



Columbia Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 100897
Local Authority Tower Hamlets
Inspection number 285911
Inspection dates 21–22 February 2007
Reporting inspector Keith Sadler

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Columbia Road
School category	Community		London
Age range of pupils	3–11		E2 7RG
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	020 7739 3835
Number on roll (school)	421	Fax number	020 7739 4812
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Alan Russell
		Headteacher	Ms Mary Igoe
Date of previous school inspection	10 June 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
3–11	21–22 February 2007	285911

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large primary school with a Nursery. The school serves a mixed community that is diverse in its race and cultural heritage. The large majority of the pupils are from Muslim backgrounds and almost two thirds are Bangladeshi. About a quarter of pupils are from other minority ethnic groups with about one in eight of White British backgrounds. Almost half the pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The number entitled to free school meals is exceptionally high. The proportion with learning difficulties and disabilities is similar to other schools. Attainment on entry to the Nursery is exceptionally low with a significantly high proportion of children having little or no experience of English. The headteacher has been in post for one year having previously been the deputy head in the school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Columbia is a good and improving school. It now has a number of outstanding features because of the headteacher's relentless focus on improving its performance. There is a positive atmosphere of care and support which enables pupils to thrive in their learning and to achieve well. As one parent suggested, 'The feel of the school is of a calm, well behaved and happy place'. Pupils' achievement is good and their personal development is outstanding. Pupils love school and learning, their behaviour is excellent and they have very positive attitudes. Parents are almost unanimously supportive of the school. In particular, they say that their children like school, are safe and are taught well. The inspection confirms these views.

The school rightly views the quality of its teaching and learning and its curriculum as being good throughout the school and having a positive impact on achievement. Indeed, some of the teaching and learning is outstanding. This is the direct result of the headteacher's sharp focus on monitoring and continually improving the quality of teaching. Staff are highly skilled in providing activities that capture the interest of the pupils, and make learning come alive for them. This means the pupils concentrate hard, do their very best to learn and make good progress. Teachers generally challenge pupils of all abilities to achieve as well as they can but, on occasions, work is not hard enough to enable them all to do so.

Children settle quickly and well on entry to the Nursery. There are good arrangements in place to provide an early boost to the children's communication, language and literacy skills. Achievement is good in both Foundation Stage years, and is particularly brisk in terms of the children's personal, social and emotional development. However, only a minority of children reach the expected goals for their age despite this good progress. Achievement continues to be good in each year group. By the time that they leave at the end of Year 6, standards are average in English, mathematics and science, although attainment in mathematics is slightly below that of English and science. This is because until recently the school has not placed as much emphasis on pupils' achievement in mathematics as it has in English.

Leadership and management are good with some excellent features. The headteacher is deeply committed to the school, has a very clear vision for its improvement and, as a result, the school continues to make significant strides forward. She has strengthened the processes to check on both the school's provision and the pupils' achievements. As a result, the school has a finely-tuned view of exactly what needs to be done to improve. Improvement projects, such as that to boost achievement in mathematics in Key Stage 2, although a recent development, are already having a positive impact on pupils' progress. Teamwork is very strong. The senior leadership team is an effective group. They work very closely together to ensure that the school is given strong strategic direction and that the quality of management is good. Governors play an excellent critical role.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in mathematics at Key Stage 2 by improving the pupils' calculation skills.
- Ensure that teaching challenges all pupils to achieve as well as they can.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

All groups of pupils achieve well throughout the school. In both the Nursery and Reception years, due to good provision, children progress well in all areas of learning and this is particularly marked in their personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy. Pupils continue to achieve well in Years 1 and 2. Although pupils' attainment is significantly below average at the end of Year 2, particularly in reading, good progress ensures that standards are a step closer to expected levels. Progress and achievement continue to be good in Years 3 to 6. In consequence, by the age of eleven standards have been average in English, mathematics and science for the past four years. Although pupils' achievement in mathematics is generally good, their progress has not been quite as strong as in English and science. However, as a result of the good improvement project which is focusing on improving pupils' calculation skills, there are indications that the current Year 6 pupils will achieve as well in this subject as in English and science.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development, including the spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects is outstanding. Relationships are highly positive and behaviour is excellent both in lessons and around the school. Children in the Foundation Stage make rapid progress in their personal, social and emotional development. This continues exceptionally well in all year groups as a result of the many opportunities offered in assemblies, circle times and in the highly successful nurture groups. Pupils have a high level of understanding of how to stay safe. For example, although bullying is uncommon, they know how to deal with it if it arises. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school. One said, 'I like the mixture of children from all around the world so we have lots of different ideas'. Pupils' understanding of the need to be fit and stay healthy is exceptionally good. The youngest children understand the importance of physical activity, and older pupils have a sophisticated understanding of the positive effects of physical exercise and a healthy and balanced diet. Pupils thoroughly enjoy taking responsibility such as being members of the school council. They also value the Year 6 'friendship squads' who work alongside school staff to support them at lunch times. Pupils take an active part in organising fund-raising for local and international charities, extending their awareness of good citizenship. They are prepared well for their future. Attendance rates are adversely affected by the large number of families that take extended holidays during term time. However, as a result of the excellent processes in place to maintain

and reduce absence, attendance rates have been average for three of the past four years.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good throughout the school and there are outstanding elements. These include the management of pupils and teachers' challenging questioning. In particular, class and support teachers and teaching assistants work closely together to make lessons interesting and exciting. In one lesson, for example, two teachers took on the roles of an instructor teaching a student how to round numbers to the nearest hundred. The pupils were transfixed, following the 'student's' effort at understanding with intense engagement. Teachers question pupils well, and encourage them to explain in detail the reasons behind their answers to reinforce their literacy skills. This also enables staff to identify any misunderstandings and adjust the lesson accordingly. As a result most lessons meet the needs of all groups very well although occasionally some pupils are not always challenged to achieve as well as they can.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school's good curriculum provides both depth and variety. One parent said, 'I am delighted with the opportunities and projects that my daughter has participated in.' Pupils enjoy what they do and work hard to succeed. Many pupils come to school with little English, and the provision for them means that most achieve as well in the subject as native speakers. Arrangements to support pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are also good, although learning plans for these pupils lack precise learning targets. This limits the opportunity for the many members of staff that support these pupils to gain an understanding of their progress. Lesson plans rightly emphasise the development of pupils' speaking and listening skills in most lessons. Teachers are adept at planning lessons which link different subjects together and this helps to make lessons more lively for pupils. The curriculum in the Foundation Stage is good, and lays a solid basis for future learning. The school provides an outstanding range of additional activities to enrich and broaden the curriculum. As well as many well-supported out-of-school clubs, its links with outside organisations such as the Creative Partnership bring exceptional benefits to the pupils' experience, especially in the arts.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Providing good care, guidance and support is at the heart of the school's work. As a result of the very positive lead taken by the headteacher and followed by all members

of staff, pupils feel safe in school. Good arrangements are in place to track children's progress. Pupils have targets in reading, writing and mathematics so they know what they need to do to improve their work. Pupils with learning or behaviour difficulties and disabilities are exceptionally well supported by a large network of capable and highly-trained staff. They work effectively together to support pupils both in class and in the 'School House'. This is a major factor in the excellent personal development of many pupils and their good progress in lessons. The school's arrangements for safeguarding and protecting children meet current regulations and are well developed. All staff have been trained in child protection procedures. Risk assessment procedures are in place though they are not reviewed by staff in charge when repeat off-site visits are made.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school has successfully built on the many successes identified in the previous inspection. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and management. Supported well by the effective deputy head, she ensures that the school's provision is robustly checked by staff with responsibilities and she has a crisp and clear understanding of what needs to be done to bring further improvements. The senior leadership team is an important and effective group. The school has a very complex range of support groups and agencies that enrich substantially the provision for pupils. These are managed exceptionally well and bring significant benefit to the pupils' achievement and enjoyment. There is excellent capacity for further improvement because processes to check progress and provision are very robust, involve all staff with responsibilities, and governors. In addition, ensuing improvement projects are very well targeted. Governance is excellent. Governors have an exceptionally clear view of the school strengths and weaknesses. They are directly involved in the development of the school's good quality improvement plan. In addition, they play a key role in checking progress towards the targets set both through gaining direct information by talking with pupils and also through the good range of quality information that is provided to them by teachers with responsibilities.

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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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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?	2
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.

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	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

Thank you very much for welcoming us to your school. We enjoyed meeting you all. You told us how much you enjoy school, love lessons and learning and that you think that yours is a good school. We agree! Here are some of the main things that we found.

- Your teachers work hard to make sure that your lessons are fun and that you learn well.
- You make good progress in all classes and achieve well.
- The adults make sure that there are many interesting things to do in addition to your normal lessons, such as after school clubs and by having lots of visitors and visits outside school.
- Your behaviour is excellent and we were impressed by the way that you can take responsibility and care for each other.
- Ms Igoe is an excellent headteacher. She makes sure that the school runs smoothly and that everyone works together to make your school successful. She is helped exceptionally well by the governors and also your teachers that have responsibilities for subjects.

I have asked the staff to do two things.

- Raise standards in mathematics in your school.
- Make sure that your teachers prepare lessons with activities that are challenging for all of you.

You can help to make the school continue to be successful by working hard and meeting the targets set for you.

With best wishes

Keith Sadler(Lead Inspector)