



George Eliot Junior School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 101115
Local Authority Westminster
Inspection number 285973
Inspection dates 12–13 September 2006
Reporting inspector Keith Williams

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

Type of school	Junior	School address	Marlborough Hill
School category	Community		London
Age range of pupils	7–11		NW8 0NH
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	02077226870
Number on roll (school)	219	Fax number	02074830239
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Ms K Harvey
		Headteacher	Miss Beatrix Simpson
Date of previous school inspection	14 January 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

George Eliot is an average sized junior school situated in an affluent area of North London. The very large majority of pupils live outside the school's catchment area, many living in areas of significant deprivation, and the percentage eligible for free school meals is much higher than usually found. Most pupils are drawn from a range of ethnic backgrounds, the largest proportion being from Black African, White eastern European and Bangladeshi backgrounds. About a third are the children of refugees. Most pupils speak English as an additional language, many of whom are at the early stages of learning the language. A larger than usual percentage of pupils join or leave the school at other than the usual times. The school is emerging from a period of unsettled staffing. The headteacher and deputy joined the school at the beginning of the current term, following a two-year period when the school had a consultant headteacher. For the first time in four years, the school now has a full complement of permanent teachers.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to accelerating pupils' progress and raising standards. The school's overall effectiveness is inadequate.

The legacy of low standards and underachievement are a direct result of a period of high staff turnover and weak teaching. The previous, temporary, leadership made good strides in improving pupils' behaviour and attitudes to work. A more stable, effective and committed teaching complement was established. Even so, the school's overall effectiveness remains inadequate because pupils' performance in the national tests has been significantly below average for some time. Though standards fell further in 2006, close examination of the school's assessment data shows that these pupils made slightly better progress than the cohort of 2005.

The new senior managers have made remarkable progress in a very short period of time. A rigorous analysis of the test results of pupils in each year group, prior to taking up their posts, has been well used to highlight areas of weakness in pupils' knowledge and understanding and to identify those who are making insufficient progress. Consequently, they have quickly gained a clear and accurate picture of the school's performance and what needs to improve. This information shows that the pupils currently in Years 5 and 6, as a direct consequence of improvements under the previous leadership, are on track to achieve better test results than in previous years. However, the senior managers are not complacent and recognise that the pupils' progress, although beginning to rise, is still too slow.

Robust plans have been implemented that are already having a positive impact on pupils' learning and their personal development. Staff training, before the start of term, is making a difference. Teachers' planning is clear about what pupils are expected to learn and this information is shared with pupils and reviewed regularly during lessons. Teachers are well aware of the prior attainment of pupils and the work is well matched to the needs of different levels of ability. However, the legacy of weak teaching remains. Gaps in the pupils' understanding mean that many find the work difficult. Even so, they enjoy school, behave well, work hard and are eager to improve. The renewed commitment of teachers and pupils to improvement means that teaching and learning are satisfactory. As a result, pupils' progress is accelerating and, in lessons, is now satisfactory. However, pupils' limited basic skills mean that, currently, they are inadequately prepared for their future economic well-being. Although there are clear plans to keep a closer check on the quality of teaching and improve further the systems for tracking pupils' academic progress, there has been insufficient time for these to have been fully implemented. The subject leaders are not yet fully effective in maintaining an overview of the standards and quality of provision in their areas of responsibility.

What the school should do to improve further

- * Raise standards in English, mathematics and science.
- * Implement arrangements for assessing pupils and tracking their progress.
- * Ensure that a closer check is kept on the quality of teaching and learning.
- * Develop further the role and influence of subject leaders.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is below average. In the national tests of 2005 standards were significantly below average overall and pupils' achievement was poor regardless of background, ability or experience of the English language. In 2006 standards fell further but, on the basis of their very low starting points when they arrived at the school in Year 3, the progress of these pupils was slightly better than that of the 2005 cohort.

The rate of progress made by pupils in lessons is improving. However, standards remain too low and the positive impact of improved teaching has not yet redressed the legacy of past underachievement. Even so, there are positive signs that pupils of all backgrounds and abilities in Years 5 and 6 are now on track to achieve their challenging targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupil's personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is satisfactory. Pupils enjoy school and this is reflected in the improved attendance since the last inspection. Behaviour is good and pupils are polite, helpful and relate well to each other. Their moral and social development is strong. They have a sense of responsibility and value their contribution to the school council and the support they give to charities. These positive attitudes are having a direct impact on the improving provision. Pupils feel secure in school and have a good understanding of how to stay safe. They understand the importance of healthy lifestyles and enjoy the improved school meals. Weaknesses in pupils' basic skills mean that they are not effectively prepared for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Despite weaknesses in teaching over recent years that have contributed to pupils' underachievement, improvements to the climate for learning and more recent and rapid improvement to lesson planning and higher teacher expectations are already

having a significant impact on pupils' learning. Teachers are making effective use of their informal day-to-day assessments to ensure that the work more closely matches the pupils' capabilities. The support given to pupils with learning difficulties, and to those new to English, ensures that they make similar progress to their classmates. Marking is sharper and is now highlighting how pupils can improve their work. Pupils, for their part, respond well. They try hard, even when faced with difficulty, and are eager to improve so that their progress in lessons is now satisfactory. For example, in an effective mathematics lesson in Year 3, the teacher took good account of gaps in pupils' knowledge and ensured that they made good progress in their ability to calculate mentally. Whilst the teaching of basic skills in literacy and numeracy lessons is satisfactory, opportunities to teach these skills in other subjects are limited.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory overall but previous weaknesses in the planning for the core subjects have contributed to pupils' underachievement. Recent changes have ensured that pupils are now offered a broad and balanced range of activities, although there are no planned links between subjects to make learning more meaningful. Provision in information and communication technology has improved since the last inspection. A satisfactory range of activities enrich the curriculum. These include the introduction, last year, of weekly French lessons throughout the school and class visits that reinforce the work that has been done in school. Pupils talk enthusiastically about these opportunities. Visitors, including local religious leaders, bring their own expertise and experiences to help pupils' understanding. Good links have been established with other providers to enhance pupils' learning, including the neighbouring infant and secondary schools. A good range of out-of-school activities and successful inter-school sporting competitions enhance pupils' enjoyment.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The care, guidance and support offered to pupils are satisfactory. There are good arrangements for safeguarding pupils and promoting their welfare. Pupils rightly feel secure and know who to go to if they need help and advice and the 'peer mediators' offer good support. The 'inclusion team', comprising the home-school officer, special educational needs co-ordinator and learning mentors, play an important role in supporting needy and vulnerable children and their families. Effective relationships with outside agencies, including social services and educational psychologists, help promote pupils' welfare. Strong links with the feeder infant and secondary schools ensure the smooth transition between schools. Support for pupils learning English as an additional language and those with special educational needs help them to make similar progress as their peers. The new systems for assessing and tracking pupils' progress are not yet well enough established to provide effective academic guidance.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Overall, leadership and management are satisfactory. The new headteacher and deputy have made rapid progress in a very short period of time and are building upon the improvements started under the previous leadership. Although past self-evaluation has sometimes been over-generous, the new leaders have a very clear idea of what needs to improve and have rightly started to increase pupil's progress by improving the quality of lessons. Some of this work has already had a significant impact on pupils' learning and their personal development. The leaders are beginning to hold teachers to account for the performance of their pupils. Teachers are rising to this challenge and, consequently, the teaching seen in the inspection was never less than satisfactory and pupils are now making satisfactory progress in lessons.

Improvements to the school environment and the quality of books available to pupils have been rapid, too. As a Year 6 pupil commented, 'The entrance hall looks good and I am proud of my school now.' There are clear and well-made plans for monitoring and improving further the quality of teaching. Governors have been faced with considerable challenges to establish permanent leadership and teaching teams. They have not always had sufficiently detailed information about the school's performance to make informed decisions. Despite this, their sound judgement in appointing very capable, enthusiastic and determined leaders means that governance, overall, is satisfactory. Weaknesses remain in middle management, as subject leaders have previously had too little influence on standards and achievement.

The pupils' past underachievement means that the school has not yet secured equal opportunity for all pupils to fulfil their potential. Standards are lower than at the time of the last inspection, and pupils' achievement, although currently improving, has deteriorated since that time. However, the maintenance of improvements secured during the past year and the remarkable impact of the new leaders means that there is the demonstrable capacity to improve further.

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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?	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
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?	3

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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
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?	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

I am writing to thank you for the very friendly way you welcomed us into school and to tell you about our findings. We enjoyed talking to you and your views and opinions have given us a lot of helpful information.

At the moment, the school is not doing as well as it should and needs to get better quickly. However, many of you told us how pleased you are with your new headteacher and deputy. They are determined that things should improve. They know what needs to be done and they have already made a very good start by making changes that are making your lessons better. Other changes are pleasing, too, and some of you told us how proud you are of your new attractive and welcoming entrance hall. We saw how hard you and your teachers are working in lessons and that you are keen to improve. Keep it up. Teachers are already making sure that those of you who can do harder work get it and they are giving help to those of you who need it. Your work is beginning to get better, but there is still a long way to go. You behave well in lessons and on the playground and are friendly to other children and adults. Well done to those of you who are peer mediators. You help to make the school a safe place.

Your headteacher and teachers are going to work hard to help you do your very best, particularly in reading, writing, mathematics and science. We know that you will want to help them. We have asked them to keep a closer check on how you are doing and to check that lessons continue to get better. The teachers who are in charge of subjects have their part to play, too, by making sure that you are learning well.

Once again, thank you for your help during the inspection. We enjoyed being in your school and we wish you good luck for the future. We know you will work with your teachers to help your school to improve.

Yours sincerely

Keith Williams

Lead inspector