

John Scurr Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100906
Local Authority	Tower Hamlets
Inspection number	323374
Inspection dates	10–11 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Sheena MacDonald 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	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	465
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Lyall
Headteacher	Ms Bridget Fagan
Date of previous school inspection	5–6 October 2005
School address	Cephas Street London E1 4AX
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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 18 lessons, and held meetings with governors, school leaders, groups of pupils, staff and external partners. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation including: monitoring, self-evaluation and improvement-planning, assessment information, pupils' books, support plans and outcomes for a particular group of pupils, parental and pupil questionnaires.

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

- the effectiveness of strategies to raise attainment in early literacy, girls' confidence in speaking and listening and boys' writing
- the impact of assessment for learning, family learning and involvement of pupils in self-assessment in mathematics
- the impact of leaders and managers at all levels (including governors) on improving standards
- the quality of the school's work to develop good partnerships and community cohesion.

Information about the school

John Scurr Primary is larger than most primary schools. The school provides for younger children in the Early Years Foundation Stage in a Nursery, and for older children in two Reception classes. Although different minority ethnic groups are represented in the school, most pupils come from Bangladeshi backgrounds. Most speak English as an additional language and almost half, with particularly high numbers in the younger classes, are at the early stages of learning English. A much higher than average number of pupils is known to be eligible for free school meals. Increasing numbers of pupils are joining and leaving the school at times other than in the Nursery or Reception classes. Many of the new entrants arrive throughout the year from other countries. The school provides a breakfast club and the local Junior Youth Service provides an after school club.

Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

John Scurr is a good school with a very strong ethos of caring for and valuing the individual while also recognising the importance of its community. The support, care and guidance offered to children and their families are outstanding, as are the relationships with partnership agencies and organisations. These strong features enable the school to extend its provision, expertise and enrichment activities so that pupils make good progress both academically and personally. Other notable strengths in the school are its linguistic and cultural richness and the provision and outcomes in art and music. As a governor rightly said, 'the children educated at John Scurr are well-behaved, socially aware, enjoy schooling in all its aspects and are responsible citizens to be'.

Many pupils start school with little English and most have very low skills in other areas of learning. By the time they leave Year 6 they achieve at national expectations. The school makes good use of comprehensive systems to track the attainment and progress of groups and individual pupils. This enables the school to provide rapid high-quality additional support where it is required or where there is possible underachievement. As a result, all groups, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and the high numbers of pupils at the early stages of learning English, make equally good progress.

Over the last few years the school has experienced a series of staffing changes, particularly in Key Stage 1. As a result, senior leaders have rightly focused on ensuring that new, and sometimes inexperienced, teachers develop consistent practices and good teaching skills. Teaching is now good: lessons are well planned with clear learning objectives and valuable opportunities to develop pupils' communication and thinking skills. The curriculum is adapted well to meet the needs and interests of pupils and there are some good examples where links are made between subjects to make learning more interesting and relevant. The positive impact of this approach was evident in the high-quality story writing resulting from work on the Ancient Greeks. The school's work to promote early literacy and ensure good practice through the transition from Reception into Year 1 has resulted in pupils acquiring important reading and writing skills more quickly and improved attitudes to learning. Throughout the school many pupils are slowed down by poor handwriting skills because there is no consistently followed system for making sure they master the mechanics of fluent handwriting at an early stage. Although most teaching is

good and there are examples of outstanding teaching and learning, there are still some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching across the school and not all teachers have equally high expectations of how much and how well pupils can achieve.

The leadership team, including governors and subject leaders, are knowledgeable and committed to ensuring that the pupils receive the best possible well-rounded education. Self-evaluation is thorough; the school has an accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and has a well-devised improvement plan to tackle the areas requiring improvements and further develop the strengths. The school is rigorous in carrying out its planned actions, but targets and expected outcomes in terms of pupil achievement are not specified clearly enough and this makes evaluating the impact difficult. The school has maintained good-quality education over time despite changes in leadership and staffing. It has demonstrated that it knows itself well and has taken successful action to improve aspects identified as weaknesses. The school's capacity for further improvement is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards in English, mathematics and science, particularly by the end of Key Stage 1, by making sure that all teachers have equally high expectations about how much and how well pupils can achieve.
- Make sure that all pupils are taught, and master, the key skill of fluent handwriting by applying and monitoring rigorously a consistent policy.
- Sharpen the focus of school improvement-planning on the performance outcomes for pupils so that the impact of actions and strategies are more easily measured and evaluated.

How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

2

In the majority of lessons observed during the inspection, pupils made good progress and were enthusiastic about their learning. Some girls have been more reticent in volunteering to answer questions in whole-class sessions and, in the past, this has hindered their progress. Paired talk and group discussions are ensuring that even the most timid are contributing and developing their important communication and thinking skills. Many lessons, particularly in English, link learning to other subjects such as history or science and this is particularly motivating boys to make better progress in their writing. Those pupils learning English as an additional language make good progress because of the high-quality additional support they receive and also because there is a good understanding across the school about which strategies and techniques to use to accelerate the acquisition of new vocabulary and understanding of a new language. Although the involvement of pupils in evaluating and reflecting on their own learning in mathematics is still at an early stage, there are positive signs that this is resulting in greater understanding and more rapid progress.

In 2008 Key Stage 1 results were particularly low. The school recognised that progress was too slow and had been adversely affected by staffing changes. It has taken determined steps to remedy the situation by improving the quality and consistency of teaching and learning in Key Stage 1. This positive action is resulting in pupils now making better progress, especially in literacy.

Pupils' good behaviour and enjoyment of learning helps them to benefit from all the school has to offer. The pupils are mature, polite and friendly and they get on well with each other and adults. They know their views are important and how this influences activities such as the school and class councils. They are enthusiastic about taking on responsibilities such as in the playground where older pupils lead singing and action games. This is a 'healthy school' and pupils have a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy diet and lifestyle. School meals are nutritious and well balanced and pupils enjoy the school's physical activity programme and clubs. They have a good understanding of what is right, wrong, fair and unjust. The way the school includes and values each individual contributes to their understanding of different cultural groups and pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They have many of the personal skills which will help them in the future, although opportunities to show initiative and enterprise are limited.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	2
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	2
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	2
How well do pupils behave?	2
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	2
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	2
Pupils' attendance	3
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	3
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	2

¹ Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

The quality of the school's work

Good teaching overall, and positive relationships, mean that pupils have good attitudes to learning. Lessons are well planned with clear learning objectives, so that pupils know what is expected of them and are increasingly involved in judging their own success. Teachers plan activities with care to meet the varying needs and capabilities of the pupils. This, allied to good team work, means that all staff provide valuable support in class and in small group sessions. Clear instructions, good visual materials and a focus on developing communication and language skills are particularly strong features. These are important and support the learning of all pupils, but particularly those new to learning English. The school has focused successfully on improving teaching skills and some outstanding lessons were seen during the inspection. However, there is still some inconsistency between classes and subjects and there are too few opportunities in lessons which call for pupils to use their initiative or set themselves challenges.

Assessment data is used well to target high-quality additional support and also to inform everyday learning. For example, a systematic phonics programme has been introduced and used across the younger classes and is leading to improvements in early literacy skills. Teachers mark pupils work well and some recent initiatives, particularly in mathematics, involve pupils in responding to teacher's comments and in thinking about their learning. This work is at an early stage but the signs are promising.

The school makes the most of its locality and links with other schools and groups so that children and their parents experience the richness of London and the local culture. As a result, pupils experience a broad curriculum with particular strengths in music and art. Literacy and numeracy rightly have a high priority and revised programmes are currently being embedded which are improving the quality of provision in these subjects.

The school knows and cares for each pupil exceptionally well. There are excellent systems to identify, support and monitor the progress of vulnerable pupils, and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Support staff, including the learning mentors, home school worker and enrichment coordinator, ensure help is available exactly when it is needed and their contribution is valued greatly by pupils and their families. There are excellent arrangements to welcome pupils into the school and to support their transition on to secondary school.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	2
Effective assessment	2
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	2
Support, guidance and care	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders have maintained, over time and through staffing changes, a school where pupils enjoy coming to school, are enthusiastic learners and make good progress. There is a strong commitment to ensure all have equality of opportunity and to serving and supporting the community as a whole. The school's duty to promote community cohesion is particularly well developed at local and international level, although understanding and links with other communities in Britain are less well developed. The leadership team have actively sought to recruit staff who increasingly reflect the different groups in the community. Parents are very involved in school life and their views are sought and acted on, and there are outstanding links with a wide range of other providers and organisations, both in terms of supporting pupils' progress and through enrichment activities.

The headteacher and her team have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This is secured through rigorous monitoring, effective teamwork and good assessment systems. The school improvement plan is detailed with appropriate aims and actions. Equally, there is a strong commitment to staff development, so that all, including subject leadership teams, make a good contribution to school improvement. Recent staff changes have, understandably, resulted in a focus on developing teaching skills and improvement planning is not specific enough about what success will look like in terms of pupils' achievement. Governors have a good understanding and involvement in shaping the aims, vision and key areas for improvement in the school.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	2
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	2
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	2
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	2
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision-making about matters relating to learning and well-being	2
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	1
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	2
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children enter the Nursery with skills and abilities well below those normally expected for their age, especially in personal and social development and in communication, language and literacy. They make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes because adults know all the children very well and teaching is good. There is a rich learning environment, especially in the Nursery, with spaces devoted to different areas of learning and colourful and stimulating displays. Children settle quickly and engage happily in a wide range of interesting activities. The introduction of a programme to teach sounds and letters is helping children in developing their reading skills. Children's natural curiosity is harnessed through developing learning in extended ways, as when children planted beans to watch them grow, and also used them to make beans on toast. Adults promote children's speaking and listening skills through careful questioning and stimulating role play areas. Tasks are usually well chosen, although occasionally the focus is too much on activity rather than what the children will learn. Thorough assessment of children's progress gives adults a very clear picture of their levels of development. Records clearly show adults what children need to do next to improve, and planning takes this into account well. There is effective leadership and management. Good systems are followed to ensure the welfare of all children, and strong teams cooperate effectively to ensure children achieve well. Support staff and teachers plan together and often reflect on their practice, looking for ways to improve the provision further.

How good are the outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	2
What is the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	2
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?	2
Overall effectiveness: how well does the setting/school meet the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	2

Views of parents and carers

Over 140 parents or carers returned questionnaires to HMI, which is around the usual number for this size of school. The vast majority of parents are overwhelmingly satisfied with the school. A pupil questionnaire also confirmed this high degree of satisfaction with all aspects scoring highly. Although there were no particular trends in the small number of comments received by HMI, there was a small group of parents who commented that they would like to be kept more regularly informed about their children's progress. Inspectors found that the school actively seeks to keep parents well informed and that it is currently looking at ways to do this even more effectively.

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:	an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
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.



25 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of John Scurr Primary School, London, E1 4AX

As you know, I visited your school recently with two other inspectors to find out how well you were doing. Thank you for being so friendly, polite and welcoming, especially those of you who gave up your playtime to talk to us. You and your parents told us your school was a good school and we agree with you.

You behave very well and your enthusiasm for learning is a pleasure to see! The adults in school take outstanding care of you and you take good care of each other. The adults are excellent at working with organisations and people outside the school, so that if you need extra support, they know where to find it. Also, there are lots of chances to take part in extra activities along with pupils from other schools and with groups such as the Guildhall students. Your school is also good at involving your parents and bringing them in to John Scurr's community.

You get off to a good start in the Nursery and Reception classes. Your headteacher and the other school leaders noticed that you were not doing quite so well in some year groups, so they have worked hard to make sure the teaching and learning is good now in all parts of the school. By the time you leave at the end of Year 6, you have made good progress in all subjects.

Most of the lessons we saw were good, and some were excellent, because they were exciting and challenging and you learned a lot in a short time. But sometimes we thought that you could have been expected to do even harder work, so we have asked the adults to make sure they all expect the very best from you. Also we saw that many of you need some help to become better at handwriting, so we have suggested that everyone shows you how to improve your writing.

We have asked the leaders that when they are planning to improve things, they keep a very sharp eye on your achievements and progress.

I enjoyed my time with you, especially seeing the lovely art work and listening to the singing on Wednesday. No wonder you have achieved a Sing Up Platinum award. I wish you every success in the future. Keep up the good work!

Yours faithfully

Sheena MacDonald
Her Majesty's Inspector

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