

Comet Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100213
Local Authority	Hackney
Inspection number	307328
Inspection dates	20–21 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Nick Butt

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

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3–4
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	76
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Fran Paffard
Headteacher	Mrs Angela Mabhena
Date of previous school inspection	25 November 2003
School address	20 Halcomb Street Hoxton London N1 5RF
Telephone number	020 7749 9850
Fax number	020 7749 9851

Age group	3–4
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The Nursery moved into its new building in March 2009. It was in temporary accommodation for over a year prior to that at a local primary school. There are 30 full-time places and up to 60 part-time places available. Children spend between four and five terms in the Nursery before moving on to Reception classes in several nearby primary schools. Three quarters of the children come from a wide variety of minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest group being Black African. Almost two thirds of children speak English as an additional language; half of these are at the early stages of acquisition. A high number of children join and leave the Nursery outside normal times. The proportion of children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is high. These mainly include speech and language difficulties. Children are admitted to the Nursery in September and January. The Nursery has recently been designated as a children's centre but is not yet providing childcare. It has the 'Happy in Hackney' award for promoting healthy living.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Comet Nursery is an outstanding school that provides an excellent standard of education for all its children. Staff have a shared deep understanding of how young children learn and have set up a unique incubator of creativity, where children have the freedom to explore and discover the world around them. The Nursery is alive with activity and excitement, and the learning environment has been painstakingly designed to enable children to develop at the optimum possible rate. Staff have taken full advantage of the opportunity to build a new school from scratch, so that the design of the building reflects their philosophy of education. There is plenty of space for children to find things out, with designated learning and resources areas easily accessible to them. Parents are delighted with the Nursery, universally praising its work. Typical of the many positive comments was, 'It caters for all children's and parents' needs for education and growth.' They are keen to support their children's education, and staff are finding ways to involve them more in helping their children to learn.

Children join the Nursery with skills and abilities well below those typically found, especially in their language and communication skills and in personal and social development. They make outstanding progress from this low starting point because of the vibrant and stimulating curriculum and the excellent teaching, which guide and support children in pursuing their own interests. By the time children leave the Nursery to go on to Reception classes in other schools, they have skills that are generally above those of most four-year-olds. The Nursery places children's welfare, learning and development at the centre of all it does, so that staff have an excellent knowledge of each individual child, and immaculate records track their progress in each area of learning. Teachers, nursery education officers and learning support assistants work together tirelessly to provide exactly the right conditions for the children to thrive. They make excellent use of the outside areas to promote physical development, and now wish to enhance children's knowledge and understanding of the world through creating wild and woodland areas.

Children's personal development and well-being are outstanding because they learn to work and play together in harmony, and show consideration to one another, fully understanding the school's simple but highly effective behaviour code. This includes ideas such as 'keep yourself and others safe'. All adults provide excellent role models to the children through showing respect and remaining good-humoured. They provide such interesting and thought-provoking experiences that children love coming to school, and make a full contribution to their community, tidying up sensibly and helping to set places for dinners. Attendance has improved considerably since the last inspection and is now good. The school is working hard to ensure all families do all they can to continue this positive trend. Children are given a love of learning that equips them extremely well for the Reception year, as they grow in confidence and develop a willingness to share new experiences.

The headteacher has a real passion for early years education and has travelled literally to the ends of the earth in her quest for best practice (New Zealand). This excellent leadership and management is very ably complemented by the deputy headteacher and a highly effective team of practitioners who seem to enjoy being at the Nursery just as much as the children do. The school has been on a long journey without its own home, reliant on the goodwill and support of parents and a neighbouring primary school. It has come round again to its original site in a blaze of glory, alight with inspiration and boundless energy. This Nursery is no shooting star, however. It has an outstanding capacity to keep burning brightly well into the future.

What the school should do to improve further

- Build on existing strong links with parents to extend their involvement in their children's learning and in supporting good attendance.
- Enhance children's experiences of the outside space through developing woodland and wild areas.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Children make outstanding progress from very low starting points. This is because the staff know them all so well as individuals, and key workers monitor their development meticulously. They are able to respond to their interests in planning activities that will motivate and inspire them, and provide additional support where necessary, for example to children with delays in their language and communication. The entire learning environment is very carefully planned to provide an extensive range of exciting experiences for the children so that there is never a dull moment. All groups of children achieve extremely well, including those who are learning English as an additional language. Children leave the Nursery ahead of their peers in all areas of learning, very well equipped to make the most of Reception.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Children have an outstanding understanding of how to live healthily, as every day they make healthy choices and take plenty of exercise, especially on the versatile climbing frame outside. For many of them, mastering the monkey bars is the highlight of their day. Children know all about different kinds of fruit, exploring it as part of a project on their favourite book, 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar'. They feel safe in the Nursery and are not afraid to try new challenges. They learn how to use tools such as hammers safely. Parents comment on how quickly they grow in confidence and blossom. Children exhibit good manners at all times, and know exactly what is expected. Enjoying a book about a greedy monkey, they commented, 'He wants him to say 'please', ' and 'You have to share it'.' Children accept one another and celebrate their many different cultures, taking a full part in International Food Evening. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is especially good, experiencing 'awe and wonder' on many occasions, even when recalling a special experience as they turn the page of their personal portfolio. 'Wow!', they exclaim as another painting or photograph comes into view. Children help the 'new' children to settle in, and take an active part in the life of their local community, working with a local art gallery on a sculpture project around the Boulder in Shoreditch Park.

Quality of provision

Effectiveness in promoting children's learning and development

Grade: 1

The design of the building is strongly influenced by an Italian model, which uses light and space innovatively to develop children's creativity. The 'pod' is an egg-shaped space where imaginations can run riot, with children enjoying trying out different rhythms on African drums. Teachers observe children very closely, and plan their activities around what they know about how they learn. They often provide work spaces for two children side by side, such as the painting easels, because then they will talk together about what they are doing. This emphasis

on 'sustained shared thinking' gives children the freedom to engage in purposeful tasks at length, while simultaneously discussing their ideas with another child or an adult. A key strength of the provision is the way that adults interact with children, asking open-ended questions and extending their understanding. Excellent planning clearly states how to challenge children's thinking, and suggests ways that the learning could go, depending upon children's responses. Outside, building with wooden blocks, children realised their desire for a 'swimming pool' and, working together with a sympathetic adult, designed it, built it, devised rules for it and photographed it. They also 'swam' in it with as much glee as if it had been real. The use of core books on which to pivot much of the outstanding curriculum engenders in children a love of reading, and links the areas of learning together with great skill. Children are able to work indoors or outdoors at will whatever the weather, as the flow of activity swirls around the whole site.

Effectiveness in promoting children's welfare

Grade: 1

One of the reasons children love coming to the Nursery so much is because they know they are valued and their opinions matter. Staff make time for them, and often a child and an adult will engage in an activity together, enjoying one another's company. The boys particularly appreciate the role models provided by male staff. A parent summed this up when she said, 'Staff are helpful, approachable and very committed to the children and their welfare and development.' Expert advice is on hand on a daily basis from children's centre health professionals, and the school staff work very closely with a wide range of external agencies to reach out to families. There are drop-ins five times per week for children under three years of age, enabling them to become familiar with the Nursery and helping staff to identify quickly any children who may have special educational needs. The school believes it could do even more to support parents in helping their children learn at home, and is developing a programme of workshops and events for them. Staff run special groups for children who find learning difficult, or for those who have language and communication difficulties, enabling them to make very rapid progress. Adults give constant feedback to children about how they are getting on, and share specific simple targets with them as the need arises. Safeguarding arrangements are exemplary, and in the very capable hands of the school keeper, the housekeeper and the office administrators, the school runs safely, smoothly and efficiently at all times.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher's dynamic leadership enables her team to transcend the boundaries of Early Years provision to achieve truly remarkable outcomes. In only two months, they have transformed an empty shell of a building into a place of wonder and inspiration where children thrive. Rigorous self-evaluation and an enormous capacity for reflection mean no learning opportunity is lost, or assessment moment missed. Staff constantly evaluate how activities are going and how they could be improved next time. They are always thinking up new ways to teach new skills. Highly effective monitoring develops staff exceptionally well, as they are encouraged to pursue their own interests, and the school funds their training. They bring new perspectives and new ideas that benefit children's learning. An excellent tracking system shows staff how well children are progressing in each area of learning, and enables them to look for patterns and trends. This allows their planning to focus in on those areas that need more attention. For

example, they noticed that restricted space in the temporary base meant children's physical development was not as strong - hence the priority on making the new site an exciting and challenging physical environment with a climbing frame and wild and woodland areas.

The governors bring a wide range of expertise and have an outstanding knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage. They visit regularly and hold leaders to account very effectively. The school promotes community cohesion extremely well, reaching out to groups within its own locality and appointing staff who speak a wide range of languages. Hetty Hoxton, the Nursery bear, last heard of in Ecuador, keeps children informed about the wider world, having passed through, among other centres of global interest, Manchester, San Francisco and South Africa.

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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 is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
The standards[1] reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of the children in the EYFS promoted?	1

Leadership and management

How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
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

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

08 June 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Comet Nursery School, London, N1 5RF

I really enjoyed visiting your brand new school. Thank you for making me feel so at home. I know you think your school is sensational and I agree with you. Here are some of the things that are particularly special.

- You come on in leaps and bounds in your learning because you have so many exciting things to do.
- The adults have thought really hard about making the Nursery a place where you can find new things to do every day.
- There is plenty to interest you both inside and outside.
- The adults do all they can to help you to learn and they listen to your ideas.
- You love listening to stories and talking about them.
- You all understand and follow the behaviour code very well.
- The adults keep you safe and look after you extremely well.
- The headteacher makes sure the Nursery is the best it can possibly be.

I am delighted that you are coming to the Nursery a lot more than children used to in the past, so keep it up. I know your parents are eager to help you at home and I am encouraging the adults to support them in this. Your climbing frame is so exciting, and I know the adults have all sorts of ideas to plant wild and woodland areas where you can hide and have adventures.

Thank you again for sharing your Nursery with me. Keep happy and keep learning.

Yours faithfully

Nick Butt

Lead Inspector