic groups and around half, much higher than is typical nationally, has a home language other than English. Most are fluent speakers but there is a higher proportion at the early stages of learning English in Years 3 and 4 than in older year groups. Eligibility for free school meals is double that found nationally. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities account for a higher than average proportion of the school's population.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Dollis Junior School provides a satisfactory quality of education. It is recovering well from prolonged turbulence at senior level. Good teamwork and the present shared vision for the future of the school underpin the energetic drive to strengthen 'The Dollis Way - growing through learning'.

The overwhelming majority of parents are strongly supportive of the school. They recognise that the pupils' personal development is good and that personal care, guidance and support are a real strength. An appreciative parent noted the importance Dollis gives to 'promoting positive values'. The school provides a happy caring ethos for its pupils and nurtures good relationships between them. Pupils attend regularly because they enjoy school. They behave well in lessons and responsibly in the playground and around the site. They are keen on the many out-of-hours opportunities such as sport, particularly the 'huff and puff' club. Pupils contribute regularly to school improvement through the school council. They serve the school and wider community well through a number of daily duties and charity events. Effective personal and social education prepares pupils well for the next steps in their education. Although detailed attention is given to ensuring that pupils work and play in a safe environment, provision for those arriving early to school is very limited. Some parents would also welcome more frequent information on pupils' progress.

The acting headteacher, effectively supported by the new senior team, leads the school exceptionally well. However, the school has run for a lengthy period without a permanent headteacher because governors have not sought to make an appointment quickly enough. This is of concern to the school generally and hinders the rate at which it can make progress. Parents echo this view. One parent wrote, 'I am particularly impressed with the present leadership' but 'am concerned that the school is still led by an acting head'. The quality of middle leadership is uneven. Overall leadership and management, including governance, are satisfactory.

Senior leadership's evaluation of the school's strengths and priorities for development are incisive and accurate. Fast progress has been made in reviewing and implementing school systems and procedures although the impact on standards is not yet fully evident. Standards remain average and pupils achieve satisfactorily. The mainly stable classroom staff has helped sustain good teaching and pupils' high motivation to learn. The curriculum, however, has not matched the needs of all groups effectively. This is recognised by the school and development is underway to remedy underachievement among Black African pupils and boys with lower attainment on entry. Whilst able pupils are generally successful in mathematics, other groups of pupils do not always achieve as well as they might. Middle leaders' checks on pupils' progress are not frequent enough to ensure that underachievement is identified rapidly.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in mathematics, particularly for pupils in the middle and lower attainment groups.
- Establish more frequent checks on pupils' progress so that underachievement is remedied speedily and parents informed more often.
- Accelerate plans to develop the curriculum so that it matches the needs of all pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are a close match to those expected nationally. Following a number of years in which standards were above average, results in national tests, in 2005 and 2006, were average. Overall Pupils achieved satisfactorily from a broadly average starting point on joining the school. Information on the present Year 6 indicates that there is no further decline and that progress is satisfactory and standards average. Checks on younger year groups with lower starting points indicate that progress is faster because of currently good teaching.

There are no significant differences in the overall performance and progress of boys and girls but pupils make faster progress in English than in mathematics and science. Able pupils achieve well overall as do those from most minority ethnic groups. Black African pupils, however, make slower than expected progress as do some boys of below average attainment on joining the school. There is underachievement among some groups of pupils in mathematics. Those with learning difficulties and disabilities achieve satisfactorily.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of pupils are good. They enjoy school, are friendly and confident, and show that they feel valued and respected. They feel secure in school and know whom to turn to if they have a problem. Some, however, would welcome earlier access to school at the start of the day. Pupils report that any bullying, which is rare, is dealt with 'quickly and smoothly'.

Pupils appreciate the effective measures to help them lead a healthy life. They mostly eat healthily and make good use of many opportunities to take exercise. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They consider the needs of others well and think about the world around them. They show a good commitment to the school community through the school council, and are well prepared for 'workplace' skills by taking responsibility for other pupils. Some, for example, help younger children to read. Pupils make good use of local business links, such as those with a garden centre, to budget and prepare a simple business plan. They make an effective contribution to the outside community by raising money for good causes.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. There has been a high degree of stability among experienced classroom staff. This, coupled with a recent sharp focus on further improving classroom practice, has sustained the quality of teaching despite the turbulence at senior level. However, teachers' day-to-day checks on pupils' progress do not feed often enough into whole-school systems to ensure that all pupils achieve sufficiently well across the curriculum.

Lessons are generally well structured and planning is conscientious. Warm working relationships characterise most classrooms so that pupils co-operate well with teachers and each other. They enjoy work and most are keen to persevere with tasks. Information and communication technology resources are well used to hold pupils' attention. In successful lessons, such as a Year 5 mathematics session, pupils made fast progress because tasks were very well matched

to their needs and expectations of them high. The brisk pace ensured little time was wasted. Not all lessons, however, share such detailed knowledge of the pupils' earlier learning and individual targets. There is scope for teachers to target questioning more carefully and to use a wider range of strategies to assess individuals' learning more effectively.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. The very strong emphasis on basic skills, however, limits interest and excitement for some groups of pupils. The school has identified this lack of stimulus as a cause of underachievement among lower attaining pupils. Steps are in place to develop themes across the curriculum through which to address humanities, for example. A comprehensive programme of personal, health and social education contributes well to pupils' understanding of healthy lifestyles as do the wide range of out-of-hours sporting activities. Other visits and clubs such as performing arts and French enrich pupils' experience of national and other cultures. A recent visit to water mills was a clear favourite in Year 3.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support of pupils are good. Pupils are well cared for and supported. Measures for protecting vulnerable children are highly effective as are links with external agencies. Teachers, assistants and the learning mentor know individual children very well and are effective in managing their emotional and social needs, including those of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities.

The academic guidance of pupils is satisfactory. Measures to inform pupils and parents of half-yearly progress have been established. However, the school recognizes that more frequent checks on progress are necessary to remedy underachievement speedily. There are good informal contacts with parents and a 'regular dialogue when necessary' as one commented.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The impact of leadership and management since the last inspection has been very variable. The dip in national test results from the 2004 high coincided with turbulence at senior leadership level. Currently leadership and management are satisfactory although this masks some aspects that are good or better. The leadership of the acting headteacher is outstanding and has very effectively stabilised the school. Sensitive restructuring of the supportive senior team has encouraged good teamwork throughout the school. Policies and procedures have been reviewed and re-vitalised. Thoughtful training is preparing staff well to build a more inclusive curriculum that matches the needs of all groups of pupils as well as of a changing intake, already evident in Year 3. The monitoring and evaluation of classroom practice has been re-instated. Systems to assess pupils' progress have been strengthened although the school recognises that more frequent checks would help identify underachievement more speedily.

Committed middle leaders, a number new in post, generally share the senior team's clear vision for school improvement. There remains unevenness, however, in how well they understand their management roles. Governance is satisfactory in that it ensures statutory requirements are met and that school finances, resources and buildings are soundly managed. However, the

governing body's decision not to seek to appoint a substantive headteacher over two years is unsettling for the school. This hinders the school's rate of improvement despite the accurate evaluation of strengths and identification of priorities for improvement. The capacity to improve is thus satisfactory rather than good.

The views of parents, pupils and staff are valued and used where possible to inform changes. The reporting system, homework clubs and the development of playground space, for example, have all been positively informed by their opinions. Teachers are appreciative of the good professional development activities afforded them, some supported by renewed links with the local authority.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

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 disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	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	2

The quality of provision

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

¹ Grade 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

After our visit to your school, we would like to share our findings with you. We would also like to thank you for your friendly welcome and for sharing your opinions with us. You will also want to know what else we found when we joined you in classrooms and play areas.

We think Dollis is a satisfactory school that is getting better quickly and we know that you and your parents agree. We are pleased that you are proud of your school, attend regularly, behave well and enjoy the company of friends and teachers. You tell us you are well looked after and we agree that your school takes good care of you.

Included in the many things that are good about Dollis is your success in English, the good teaching and the many clubs. Your acting headteacher leads you especially well and he is helped by a good senior team. To make things even better, we have asked staff to do more to raise standards in mathematics and to ensure your progress is checked more regularly and your parents informed more frequently. We also want your school to go ahead quickly with the planned changes to the curriculum so that it helps every one of you to do as well as you can.

We are sure you will continue to work with your teachers and pay close attention to what they tell you to do to improve your work even more. We wish you all the best for your futures

Sheila Nolan

Lead inspector