

George Mitchell School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103096
Local Authority	Waltham Forest
Inspection number	308218
Inspection dates	4–5 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Gill Close HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	592
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr M Zafar
Headteacher	Mrs H Jeffery
Date of previous school inspection	28 February 2005
School address	Farmer Road Leyton London E10 5DN
Telephone number	020 8539 6198
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Students are from a wide range of ethnic groups. One third of the students have Asian heritage, mainly Pakistani, one quarter are from Black ethnic groups, mainly African, and one quarter are from White ethnic groups. Two thirds speak a first language other than English, with one sixth at an early stage of fluency in English, and a few enter the school without any English. A high proportion of the students, one half, has learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the main ones being moderate learning difficulties or behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. An average percentage has a statement of special educational needs. Students' socio-economic circumstances are more disadvantaged than average, with a high proportion, one half, eligible for free school meals. A higher proportion of students than nationally joins the school after the beginning of Year 7.

The school is on three sites nearby to each other. As an extended school, it offers a range of services for students and families.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

George Mitchell is a good school in which students make good progress from very low starting points and enjoy attending. Through excellent pastoral care, it provides a haven in which students feel exceptionally safe and their personal development and well-being are outstanding. In particular, their excellent contribution to the community and involvement in decision making are recognised locally and nationally.

The standards students reach are improving this year, but remain below average. Low literacy and English standards in Key Stage 3, for students whose first language is not English as well as for those for whom it is, restrict the overall standards students reach by the time they leave school. The few students new to English make good progress in literacy but, despite the school's focus on it, literacy standards are rising slowly. Teaching and learning are good. The combination of lessons, support, revision and intervention enables students to make good progress overall. It is strongest in Years 9 and 11, where students are well supported as they prepare for external assessments. The school has correctly identified that progress is not consistent across year groups and revised its assessment systems to identify any underachievement at all attainment levels and in each year, although this has not consistently taken place early enough in the school year. There is much good teaching in the school, involving students working together on interesting activities and assessing the quality of their work. Teachers often provide well-prepared and engaging lessons, but sometimes the focus is not sharply enough on ensuring that every student makes good progress. When the work involves less challenge, interaction or speaking and listening they do not do as well. Monitoring of lessons has led to improvements in teaching, although it sometimes misses opportunities to pinpoint ways of raising learning and progress for all pupils. The good curriculum is regularly adapted to meet students' needs through revised courses and groupings. A particular strength is the work-related learning. Care, guidance and support are good overall. The support for students with learning difficulties and / or disabilities enables them to make good progress.

The good leadership and management, with strong leadership by the headteacher, have placed a persistent focus on improvement and inclusion. This has yielded raised standards and attendance, better behaviour, and improved management and assessment. The improvements the school has made and the systems it has in place give it good capacity to continue to improve. It provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the quantity of good teaching through an increased focus on every student's learning and progress, including when monitoring teaching and sharing good practice, and involving students actively in raising their own progress in each lesson.
- Track progress rigorously throughout each year group to identify any underachievement early and monitor progress frequently against the level and content of targets.
- Tailor provision more effectively to raise standards in literacy and English, in order to further raise overall standards.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement and standards are good. Students enter the school with attainment that is substantially below average overall and in literacy. They make good progress and reach standards

that are below average. The school's data for current students indicates that the gap between the school's results and national results is closing, following a period while it did not close. The well targeted support as students approach examinations and tests has contributed strongly to this; nevertheless standards remain below average at both key stages. An earlier focus on boys' attainment has successfully narrowed the gap in attainment between boys and girls that was evident at the last inspection. The school's analysis of subject areas where performance was weaker has led to improvements, although these have been faster in some areas than others. In some subjects, students' knowledge and recall is at a higher level than their understanding, and they do not show the independence that is needed for more advanced studies.

In 2007, students made good progress overall at Key Stage 3, but their progress in English was below that expected. The school's data shows that students this year are on track to make better progress in English so that overall achievement in Key Stage 3 is good. Nevertheless, low literacy and English standards in Key Stage 3, for students whose first language is not English as well as for those for whom it is, are restricting the overall standards students reach by the time they leave school. Beginners in English receive good support that helps them to make rapid progress, but some others do not raise their literacy levels fast enough. In the last two years, students whose first language is not English reached notably higher standards at Key Stage 4 than did those for whom it is. The progress students make is strongest in Years 9 and 11, where the school targets intervention for those who are falling behind national expectations. Students with learning difficulties and / or disabilities receive good support that provides the access to enable them to make similar good progress to their peers. Those who received support through more than school action attained significantly higher standards than similar students nationally in the last two years.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. They feel very safe and enjoy being at school, which equips them well to become confident young people who demonstrate a generosity of spirit and a respect for others.

Attendance is now above the national average and this is an improvement since the last inspection. Punctuality is very good, and pupils' behaviour is good both in lessons and around the school. Exclusion levels have fallen and there have been no permanent exclusions during this academic year.

Students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is excellent. It is enhanced by a wide range of events and activities that build self-esteem. Students show genuine care for each other and participate actively in a successful anti-bullying strategy that, together with effective policies on bullying and racism, ensures that the rare incidents are dealt with well. Students get on very well with each other and staff.

Students have a very good awareness of the importance of healthy lifestyles including drugs awareness, sexual health and the need to take physical exercise. The school canteen provides a range of healthy food choices and as part of 'Challenge 2012' the students produced a recipe book of healthy eating choices. However, despite this, some pupils choose not to eat during the school day.

The school provides outstanding opportunities for a large number of students to be involved in decision-making and has gained local and national recognition as having excellent practice

with respect to the student voice. Of particular note is the involvement of students in improving the quality of teaching and learning through the Making Learning Better group. Students observe lessons, feed back to teachers and play an active role in the recruitment of new staff to the school. The students value these opportunities, which greatly enhance their personal development. They make an excellent positive contribution to both the local community and internationally through a range of charity events and activities. The school ensures that pupils experience the world of work through work experience and a wide range of enterprise activities. However, weaknesses in literacy and numeracy skills impair progression for a significant proportion of students.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Relationships between students and teachers are good and this has created a positive climate for learning. Teachers know in detail the requirements for examinations and tests, and prepare students well for them. Most lessons are well structured and delivered in a lively manner. The good lessons offer students the chance to participate actively and to reflect on their own progress. In a range of subjects, students work together in groups to develop products, presentations or performances using a range of media and to evaluate the outcomes of their work. These structured group and paired work tasks enable students to develop their understanding and make good progress. They are based on careful planning for progression. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to students' learning in many lessons; they often work effectively with small groups in the classroom. The quality of marking of students' work is inconsistent. The best examples help students understand clearly what they need to do to improve; weaker marking acknowledges effort but is less precise in its focus.

In less effective lessons, the teacher spends too much time talking to the class as a whole, students are too passive and occasionally this leads to some low level disruption. Some work set does not provide appropriate challenge or progression for all students. The focus on literacy has successfully encouraged teachers to seek ways to develop students' vocabulary and the use of key words is a helpful feature of many lessons. However, lessons do not consistently involve all students well enough in speaking and listening activities to develop their understanding of the language and the subject. Students say that there is some disruption to their learning that results from lessons being taken by supply teachers and temporary staff.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good curriculum that caters well for the differing needs of the students. When it identifies a need, it tries out new ways to group students to deliver the curriculum more effectively, such as by gender or strength in verbal and non-verbal reasoning. The curriculum contributes very strongly to students' excellent personal development. The school is justly proud of its very good provision to prepare students for the world of work through a wide range of work-related opportunities across the curriculum and theme-based enterprise days. In Year 10, all students have to produce a business plan and manage a budget.

The Key Stage 4 curriculum offers a suitable range of academic and vocational options. English literature is not currently included but is available for next year's Year 10. Statutory requirements

are met, which marks an improvement since the last inspection. Information and communication technology is delivered effectively with students' hands-on use having improved since the last inspection. There is good provision for the few very early learners of English, including through special classes, but for others the school's focus on literacy development in its curriculum planning is not raising standards fast enough to enable students to reach average standards in all subjects. Some parents have expressed concern that they are not fully enough informed of the optional homework to enable them to become as closely involved in their children's learning as they wish to and not all students build their independent study skills through attempting it. There is a wide range of well-attended after school and lunchtime clubs, some offered as part of the extended school provision, that successfully enhance students' enjoyment.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school has created a haven in which the quality of care, guidance and support for learners is good. It promotes an ethos where students enjoy coming to school, feel safe and are able to seek help if needed. Pastoral care is outstanding and all staff show a genuine commitment to inclusion and raising achievement. Assemblies are used very effectively to promote values and positive attitudes. Guidance on choices and progression is good.

Safeguarding arrangements are in place, health and safety procedures are robust and students know who to turn to if they need help. However, although details are in the school handbook, not all adults working in the school have been inducted into the school's child protection procedures at the earliest opportunity.

There is good support for students with learning difficulties and / or disabilities and effective use of learning assistants in the classrooms. The Learning Centre has developed excellent links with a range of outside agencies. Together they provide well targeted support for vulnerable pupils including those in the care of the local authority, who are making good progress.

This year, revised systems for assessment, target setting and tracking have provided staff with information that has helped them intervene successfully where students in Years 9 and 11 were not meeting national expectations, and where highest attainers were underachieving. The school has correctly identified that progress is not consistent across year groups and sharpened its assessment systems to identify any underachievement at all attainment levels and in each year, although this has not taken place early enough in the school year for some year groups. Students know their target levels and grades and, in many cases have clear subject specific targets, but they are not consistently used well to raise standards.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The strong leadership of the headteacher, well supported by a dynamic senior leadership group has created a shared vision for improvement and inclusion. Staff have contributed to evaluation that has accurately identified key areas for development. These have fed into an action plan that has already led to improvements, such as in assessment and tracking, attendance and behaviour. Students contribute their views effectively through evaluating lessons and attending meetings. Evaluation is accurate in many areas but sometimes generous. Monitoring of lessons has led to some improvements in teaching but sometimes a greater focus on teaching than learning has contributed to generous evaluation or identification

of areas for development that do not raise learning quality for all students as fast as they might. The quality of middle management has increased in consistency and improved since the last inspection, for example in use of assessment data for tracking and supporting intervention, and learning leaders use it well to target support and praise to the year groups they are responsible for. Leadership and management skills are developed effectively through the line management system. Governors know the school well and its key areas for development. They involve themselves keenly in its improvement. All statutory requirements are in place.

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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?	2
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	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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	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.

Annex A**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	2
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	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	2
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

17 June 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of George Mitchell School, London, E10 5DN

Thank you for the very warm welcome that you gave us when we visited the school. You impressed us by your politeness and consideration for each other.

We found that your school is a good school. It helps you to make good progress and to have outstanding personal development. Staff look after you extremely well. You told us that you felt exceptionally safe, and that students are involved well in dealing with the rare occasions of bullying and in observing lessons. Your outstanding contribution to the school and wider community is recognised nationally. You know how to stay healthy, but some of you choose not to eat anything during the school day. Your attendance has increased and your behaviour is good. The school is led and managed well. It has improved and leaders know what else needs to be done.

The curriculum meets your needs well. You have very good preparation for work, for example through business and enterprise activities, but low standards of literacy and English are holding back some of you from reaching the overall standards that you need for the future. We have asked the school to ensure you make faster progress in literacy and English. You can help by making sure you speak, listen and ask enough to understand what everything means. Some parents told us that they wanted more information about the optional homework so they could play a fuller part in your learning and helping you develop independent study skills.

Teaching is good. You told us that you enjoy interactive activities where you work together and assess how well you are getting on. Sometimes, lessons are less interactive and do not include challenging work for all of you, so some of you do not make good progress. We have asked staff to increase the amount of good teaching, particularly by focusing on how much progress everyone is making and involving you more actively in raising your progress.

The staff help you well to prepare for tests and examinations in Years 9 and 11. They have improved their records so they can see who is behind their targets in each year group. We have asked them to use them more often so that you do not fall behind. You can help by checking regularly how well you are doing at meeting your targets and asking for assistance if you are not.

I wish you success at school and in helping it to become even better.

Yours sincerely

Gill Close

Her Majesty's Inspector