

Comber Grove School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100783
Local Authority	Southwark
Inspection number	323344
Inspection dates	20–21 January 2009
Reporting inspector	David Whatson

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	334
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	Ms Louise Philpot
Headteacher	Mr Michael Kent
Date of previous school inspection	22 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Comber Grove Camberwell London SE5 0LQ
Telephone number	020 7703 4168
Fax number	020 7277 1308

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Comber Grove is a popular, larger than average, ethnically diverse primary school. The two largest ethnic groups are those from a Black Caribbean or a Black African heritage. The proportion of pupils learning English as an additional language is much higher than is usually found. About a fifth of these pupils are at an early stage of learning English. There are 39 children who attend the Nursery class of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Most of these enter one of the two Reception classes. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is well above the national average. Although the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average, the proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs is higher than usually found. These pupils experience a range of difficulties and/or disabilities, including severe learning difficulties, autism, and hearing impairment as well as physical disabilities. There are a few looked after children.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Comber Grove is a good school and pupils achieve well because of the good provision. The school's outstanding curriculum makes a considerable impact on pupils' personal development. This is a view endorsed by staff and parents. Like so many others, one parent wrote, 'I have no regrets in sending my child to Comber Grove Primary'. Pupils are also very pleased with what the school offers. A typical response from a pupil was, 'I like my friends, I like fruit, I like my teacher, I like everything!', while another responded that the teachers 'teach us very well, we enjoy it and at the end of the day we have learned lots of things'.

Achievement is good and sometimes very good. Pupils make good progress throughout the school. Standards at the end of Year 6 have improved in the last few years. In English, mathematics and science they are above average. Standards in English, and particularly in reading, are much higher than in the other two subjects because of the very good quality of feedback and academic support and guidance pupils receive in English. Using the expertise of teachers, and visiting specialists, many pupils also become accomplished artists, singers and instrumentalists.

Lessons are often lively and practical and foster pupils' love of learning. In many cases teaching assistants support pupils learning well, but this is not a consistent feature and at the start of some lessons pupils' learning slows because of a lack of support. Because there are far fewer pupils in a class than is normally found, teachers know their pupils exceptionally well. Teachers' written comments in pupils' English books often detail what a pupil should do next to improve but in mathematics this is not always the case. Pupils do not, therefore, always know what they should do to improve and their learning is not as fast as it is in English. Teachers are highly skilled at helping pupils overcome any barriers they have to learning. Good care and guidance support the most vulnerable pupils well so that they are involved in all aspects of school life and make good progress. The school is very inclusive and all pupils receive the same good quality provision. As a result, there is very little difference in the achievement of different minority ethnic groups, many of whom make better progress than is usually found. Those pupils learning English as an additional language make good progress because of the high priority given to language development. Pupils with physical and other disabilities or learning difficulties, make good, and sometimes exceptional, progress because of the high-quality personalised support they receive.

The staff at Comber Grove work hard to successfully promote harmonious relationships within both the school and the wider community. Parents feel welcomed and all pupils thrive in the calm, safe environment. Pupils' personal development is excellent as are their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils feel very safe and supported. The overwhelming majority of pupils enjoy school, and its highly creative curriculum which, as a parent described, is 'fun and inspirational'. The basic skills are a strong feature but so are music, drama and art. Attendance is above the national average. The behaviour of the vast majority of pupils is exemplary. Pupils choose to eat well and enjoy exercise. They are fully aware of their responsibilities and are proud of their 'Eco' work. Pupils are very well prepared for their move to secondary school.

Sharply focused leadership from the headteacher and deputy means staff work effectively as a team to maintain high-quality education and care that have, at their heart, the needs of the pupils. Governors are developing their ability to offer greater challenge and offer strategic

guidance. The school's track record of improvements and determination to make things even better give it a good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children enter the successfully managed EYFS with skills and knowledge that are well below the typically expected levels. Relationships are very positive and the children settle quickly. Parents are very appreciative of the warm welcome they, and their children, receive. Children thrive and are very happy in the EYFS because adults care and nurture them very well. Consequently they make impressive gains, particularly in their social development. Because of consistently good teaching children achieve well, although most enter Year 1 with the skills and knowledge below the expected levels for their age. A good range of activities both in class and outdoors stimulates children's learning and enjoyment well. The children do not, however, always have sufficient opportunity to share their ideas and experiences with their peers or adults. The recently introduced approach to the teaching of letters and sounds across the EYFS and into Year 1 is having a positive impact on children's early reading skills.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the level of challenge and strategic guidance offered by governors.
- Improve teaching consistency by ensuring that teachers' written comments make explicit what pupils need to do to improve and by making sure that all teaching assistants consistently support pupils' learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

From their lower than expected starting points in Year 1, pupils make good progress as they move through the school. In Years 1 and 2 progress is better in English, particularly in reading, than in mathematics and science. This is because pupils receive much better written feedback and academic guidance and support in English than in mathematics. By the end of Year 2, standards are slightly below the national average overall with standards in reading and writing being slightly higher than in mathematics. Pupils continue to make good progress overall during Key Stage 2 so that at the end of Year 6 standards are above those expected nationally. Achievement, however, is particularly good in English and standards are noticeably higher than they are in mathematics and science. Pupils are well prepared for their next stage of education. The school's records indicate that these positive trends are set to continue in 2009.

Those pupils who have a home language other than English make good progress. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good and sometimes very good progress and exceed their personal targets. There is little difference in the achievement of pupils from different minority ethnic groups, all of whom perform better than their peers nationally. Standards in music and art are also above those expected.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils thoroughly enjoy school. One parent typically wrote, 'My child comes home very happy every day'. Pupils feel very safe and secure, free from harassment and know that all staff are very supportive. At break times pupils are very eager to eat the fruit provided for them and

use the available sports equipment. Relationships throughout the school are very positive. Pupils are exceptionally welcoming and well-mannered. They speak with great pride about their school and have a great love of learning and respect for their teachers and peers. Behaviour is very good. By the end of Year 6 pupils have developed into mature, confident, and caring individuals. The school council is particularly proud of the improvements made to the school toilets as a result of their work. Pupils work hard to maintain their allotment and orchard and have won several Eco awards.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is consistently good. Innovative and imaginative teaching in some classes gives pupils a significant boost to their learning. Interactive whiteboards are being used increasingly well to engage pupils in their learning. Pupils are often deeply absorbed in their work because lessons are interesting and well resourced. Teachers know pupils extremely well. In small classes pupils receive a very substantial amount of individual support. In most instances challenging activities are well planned and carefully matched to pupils of different abilities. Adults work closely with groups of pupils, but at times, especially at the start of a lesson the learning of some pupils slows as a few teaching assistants do not provide sufficient support. Because of very clear written feedback in English pupils make very good progress as they know how to improve their work, but this is not always the case in mathematics and progress there is slower.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The outstanding curriculum underpins much of the progress pupils make academically and in their personal development. In accordance with the school's ethos, the focus on the basic skills is not at the expense of other subjects. The school has three choirs and an orchestra, all of whom perform publicly. The school's wonderful displays of art, models such as the Chinese dragon, and historical artefacts reflect the curriculum's depth. Pupils' experiences are widened further by the school's good provision for teaching Spanish. Extremely good use is made of visiting specialists and facilities in the local community to support pupils' learning. Most pupils regularly go on school trips and pupils in both Years 5 and 6 go on a school journey. There is a wide range of popular after school clubs that extends pupils learning and enjoyment.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school's funding of small class sizes enables staff to know their pupils extremely well. Parents are very pleased that their children are known as individuals and their needs are quickly and effectively met. Because of the school's excellent pastoral care pupils make outstanding gains in their personal development. Measures to promote pupils' safety are secure. There are good systems to check on the progress that pupils make and this is being strengthened by the inclusion of more teacher assessments. The current system is used very well to identify those pupils who may need additional support or greater challenge. The high-quality interventions provided for those struggling with reading is very effective. Most pupils know their targets well and what they need to do to move up to the next level but this is not consistently the case, and pupils, especially in mathematics, are not given sufficient guidance or support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school's strong leadership and management are firmly based on the school ethos that states 'the child is central to everything we do'. This has moulded the staff into a strong team with the enthusiasm and freedom to achieve the high-quality education the school seeks to provide. Their commitment is frequently praised by many parents. Because of this, and their professional discipline, all staff are constantly involved in monitoring and evaluating the school's effectiveness. This provides quite a sharp view of the school's strengths and areas for development. The careful analysis of pupil progress and the setting of realistic and challenging targets have helped the school raise standards. The school's exceptionally robust stance against harassment and discrimination is understood and followed by all those involved with the school. Governors are very supportive and are beginning to increase their knowledge and understanding of the school. They do not, however, provide sufficient challenge or strategic guidance.

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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

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?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

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?	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 effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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?	2

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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	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**

04 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Comber Grove School, London, SE5 0LQ

Thank you for your very friendly welcome when we visited your school recently. It made our visit very enjoyable.

You said you really like coming to school and love learning. We can see why! Comber Grove is a good school with good teachers who look after you very well. This means you make good progress, especially in English, and meet your targets well. Your standards at the end of Year 6 are higher in English, mathematics and science than in many other schools.

The school provides many exciting things for you to do and many of you told us how much you love music. Listening to you sing 'La Bamba' in Spanish in assembly was a magical moment. The way so many of you become accomplished singers and musicians is one of the very special things about your school.

Lessons are sometimes so interesting that you get deeply absorbed in them and work especially hard. These are the times when you learn particularly fast. It is no surprise that many of you attend more regularly than in some other schools.

We were very impressed by your behaviour and how confident, mature and sensible you are. You say grown-ups listen to your ideas and they are always willing to listen if you have a problem. You like to live healthily.

Your school is in good hands. Your headteacher and staff work very hard on your behalf and are keen to provide each of you with the best possible education. To improve your progress, we suggested that some of the teaching assistants could help you more at the start of a lesson and that the teachers' written comments in your mathematics work should tell you more clearly how you could improve. Finally, the governors need to help your school more by asking more questions and thinking how it should develop.

We wish you well in all that you hope to achieve in the future.

Yours faithfully

David Watson

Lead Inspector