

# Rathfern Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	100700
<b>Local Authority</b>	Lewisham
<b>Inspection number</b>	307447
<b>Inspection dates</b>	5–6 June 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Margaret Coussins

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	379
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs S Sandbrook Davies
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs N Maharasingam
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 November 2004
<b>School address</b>	Rathfern Road Catford London SE6 4NL
<b>Telephone number</b>	0208 6903759
<b>Fax number</b>	0208 3140932

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Rathfern is a larger than average primary school serving a community with a wide social and cultural mix. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is much higher than usual. Over one third of pupils have English as an additional language, which is above average. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is slightly above average and their needs relate mainly to speech, language and communication, moderate learning and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. 50 children attend the Nursery on a part-time basis. The headteacher was appointed in September 2007 and the deputy in January 2008. The school has Healthy School and Activemark awards.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

Rathfern is a satisfactory school. It is quickly improving because of the good and vibrant leadership of the headteacher. She is supported well by a strong leadership team that is driving forward school improvement and is totally committed to raising standards. There is a clear vision for the school, based on raising expectations and aspirations for pupils, parents and teachers and motivating them all to improve attainment. The school successfully includes families from many backgrounds and this has resulted in a happy and harmonious working community.

Standards in the national tests have been below or well below average in recent years. Pupils' achievement, however, is satisfactory from low starting points. Although remaining below average by the end of Year 2, standards are closer to average by the end of Year 6 in English, mathematics and science. However, progress across the school is still too uneven. Some pupils, mainly in Years 3, 4 and 5 are not sufficiently challenged and are not making the progress they should. Writing remains the weakest area across the school where poor spelling, grammar and punctuation hold pupils back as these aspects of writing are not consistently taught well in English and in subjects across the curriculum.

Significant changes have been made by the headteacher to provide additional support and intervention in Years 2 and 6. This has helped to improve and accelerate the progress of some pupils because they are learning more effectively. Pupils with specific learning needs and those who have English as an additional language make satisfactory progress because they are supported effectively by teaching assistants in class and in small groups. Pupils new to the school are fully and quickly integrated into all aspects of school life so that they learn as well as others. Teaching is satisfactory overall, but expectations are not consistently high enough. Where pupils are making better progress, teachers' marking and target setting ensure that pupils know how they can improve, but this is not consistent in all classes.

There is a positive ethos based on agreed core values, in which all pupils feel valued and included. This develops pupils' confidence and self-esteem and successfully raises their, often low, expectations of themselves. These factors contribute effectively to their good personal development and well-being. Pupils are eager to express how much they like their school and this is seen in their improved attendance. They behave well and know how to keep healthy and safe. The school council is active and a strong voice in the school. Pupils welcome the responsibilities they are given and take their roles very seriously. Partnerships with parents and the community as a whole have strengthened under the new leadership and are good. Parents are very pleased with what the school offers and in particular the work of the headteacher. One parent wrote, 'The new dynamic headteacher has made some very positive improvements.'

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The roles and responsibilities of middle managers are yet to be fully established due to some temporary appointments and planned staff restructuring next term. As a result, middle management does not yet have a consistent impact on school improvement. The impact of the work of the headteacher and senior leaders, however, has demonstrated that significant improvements have been made through rigorous self-evaluation, monitoring and analysis of data. Therefore, the capacity for further improvement is good.

## Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

### Grade: 3

Children enter the Nursery or Reception with skills that are below those expected for their age, particularly in language and communication. Most make satisfactory progress although standards are still below average by the beginning of Year 1. Good emphasis is placed on the promotion of children's personal development. Children are welcomed warmly each morning and parents confirm how quickly most settle to school routines and expectations. Teaching is satisfactory overall. Where teaching is most effective, interesting activities are provided, for example the visit to the school pond to observe different living creatures. Sometimes opportunities are missed to encourage and reinforce children's language and communication skills. The curriculum is well planned and provides good opportunity for learning through play in the classrooms and in the outside activity areas. Teachers are beginning to build up a clear picture of the standards that children reach and the progress they make but this is not yet being used fully effectively to ensure the best possible transition to Year 1.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement in English, mathematics and science for all pupils by ensuring consistently high expectations of what they can do.
- Ensure pupils know what they need to do to improve by setting learning targets that clearly indicate the next steps in learning.
- Raise standards and improve pupils' achievement in writing, particularly spelling, punctuation and grammar.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 3

In 2007, standards in Year 2 and in Year 6 were below average, but pupils made satisfactory overall progress by the time they left the school. Across the school, pupils' progress is satisfactory. However, school data shows that some pupils have made much better progress over the last two terms. For example, pupils in Years 2 and 6 are now making good progress in mathematics. This is the result of the impact of the renewed whole school focus on raising standards and the number of procedures introduced to support pupils' learning. However, although standards in Year 6 are now closer to average, progress across the school is still too uneven. Progress in writing is not as good as in other subjects, and achievement in other year groups is not as good as that in Years 2 and 6. Pupils with specific learning needs and those for whom English is an additional language make similar progress to others. The learning mentor successfully supports those with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties so they are engaged in their learning and do as well as others.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

Pupils say they enjoy coming to school, feel safe and well looked after. They behave well in class and around the school. They have a good understanding of how to stay fit and healthy and participate in energetic physical activities, including the morning 'Wake and Shake'. Pupils'

spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and promoted well by the school's agreed core values. Pupils understand the need for rules and are clear about the consequences of not keeping them. They indicate that bullying is rare and the opportunity to discuss bullying issues has provided them with good strategies to use should the situation occur. Pupils are often keen to do their best, but they are not consistently enthused or involved enough in their own learning. Improving standards in basic skills are helping to prepare the pupils adequately for the next stage of their education.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Teachers know their pupils well and have good relationships with them. Consequently, pupils develop good attitudes to learning and behave well in lessons. The planning and match of learning to different abilities often lacks challenge. Some lessons are interesting and fun but there are not enough of these to thoroughly enliven learners and lift the pace of learning from satisfactory to good. The teaching of reading has improved because teachers have been helped to develop their skills particularly in teaching pupils to link sounds and letters. Learning in mathematics has improved because of the school's focus in this subject and additional support provided. Writing remains a weaker area, as it has not been a focus in the teaching or the curriculum. Teaching assistants often make a valuable contribution that ensures all pupils are included in learning.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 3**

The curriculum is developing and places clear emphasis on improving English and mathematics. There is still more to do to make learning more meaningful and purposeful by linking together different subjects and giving pupils opportunities to apply their basic skills across the curriculum. The plans to use an agreed approach to the teaching of spelling, punctuation and grammar in all classes will provide the structure that is currently lacking in these aspects of writing. An interesting and gradually increasing range of extra activities, visits and visitors to school enriches pupils' personal development. Pupils value these greatly. Special focus weeks allow pupils to explore subjects in depth and these contribute much to pupils' personal development as evident in the Healthy Living Week, which helped pupils to understand how and why they need to stay fit and healthy.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 3**

'The school environment is like one big happy family.' These words, written by one parent, sum up the views of many. This is a caring school, where pupils are supported well. As a result they feel safe and secure. The required checks are rigorously carried out on adults who work in the school. The innovative mentoring programme, in which pupils who have had behavioural difficulties give advice to those younger than themselves, is a strong feature. Academic guidance is only satisfactory. Pupils are not always given sufficient advice on how to improve their work. Though pupils have individual targets for improving their literacy and numeracy, few know them. Many pupils therefore, do not make the best possible progress to reach challenging targets.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 3

The very effective headteacher has developed a clear and innovative vision for the school since arriving last September. She has concentrated the efforts of staff on improving standards through a range of initiatives that focus on learning and teaching. There has not been enough time since the new leadership team was formed to ensure that all learners are making the accelerated progress they need in order to catch up. New tracking systems, use of assessment information and support systems for some teachers are ensuring that teaching for learning, though satisfactory overall, is improving. There is now good progress for some groups of pupils who have been identified for extra support. The headteacher and the governing body work well together in strategic planning for the school. Through effective financial management they have successfully avoided a budget deficit and have had to make difficult staffing decisions. Governors are supportive of the school and have made plans to link with different classes and are becoming more robust in holding the school to account for its performance.

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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, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
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?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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	3

### 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

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

19 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Rathfern Primary School, London, SE6 4NL

I am writing to let you know how much my colleagues and I enjoyed our visit to your school and what we found out. Thank you for making us welcome, for talking to us about your learning and telling us what you think about your school. Congratulations for coming to school more regularly, you must keep this up. Your school is satisfactory which means you learn new things steadily, but there is still more to do to make the school even better.

These are the things we think are best about your school.

- You like your school and enjoy being part of a friendly caring community where everyone looks after you well.
- You respect those who have different backgrounds, cultures and beliefs. This means you get on well together, you feel safe and secure and your behaviour is good.
- Your headteacher does a good job and has made some important changes for you, your parents and the teachers.

We want everyone in the school to work on the following important things.

- You are getting better at learning and so your teachers must expect more from you to help you get to a good level in English, mathematics and science, by the time you leave Year 6. This will make sure you have the best possible chance to do well in the future.
- Teachers can help you improve your learning by clearly showing you the next steps to take.
- You need to work particularly hard on your writing, especially your spelling, punctuation and grammar.

I was lucky enough to be able to hear your lovely singing. I particularly enjoyed the Jamaican Alphabet Song and judging from your smiling faces, you did too!

Thank you again for all your help and for being so friendly, polite and interesting to talk to.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Coussins

Lead Inspector