

Cassiobury Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117167
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	312522
Inspection date	13 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Patricia Cox

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	238
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Susan Miller
Headteacher	Mrs Alison Campbell
Date of previous school inspection	6 June 2005
School address	Bellmount Wood Avenue Watford Hertfordshire WD17 3PD
Telephone number	01923 232411
Fax number	01923 236191

Age group	7-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector focused on how well the teaching throughout the school ensured that pupils from different groups make equal progress; how well pupils develop independence and responsibility, particularly in measuring their own and others' progress towards challenging targets; and how rigorously the members of the senior leadership team take on their monitoring and evaluation roles.

Evidence was gathered from classroom visits, discussions with staff, governors and pupils and examination of school documents, especially assessment data. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in as much detail but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation form, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Most pupils in this average sized school are White British. The proportion from minority ethnic groups is above average, mostly from different White groups and Indian or Pakistani backgrounds. The proportion whose first language is not English is average although very few are at an early stage in learning the language. The proportion with learning difficulties is below average, whilst the proportion entitled to free school meals is well below average. The pupils' attainment on entry to the school is well above average and often exceptionally high.

The school has gained the ActiveMark, the ICTMark and the Healthy Schools award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Pupils rightly report that they go to 'a fantastic school'. The dull grey concrete exterior of the school belies the attractive environment and quiet buzz of productive activity within. Pupils thrive at Cassiobury, so are prepared extremely well for the next phase of education and their future lives. The school has a firm focus on developing all their abilities and qualities to the maximum. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and works in close partnership with the deputy headteacher. They have developed a strong team of staff and governors who share very high expectations. Demanding targets are set and very good support is given to ensure that these are realistic. Consequently, targets are almost always met and often exceeded. Staff and governors take on their leadership and management responsibilities particularly well. There is an extremely accurate view of standards in all subjects, and where improvement is needed. Action taken to tackle priorities for development is focused and successful. Under the excellent leadership of the chair, governors work very closely with the school to promote the best possible achievement.

There is a number of reasons why pupils achieve so well: teaching has steadily improved in recent years and is often extremely good. The school has attracted and nurtured expertise in a number of subjects, particularly in music, dance and physical education. In the best lessons, teachers use the school's extremely thorough assessment systems to set pupils work at the appropriate level for the range of ability in the class. There is some exemplary use of questioning, to probe and build on pupils' understanding. Much teaching is lively and enthusiastic, with a brisk pace and interesting resources. Many lessons involve active learning, which pupils find particularly stimulating. Teaching assistants are involved well in lessons and give good guidance to the groups and pupils they support. However, these good features are not yet consistent through all subjects.

Other factors affecting pupils' excellent achievement are their very good attitudes to the school and a strong motivation to do their best. In addition, parents provide good support for learning. A further aspect of the drive for high standards is the extremely thorough way in which the school tracks pupils' progress and intervenes as soon as there are signs that any individual is in danger of falling behind. Where standards are slipping in an aspect of any subject, the school acts very effectively to bring about rapid improvement. Pupils have short-term targets in English and mathematics, which they know and understand. These, and the careful marking of their work, help them to have a clear knowledge of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further. Pupils are often encouraged to suggest how well they and others have met the aims of the lesson. These strategies help them develop their ability to take control of their own learning and to be independent.

Another major contribution to pupils' progress is the exciting and skilfully devised curriculum, based extremely well on the development of skills in all subjects. Very good links are made between subjects so that the core of English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT) make a particularly strong contribution to other subjects; for example in the use of drama in history and religious education (RE) or the use of ICT for research. This is helping to raise standards in all subjects. French and Spanish are both taught and make a strong contribution to pupils' cultural development. There is an outstanding range of enrichment activities to give pupils first-hand experience of the topics they study. All these positive features combine to ensure that pupils achieve extremely well and that there is little difference in achievement between different groups.

Standards have risen well over recent years. They were exceptionally high in 2006 and 2007, and are on course to be so again this year. Pupils do particularly well in mathematics. Science has usually been comparatively weaker than English and mathematics, but the work done to improve progress this year has had considerable impact. The school closely monitors the progress of all groups to ensure that each does as well as the others. Almost all pupils achieve the expected standards and about 75% reach the higher level in all three subjects. The school puts a strong emphasis on using and applying mathematical skills and the most able pupils work well into the senior school curriculum. In science, they achieve especially well in scientific enquiry, and their technical language skills are particularly broadened and deepened beyond the quality demanded by the National Curriculum tests. In addition, pupils reach standards that are above those expected in ICT, music, sports, dance and RE. The school teams are very successful in local competitions and there are 140 instrumentalists in school, including a junior brass band. Pupils develop their understanding and facility with economic systems through the 'mini-enterprise' challenge in Year 6, in which they create, market and sell a product.

The school takes extremely good care of pupils' pastoral needs, and so their spiritual, moral and social development is good. There is a considerable emphasis on personal, social and health education, to give pupils a firm basis for the choices they will need to make in later life. The school listens to their views, particularly through the eco-committee and the very impressive school council. The provision of school meals has been changed as a result of pupils' concerns about the nutritional value. They have a keen understanding of how to stay safe through such initiatives as cycling proficiency training. Pupils particularly enjoy the wealth of activities outside the school day. Most parents hold the school in very high regard, although a few have expressed concerns about pupils' behaviour. The evidence shows that pupils behave well overall, and often extremely well in lessons, where they pay close attention and concentrate on their work. While most are extremely articulate, many are less able to take turns and listen to each other, being more concerned about giving their own point of view. Nevertheless, pupils get on well together and their relationships with adults are excellent. There are effective strategies in place to improve the behaviour of the few who find it difficult to control themselves.

Pupils appreciate the very supportive, confidential systems designed so that they can share their concerns and worries with an adult and receive any help they need. They say that there are many ways to confide in someone they trust. They add that bullying is rare and the occasional instance is dealt with rapidly and well. There are excellent methods to promote pupils' understanding and appreciation of the many faiths and cultures represented in the school. Consequently, their cultural development is exceptionally good; there are harmonious relationships between ethnic groups and very few racist incidents.

What the school should do to improve further

- Build on the work already in place to develop teachers' expertise throughout the curriculum so that all teaching is at least good or better.

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

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	2
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	1
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	1

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?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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?	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 tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

14 May 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Cassiobury Junior School, Watford, WD17 3PD

Thank you so much for helping me when I visited your school yesterday and a special thank you to your wonderful school council; the members are doing a really good job. Also to those of you I had lunch with and the group of Year 6 pupils I talked to - you were all so very helpful and chatty I thought you might like to know what I found out about your school.

You told me that you go to a fantastic school and I agree with you. You make really good progress there and when you leave school you know and can do so much more than most other children your age. You said that your teachers are very nice to you and I agree. They take very good care of you and make sure that you know how well you're doing. Mrs Campbell and the staff work very hard to make sure that teaching is good and that the work you have is at the right level for everyone. You have a lot of very exciting things to do - I could see that the Year 5 pupils had a really good time at the synagogue and had learnt an enormous amount. You have many clubs and other activities out of school from which to choose.

Part of the reason that you do so well at the school is because most of you have such a good attitude; you work extremely hard and try to do your best. Your parents support you a lot as well. Your targets help you to see how well you are doing, and I enjoyed seeing the different methods you use to show teachers whether you understand or not.

I have asked Mrs Campbell and the staff to do one thing to make your school even better; I want them to try to make all the teaching as exciting as a lot of it is already. And there's something you can do to help as well: you could try to keep in your mind that there are a lot of you and, although you are all so enthusiastic, you can't always have the teacher's attention. You all need to remember that you should take your turn in speaking and not all try to talk at once.

I am sure that you will all continue to do extremely well.

My best wishes

Pat Cox

Lead inspector