

London Colney Junior Mixed and Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117146
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	312513
Inspection dates	9–10 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Marianne Harris

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	122
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Becky Turner
Headteacher	Mrs Lisa Valla
Date of previous school inspection	23 March 2004
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Alexander Road London Colney St. Albans Hertfordshire AL2 1JG

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	9–10 December 2008
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average primary school. Almost half of its pupils come from an Asian background and the rest have a mainly White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who are at an early stage of learning English is higher than usually found and many enter school speaking very little English. The proportion of pupils who are identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is about average, although the number who have a statement of special educational need is higher than usual. Although these pupils' needs vary, they are mainly for speech, communication and learning difficulties. A small number of pupils are from travelling communities and attend school for part of the year. The school has provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and children enter school with skills and knowledge that are well below those expected for their age. The headteacher has been in post a little over a year. The Teatime Funtime Club, which is separately managed, meets on the site and provides after school and holiday care.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This school provides a satisfactory standard of education and is improving. After a time of turbulence, when standards dropped and leadership was uncertain, improvement is secure. Some good features are evident. Parents are particularly supportive about what is provided and one wrote, 'It is like one big happy family. My child was once very shy but is now the opposite.'

Standards are beginning to rise. However, progress through the school is not consistent between age groups or subjects. Nevertheless, despite their low starting points, by the time they leave at the end of Year 6, pupils' standards are close to average and they have achieved satisfactorily. Standards in writing, however, are below average, because progress is very uneven across the age groups. As a result, pupils do not achieve as well in this aspect of their work as they do in reading, mathematics and science. In mathematics, by the end of Year 6, the leadership and management of the school have had much success in raising standards to average. The senior leadership team has set challenging targets for future improvement and are tracking progress to make sure that pupils are progressing more consistently.

Pupils' personal development and well-being is a strength of the school. They behave well, comment on the improvements made as a result of their suggestions and demonstrate a good understanding of keeping healthy and safe. They know that there is always an adult they can turn to if they have a problem. They confirm that they all get along well together. They are learning about environmental issues and working towards becoming an eco-school. Attendance is around average and they enjoy school. They are working towards the 'Healthy Schools' status. Pupils receive satisfactory preparation for the next stage of their education and future economic well-being. Pupils' personal development is good because they are well cared for, guided and supported. Child protection systems are robust and pupils' targets are clear and displayed effectively.

The pupils enjoy a good curriculum that is well enriched by visits and extra activities. Many clubs provide a wide variety of activities such as music, sport, art and drama. Pupils in Year 4 learn a brass instrument and those in Years 4 - 6 learn German. Many lessons are interesting and exciting, although the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. This is because in some lessons it is not made clear what the pupils are going to learn, or what steps they need to take in order to be successful, thereby slowing rates of progress.

Since the last inspection, the school has improved satisfactorily. The leadership and management of the school is satisfactory overall, although the leadership provided by the headteacher is good. She has formed a new senior leadership team that has undergone training in order to be effective. This team is keen to help the school improve further and they are beginning to operate well as a unit. However, not enough time has yet passed for them to put their training into full effect. Governors are well informed and are very supportive of the school, and are beginning to question the school's performance. Recent improvement, the growing confidence of senior leaders in monitoring and evaluating performance and the strong guidance of the headteacher suggest that the capacity to improve further is now good.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

By the time they enter Year 1, children in the EYFS make good progress and reach standards that are close to those expected for their age. All areas of learning are thoroughly planned, producing a good balance of activities that children choose for themselves and those that adults lead. Children learn basic skills effectively. Early reading and writing skills are promoted well and children learn to form letters correctly and begin to explore the sound that each letter makes. They count to ten and beyond and are confident when accurately matching a number to objects. Children make most progress in their personal development. They settle into school well and quickly become accustomed to the routines of the day. They play together excitedly and enjoy exploring the outside area. Children who are at an early stage of learning English make good progress in learning the language. Adults in the EYFS work particularly hard to ensure that these children are included in everything. The staff are very good role models, developing children's vocabulary and confidence. Through activities, such as story telling, children learn quickly to respond to clear questions and to speak in English. The EYFS is well led and managed with clear systems for ensuring that children are introduced to school effectively and that parents understand how to help their children learn. Assessments are thorough and the booklets that detail what the children have achieved in the Reception class are particularly effective in showing all the activities that each child participates in and how much progress they have made.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in writing, so pupils achieve at least as well in this area as they do in reading and mathematics.
- Ensure that pupils in every lesson understand what it is they are expected to learn and how to learn it.

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

Achievement and progress are satisfactory. While many pupils reach standards close to those expected for their age, variation is apparent in the different age groups and between subjects. By the end of Year 2, teacher assessments show that pupils are around average in reading, writing and mathematics, which represents good progress and achievement. However, by the end of Year 6, standards remain close to average, so progress and achievement are now satisfactory, rather than good. In reading and mathematics, provisional test results indicate performance at around the expected levels. However, pupils make slower progress in writing and standards in this area are below average. Nevertheless, many pupils who are at an early stage of learning English make good progress and often reach average standards, with some reaching a higher than expected level. Due to effective support, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities can access lessons and make satisfactory progress. Pupils from travelling communities receive effective support when they are in school and so they settle well and enjoy learning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are very happy at school. They enjoy learning and helping each other. They are particularly proud of the way that they look after each other. One pupil commented that, 'You are never alone in the playground because someone will come and play with you.' The older pupils enjoy taking on the role of play leaders so that break times are purposeful. They sort out minor incidents and make sure that the younger ones have fun. Behaviour in the school is good. Pupils comment that the behaviour system works well and many more pupils have a letter home for good behaviour than those who have one home for inappropriate activity. Pupils get along together very well. They have a good understanding about the different cultures represented in the school and talk excitedly about the recent Eid party enjoyed by all of them. Throughout the school pupils have a good understanding about how to eat healthily and keep safe. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. An atmosphere of mutual respect pervades the school where various religious beliefs are accepted and celebrated. Pupils are especially keen to raise money for both local and national charities and the school council talk enthusiastically about the plans they have for raising even more. Attendance is rising after a time when it was below average. It is now close to the national figure.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are of inconsistent quality and this affects the progress that pupils make over their time in school. In most lessons teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They explain the purpose of each lesson, checking that pupils have understood what they are learning. The steps that pupils have to take in order to be successful are clearly detailed, and pupils make good progress. Teachers provide pupils with time to talk in pairs, enabling them to share their ideas before discussing them with the rest of the class. This is very effective. It ensures all pupils are included in introductions to or ends of lessons. However, there are a few lessons where clarity of this quality is lacking, and pupils are left wondering what the teacher wants them to do and how to do it.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The staff have worked on improving the curriculum, so it is exciting and engaging for all pupils. Pupils comment on the good range of extra activities available, including residential opportunities where they explore the environment. Special weeks and days are provided, so pupils explore, for example, particular scientific matters in depth or look at healthy eating and what it means in school. Visits into the local area and beyond further enrich learning and pupils learn about places of interest near to home as well as those further away. Sessions that promote pupils' personal, social and health education are particularly successful in enabling them to talk about their concerns and teaching them about the changes they may experience as they grow up.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being is good because it is promoted well within the school. Clear behaviour systems are known to all and have been successful in improving behaviour. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported. When appropriate, individual education plans are drawn up, so that parents, teachers and pupils can be involved in supporting learning. Teaching assistants are particularly successful in supporting pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Pupils at an early stage of learning English receive good support from within the school, as well as specialist help from outside agencies. Procedures for making sure that pupils are safe are robust and follow the local authority's guidance. The staff have set targets for their pupils so that it is clear what they are aiming for in order to reach higher standards. Marking in books is positive, and often gives encouragement as well as points for improvement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Under the good leadership of the headteacher, standards in the school are beginning to rise. A new senior leadership team has just been put in place. Its impact is not yet fully evident because they are so new. However, they are working well as an enthusiastic team and have planned well to help the school move forward. The governors are satisfactorily involved in the school and are increasingly well informed about the strengths and weaknesses in provision. The staff have made good use of outside agencies to bring about improvement. Translators are used to help families who speak very little English. Specialist help is sought for pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and staff are well trained to meet the needs of these pupils. Systems for tracking the progress that pupils make are ensuring that any who fall behind are quickly identified and supported. The school has been particularly successful in promoting community cohesion. Within the school, all are included and the beliefs, culture and customs of others are explored and celebrated effectively. Racial harmony is promoted strongly and effectively, helping to bind the community together.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ 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/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which 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 learners' needs?	3
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

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	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 eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

11 December 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of London Colney Junior Mixed and Infant School, St Albans, AL2 1JG

Thank you for welcoming me into your school recently, and for helping me to find out about your work. You enjoy school and get along very well together and were very keen to share your thoughts with me.

Your school provides a satisfactory education for you, although it is improving all the time. You reach standards that are close to those expected, but you do not do as well in writing as you do in reading and mathematics. I have asked your teachers to help you improve your writing and to make sure all of you know exactly what to learn and do in lessons. Mrs Valla says that she will make sure this happens. You could help by asking your teacher if you are not clear and helping your friends if they do not understand.

You behave well. It is impressive how well you look after each other and make sure that you have someone to play with in the playground. It was good to hear about all the improvements suggested by the school council and how much money you have raised for local and national charities. You are very keen to learn and this is good. Your teachers provide many exciting activities for you and many opportunities for you to learn on visits and trips. You know that all the staff in school look after you well and that you are safe.

Thank you once again for being so helpful. I wish you all good luck in the future.

Best wishes

Marianne Harris

Lead inspector