

Blue Gate Fields Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100895
Local Authority	Tower Hamlets
Inspection number	323370
Inspection dates	10–11 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Michael Lynes HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	327
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	Mr Robert Oakley
Headteacher	Ms Kathy Halpenny
Date of previous school inspection	27 June 2006
School address	King David Lane London E1 0EH
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors. The inspectors visited 20 lessons and every class teacher was observed at least once. Inspectors held meetings with staff, governors, parents and pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at governing body minutes, the school development plan, samples of pupils' books and 196 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- whether governance had strengthened since the last inspection, when it was the key recommendation for improvement
- the school's promotion of community cohesion, particularly whether it has a good strategy for engaging with a range of community groups beyond the school and the immediate community
- how much progress pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities make and whether the school monitors them effectively
- how accurate the school's own judgement of itself is and how well it uses this to make further improvements.

Information about the school

Blue Gate Fields Junior school is larger than average. Almost all pupils come from Asian or Asian British-Bangladeshi backgrounds. Almost all speak English as an additional language, although less than 10% are at the early stages of learning English. About a quarter of the pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, which is above the national average. About half of these pupils have either moderate or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. An unusually high number of pupils are recognised as having impaired hearing. Very few pupils leave or join during the school year. Staffing, although stable, represents some challenges and currently four full-time posts are being filled by short-term contracts, which represents about 10% of teaching staff.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Blue Gate Fields is an outstanding school in almost every respect. It has sustained a very high level of performance since the previous inspection and academic progress has been consistently outstanding since the last inspection. A key factor to this is the remarkable leadership of the headteacher. She has an exceptional understanding of the local community and parents and pupils hold her in very high regard. They are right to do so. Parents told inspectors that they were 'extremely happy', that they received 'excellent support' and that this is a 'brilliant school' that 'goes the extra mile'.

The school has a wonderfully calm atmosphere that allows children to really learn but also have fun both in and outside of lessons. During the inspection a large group of older children returned from a local football academy, clearly having had a great day. Another younger pupil excitedly told an inspector about a trip outside of the city to the local countryside where it 'was pitch black and you can see the stars'.

A vital element to the school's continued success is the exceptional work of the home-school liaison team. They work in a highly personalised fashion with families to ensure that any problems affecting them that might create a barrier to the children's success are overcome. They actively establish long-lasting relationships with families, but also readily respond to requests for assistance. A number of parents told inspectors how appreciative they were of this. Some parents clearly felt that the school had improved their families' lives immeasurably and that it provided a service that they could always rely on.

A particularly noteworthy feature is the way in which the development of language skills is embedded across the school. Opportunities to develop speaking and listening were consistently seen across all subject areas and teachers never seem to miss a chance to ask a question or to interact with pupils. As a result, pupils can express themselves confidently in a range of situations. Writing is a high priority and even the least able produce work that is not only well presented but demonstrates thought and intellectual engagement. The well-resourced library, run by a full-time, highly committed librarian, is central to the school's successful promotion of reading. Many children take books home not only for themselves but for siblings.

To continue this high level of performance the school needs to improve in two areas: governance and the monitoring of academic progress. Governance remains

satisfactory, as it was at the last inspection, and is the reason why capacity to improve further is graded as good rather than outstanding.

Governors have shown greater commitment to the school over the past three years: they know the school better as they visit more regularly and attendance at governing body meetings has improved. They also have a fuller understanding of financial matters. However, they do not take enough responsibility for holding the school to account for its performance or involve themselves sufficiently in setting priorities for further improvement. To his credit, the chair of governors recognises this. The school can track the progress of pupils accurately because teachers have a very secure knowledge of each pupil and regularly sample and moderate the quality of work in books. However, the system for using this information to formally assess the quality of work on a regular basis is underdeveloped, particularly in Years 3, 4 and 5. Parents have recognised this, as a substantial minority reported to inspectors that they would like more regular information regarding their children's academic progress. Senior leaders acknowledge this and it is a key feature of the development plan.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure governors are trained to gain a better understanding of the challenges the school faces and are directly involved in setting appropriate priorities for improvement.
- Extend systems for tracking the academic progress of all pupils, including those who have learning difficulties, to identify any potential underachievement and ensure that responsibility for this is clearly designated.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

- Achievement since the last inspection has been consistently exceptional across all subjects because teachers know individual pupils very well and plan lessons that meet their individual needs. Some improvement is required to the systems for monitoring the progress of pupils during the academic year so that any potential underachievement is consistently identified and remedied.
- Boys and girls achieve equally well and Bangladeshi pupils' progress is significantly higher than the national average for this group.
- The targets for this year's national tests are ambitious as they are set well above what might be expected, considering the pupils' starting points in Year 3; evidence from lesson observations confirms the school's judgement that these targets will be met, as does the school's track record over the past three years.
- Those pupils who have statements of special educational needs have individual plans with appropriate targets that are regularly monitored, and evidence from this inspection shows that they are making excellent progress.
- Good communication between the special needs coordinator and teachers ensures that the needs of those pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified and good support is put in place. However, data on their progress are not regularly collected or analysed.

- Pupils clearly enjoy coming to school, and both they and their parents report that they feel very safe and behaviour is excellent. This is because teachers have consistently high expectations which are quietly, firmly and often subtly adhered to.
- Pupils demonstrate high aspirations for the future and are committed to their learning. They are developing both social and personal skills and the resilience to succeed in later life.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	1
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	1
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	1
How well do pupils behave?	1
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	1
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	2
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	1
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	2

How effective is the provision?

- The quality of teaching seen during the inspection was excellent as three quarters of lessons were judged to be at least good, including a third that were outstanding.
- The grouping of pupils into ability sets for literacy and numeracy enables teachers to ensure that they plan appropriate activities that stimulate and interest pupils.
- Opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills are embedded in many lessons. As a result, almost all pupils are developing the confidence to speak with authority in pairs, groups and to the whole class.
- Presentation and handwriting in many books was of a high quality. In a number of lessons teachers used effective strategies to allow pupils of all abilities to develop their writing and produce work of excellent quality. This was particularly evident in a Year 6 class which contained mainly pupils with learning difficulties. They were expertly assisted by a teaching assistant.
- The curriculum is good as it provides a wide range of enjoyable experiences both in and outside the classroom. The English curriculum makes use of texts that are not only intellectually but culturally challenging. The school acknowledges that it needs to provide greater opportunities for the

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

development of mathematics and information and communication technology across the curriculum.

- The quality of care, guidance and support is excellent, particularly because of the work of the home-school liaison team. Parents hold the work of this team in the very highest regard.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

- The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. She has a deeply held set of values and principles which infuse every aspect of the school. As a result, staff have very high expectations of both themselves and pupils.
- The school's own evaluation of the quality of its work is largely accurate. The headteacher and the deputy headteacher are good judges of the quality of teaching and use an effective range of strategies to maintain a high level of performance.
- Safeguarding regulations and duties are met and arrangements and policies for safeguarding are in line with government requirements. The headteacher has successfully completed the government's Safer Recruitment training. Risk assessments are robust and regularly reviewed. The school has close, effective links with outside agencies to ensure that child protection procedures are thorough.
- Great care is taken to ensure that high aspirations are not merely words and that everyone has the opportunity to develop and excel. This means that the school very effectively promotes equality of opportunity. However, further work is required to ensure that the monitoring and analysis of the performance of specific groups within the school is more systematic.
- The work of governors is satisfactory. Although they display great commitment and support for the school, their understanding of its work is underdeveloped. Their ability to hold the school to account for its performance or be fully involved in its future development is therefore limited.
- The school works extremely effectively with both a range of outside agencies and parents to ensure the well-being of pupils. Engagement with potentially vulnerable families who require additional support is of the highest order.
- The school has an exceptionally clear understanding of its local community and makes an outstanding contribution to community cohesion in the local area.
- Pupils and parents are rightly very proud of their school. Pupils' knowledge of other cultures is more limited and consequently their understanding of the diverse nature of life in modern Britain is underdeveloped. This occasionally manifests itself in intolerance towards those from other cultures.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in communicating ambition and driving improvement	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

Parents demonstrated a high level of commitment to the school and great interest in the inspection process. Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils at Blue Gate Fields Junior School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. A much higher number of responses were received than is usual. In addition, a parents' meeting was held with the lead inspector which was very well attended. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and many report that it makes a major contribution to improving both the lives of their children and their families. Parents clearly feel that the school is a vitally important part of the local community. A small but significant minority of parents would like more regular information regarding their children's academic progress. Inspectors agree with this and the report identifies it as one of the key areas for further development. A small number of parents had minor concerns and constructive suggestions to make. Issues raised covered several areas and in the main related to the individual parent/carers concerned.

The inspection team received 196 completed questionnaires. In total, there are 620 parents and carers registered at the school.

	Always	Most of the time	Occasionally	Never
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	166	20	10	0

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, training or development. This may refer to the acquisition of skills, knowledge, understanding or desired attributes. Attributes include qualities or personal competencies which are important to the development of the pupil; for example personal, social, cultural, emotional or health.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities,

directing and motivating staff and running the school.



24 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Blue Gate Fields Junior School, London, E1 0EH

Thank you so much for talking to me so openly when I came to inspect your school. It was fantastic to see so many of you enjoying your learning and it was lovely to hear about your experiences outside school. You clearly enjoyed your day out at the football academy.

A lot of your parents told us that they think the school is very good; I agree and have decided that your school is excellent. I was particularly impressed by your behaviour, which was brilliant both inside the classroom and around the school. I was also delighted to see such high-quality art and displays of your work around the school. So congratulations to you and all the staff who work so hard looking after you and helping you with your learning.

To make sure that the school keeps on being excellent, we have asked it to do two things:

- the governors need training so that they can work with the headteacher to make sure that everything keeps on improving
- the teachers need to make sure that they track your progress even more regularly so that they know how well you are doing.

I hope that those of you in Year 6 get the results that all your hard work deserves and I wish all of you the very best for the future.

Yours faithfully

Michael Lynes
Her Majesty's Inspector

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