

Hermitage Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100936
Local Authority	Tower Hamlets
Inspection number	323379
Inspection dates	1-2 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Emma Ing 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)	235
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	68
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Jake Kemp
Headteacher	Dr Abdul-Hayee Murshad
Date of previous school inspection	15-16 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	15-16 November 2005
School address	Vaughan Way London E1W 2PT
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector. The inspectors visited 20 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's tracking data, its improvement planning and the minutes of the governing body together with pupils' exercise books and work.

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

- the progress made by pupils in their learning
- the quality of the curriculum provided by the school.

Information about the school

Hermitage School is a city school housed in a purpose built building on the edge of London's dockland. It serves a culturally diverse community which is predominantly Bangladeshi in ethnicity. Most pupils live locally but about 12 pupils come to school by bus from the other side of Wapping. The school has a large Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), with plenty of outdoor space. It hosts an after-school club which is run by the local authority and attended by pupils from several local schools.

Because the local housing stock does not cater well for larger families, many pupils leave during Key Stage 1. The school is generously resourced and is able to have smaller classes and many more learning assistants than is often the case in other schools.

Just over five years ago the school was identified as having serious weakness. The headteacher built a team who worked together to bring about huge improvement in the school and in November 2005 the school was judged to be outstanding. Since then, nine of those original teaching staff have gone on to do other things and in September five new teachers joined the school. One of the assistant headteachers returned to school after a long period of leave during the inspection whilst the other was unable to be present as she was on jury service.

Further information about the school

	School's figures	School's figures compared with other schools
School size	226	Average
Free school meals	36.3%	Well above average
Proportions of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	20%	Average
Proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups	92%	Well above average
Proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language	86.6%	Well above average
Proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	0.4%	Below average

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

Hermitage is a good school which prepares pupils well for the next stage of their education and plays an important role in the local community. One of the key strengths of the school is that it is an extremely caring environment, where individuals' needs are identified and met and each child, particularly those that are vulnerable, is helped to thrive. It was not surprising therefore to hear a member of the school council exclaim: 'we like our school and don't ever want to leave!' Pupils told us, 'it is a good place and they take care of you'.

Class sizes are small and teaching assistants work exceptionally well with teachers to ensure that the pupils can all keep up with their learning. For many this is a particular struggle because they are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language, or because they have behaviour or learning difficulties. Most pupils starting in the EYFS have less well developed skills than is expected for their age and many lack confidence. They get off to a good start however and make good progress through the school. This is a result of the excellent support they are given and the fact that in most areas of the school the teaching is consistently good. Pupils who find learning easy, however, are not being sufficiently challenged and stretched. All pupils need more opportunities to develop their skills as independent learners and team workers. Not enough guidance is given in lessons and in marking to indicate to the pupils what exactly it is that they have to do to make a piece of work good or better.

Despite staffing upheavals the school continues to run smoothly and provide a consistently good education. This is because:

- the headteacher and senior leaders share a very accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are ambitious for the school
- excellent systems are in place to ensure that high standards are delivered and that staff are supported to develop the skills needed to be highly effective
- the staff work together as a team.

The capacity for improvement is therefore good. Although statutory responsibilities are met, governors do not provide enough informed challenge to the school, nor are they taking a sufficiently strong strategic leadership role.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the quality of governance by ensuring that all governors:
 - have the expertise to hold the school to account for the quality of education
 - provide strategic leadership.
- Improve the quality of learning in Key Stages 1 and 2 by:
 - increasing attendance
 - offering more opportunities for pupils to make decisions about their learning, assess their own work and work in groups and teams.
- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - making sure that lessons are planned to challenge all pupils, including those who are of above average ability
 - ensuring that pupils know clearly what they could do to improve
 - providing a stronger focus on adult-led activities and on developing knowledge and understanding of the world in the EYFS.

How well does the school meet the needs of individuals and different groups of pupils?

2

The pupils at this school feel safe. They know about how to keep themselves and others safe. There is very little hurtful behaviour and pupils are confident that there are many adults that would help them if troubles arose. They also know about healthy lifestyles, generally eat well and take exercise and have lively interests.

Pupils enjoy their learning, and generally work hard in their lessons. Many however, are rather passive learners. After a good start in the EYFS, the progress pupils make slows a little in Key Stage 1 but picks up again in Key Stage 2. Overall, the progress they make through school is good. For some pupils, particularly those of average ability and in some areas such as English, it is outstanding. Individual pupils' needs are very well met indeed. Staff know the pupils well and make sure that pupils who are finding things difficult, for whatever reason, are appropriately supported to ensure that they too make good progress. The standards pupils reach at Key Stage 2 fluctuate between average and just above.

Through school council and through questionnaires pupils have voiced their opinions about their learning and well-being and have contributed strongly to improvements in their community. For example, they participated in a project to improve the school's feature garden, and worked hard to determine what the new play area should be like. Pupils have a strong sense of their cultural identity, are respectful of those of others, and are aware of wider global issues. They have a strong moral basis, know right from wrong, and they are helpful and kind to each other. Their reflections about spiritual issues are not highly developed. The school has worked hard with families to improve attendance which is now in line with national averages.

The progress of a few pupils however continues to be hampered by poor attendance.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

The quality of the school's work

Teachers plan their lessons well around clear learning goals. They use very good questioning to help pupils develop their understanding. There is good progression in the work that they expect their classes to do. However, teachers miss opportunities to explain or give written feedback to pupils about how to improve their work. Pupils are not consistently encouraged to assess their own work or to identify what they could work on next. They are given too few opportunities to take responsibility for and make decisions about their learning. There is insufficient challenge for pupils who find school work easy. The school tracks the progress of pupils well, and sets challenging targets for all but the very able pupils. Systems are in place to ensure that pupils experiencing difficulties are supported extremely well. The school augments its support by engaging specialist services both to work with pupils who have particular needs and train school staff.

The curriculum is planned to offer a wide range of enrichment activities. Some of these promote the pupils' sporting interests whilst others give them opportunities to engage in creative pursuits and drama. Members of the local community are involved in the life of the school and support the development of pupils' learning by hearing them read or sharing their skills. The pupils are given good opportunities to explore their local community, and its rich history, and also to travel further afield. The school has links with prestigious universities and Year 6 pupils talked with excitement about a recent visit to an Oxford college on Armistice Day, where they learned about the world war and were able to look at letters sent by soldiers at the time to members of the college. At the time of the inspection they were planning a presentation for their friends from Oxford who were due to pay a reciprocal visit.

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

These are the grades for the quality of provision

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	2
Effective assessment and academic guidance	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?

School leaders are keenly aware of the needs of the local community and work extremely effectively in partnership with other organisations and services to ensure that the school meets these needs very well. Parents are encouraged to become involved in the life of the school and to help their pupils learn. This starts in the EYFS and continues well through the school with activities such as workshops giving information about what the pupils are learning. Parents are consulted about proposed changes in the school and feel well informed about the progress that their pupils are making. The school seeks to ensure that all families feel welcome in the school through a range of different measures such as a needlework club for parents. The school is representative of the local community and works to forge links with those community members who are less well represented.

Teachers take good advantage of the wealth of resources available in their locality to support learning and excite and interest the pupils. In addition they ensure that pupils have opportunities to travel further afield with study visits to museums, outdoor education centres and even universities.

The headteacher and his deputy have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and plan extremely efficiently to ensure that the school maintains its strengths and continues to improve. They are rigorous in their monitoring of the work of the school which enables them to ensure consistently good provision.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Monitoring, evaluating and planning for improvement to outcomes for pupils	2
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	1
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	3
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	1
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

The good provision in the EYFS is a result of strong leadership which has created an effective team.

Young children starting out at Hermitage arrive with skills less well developed than is expected nationally. They are particularly weak in all areas of literacy, in calculation and creativity. These children make a very good start to their learning because they are well cared for and gain confidence in the EYFS. They make excellent progress in their personal and social development.

Most areas of learning are covered effectively and activities are stimulating and well resourced. A careful and consistent focus on phonics together with good opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills contributes well to improving children's language skills. Reading and writing skills are also showing signs of developing well. Less secure, and an area for improvement, is the development of children's knowledge and understanding of life beyond school. Although children in the EYFS make local trips, they would benefit from a greater range of experiences of the excitement of life, such as growing things.

Teaching is generally good, but the recent shift to a much higher proportion of child initiated activity has swung too far so that the children now need more direction. Teachers work closely with learning support assistants and staff know individual children well. This means they are able to intervene to engage, support and encourage appropriately for each child.

By the time they enter Year 1 most children have caught up significantly and are reaching just below the levels expected in most areas of their learning. They meet expectations in some areas of number work and in personal and social development.

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 the children in the EYFS promoted?*	2
How effectively is the provision in the EYFS led and managed?*	2

* Common judgements made across all inspections of the EYFS

Views of parents and carers

Those parents that returned questionnaires were overwhelmingly positive about the school and its leadership. A very small number expressed concerns about the extent to which the school prepares pupils for the next stage in their learning and several expressed mild concern about the children's behaviour in one or two classes.

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 2006-7, 14% 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 2006-7, 46% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing for its pupils suitably. In 2006-7, 34% 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 2006-7, 6% 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.

Letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection.



17 December 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Hermitage Primary School, London, EW1 2PT

It was a pleasure meeting you and watching you at work and play during our recent inspection of the school. Thank you all for taking time to show us your work and talk to us about your experiences.

Your school is providing you with a good education. Your headteacher and all the staff care for you extremely well. Because the teaching is good you are making good progress. Although some of you experience extra challenges, you are making good progress too.

We can see that the school is a lovely place to be. You have lots of exciting opportunities to do new things and go to interesting places. The resources are, as you told us, really good.

We think that there are a few things that the school could do even better. You could help by making sure that you come to school every day and continue to work your hardest. In addition, we have asked:

- the governors to play a bigger part in helping the school move forward
- the headteacher to make sure that those of you who find their work easy are helped to achieve even more
- Key Stage 1 and 2 teachers to give you more opportunities to develop your independence and initiative and to give you very clear feedback about what you could do to improve your work.

It was a pleasure being in your school, I hope that you continue to do well and enjoy your education.

Yours faithfully,

Emma Ing
Her Majesty's Inspector

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