

Smithy Street School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100941
Local Authority	Tower Hamlets
Inspection number	323383
Inspection dates	10–11 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Robert Lovett HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005; 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)	346
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Ros Coffey
Headteacher	Ms Edith Philipsen (acting)
Date of previous school inspection	4–5 October 2005
School address	Smithy Street London E1 3BW
Telephone number	020 7702 7971
Fax number	020 7702 8169
Email address	admin@smithystreet.towerhamlets.sch.uk

Age group	3–11
Inspection date(s)	10–11 March 2009
Inspection number	323383

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors. The inspectors visited thirteen lessons, and held meetings with the chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body, the acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher, subject leaders, the leader of the Early Years Foundation Stage and groups of pupils. Inspectors also spoke to the substantive headteacher on the telephone. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation, including the school improvement plan, documentation about individual pupils, evidence of the progress pupils are making and minutes of governing body meetings. Inspectors also analysed the 63 parental questionnaires received.

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

- the progress made by pupils during their time at the school
- the progress made by specific groups of pupils, especially those identified as gifted and talented, and pupils who are learning English as an additional language
- behaviour in lessons and around the school and how safe pupils feel
- the school's effectiveness in promoting partnerships with parents, community cohesion and awareness of a range of cultures.

Information about the school

Smithy Street is a popular and growing school. Due to increasing demand for places, the school roll has risen significantly since the last inspection. The school is currently being led by the deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher who have assumed the roles of acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher respectively. Almost all pupils have a home language other than English; most pupils are of Bangladeshi heritage. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is about three times the national average.

Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

The rather austere Victorian facade of Smithy Street School belies the great warmth of the welcome to be found within. One of the first things to strike visitors is what a bright, calm and happy place it is. Pupils are exceptionally polite and friendly. Pupils who are new to the school speak very positively about the warm welcome and excellent support they receive. They say the school quickly identifies not only those areas in which they need extra help, but also their strengths so that these too can be further developed. As one pupil said, 'I needed help in learning English but my maths was really good and the teachers helped me get better at both.' Pupils and parents are rightly proud of their school and responses to the parental questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive. Parents and carers rightly believe the school does an excellent job in keeping their children safe and are strongly supportive of the quality of leadership and management. Although the school already does a lot to work with families, some parents believe correctly that the partnership could be further strengthened if they were to receive more information about the progress their children are making and about how they can help them in their learning.

The Early Years Foundation Stage, particularly the Nursery, has recently seen significant changes in staffing but thanks to very good induction procedures and excellent leadership and management, this has not had a significant impact on the outcomes for children, which are outstanding. Most children join the Nursery with levels of skills and knowledge, particularly English language skills, that are below those expected. Because of the high quality of teaching, particularly in the two Reception classes, children make good progress.

Teaching throughout the school is consistently good. Lessons are very well planned so that teachers feel confident about their teaching, resources are well organised and time is effectively used. Pupils enjoy learning and are very positive about the help they receive from teachers and the other adults who support their learning. In some lessons opportunities for pupils to be more actively engaged are not identified. In such instances pupils are too passive and too few have the chance to participate. Teachers do not make sufficient use of group and paired working to discuss questions, challenge pupils' thinking and develop a sense of independence. The excellence of the school's assessment and tracking systems is not consistently matched by teachers' marking. In some classes, marking does not tell pupils how well they are doing and how to improve their work as frequently as it should.

The school has improved significantly since it was last inspected and standards have risen. Part of the reason for this improvement is the very strong teamwork among the whole school community and the powerful shared vision and sense of purpose. This results in a high level of critical reflection among all staff, but particularly the school's senior leaders and governors. They constantly question the effectiveness of their work, try to measure how well pupils are doing and use this information to raise standards. The school's self-evaluation is detailed, honest and robust and includes consultation with parents and rigorous questioning from governors. One of the most impressive features is the strong link between analysis and planned actions so that the school is constantly striving to improve further. This analysis then informs the detailed and comprehensive range of improvement plans which covers almost every aspect of the school's life. Because of the school's excellent self-evaluation, record of improvement, rising standards and inspirational leadership and management, the school has an excellent capacity to continue to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching to outstanding by:
 - making better use of partner and group working to further engage pupils in their learning and increase independence
 - ensuring greater consistency in the quality of marking across classes and year groups.
- Strengthen the partnership with parents by providing them with better information about the progress their children are making, the work they are doing and the life of the school.

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

1

Pupils' outstanding progress is the result of consistently good teaching, an excellent curriculum and a very positive and supportive school ethos. Pupils value the high-quality support they receive and enjoy their lessons hugely. Pupils are able to work with sustained concentration and really enjoy the challenge of learning. Behaviour in classrooms and around the school is excellent because relationships between pupils and between pupils and adults are excellent. This atmosphere of trust and respect is also reflected in the pride pupils take in their surroundings, treating the school building and grounds with care and respect. There is hardly a piece of litter to be seen anywhere and despite its age the school is sparklingly clean, bright and very well cared for. Pupils' attainment by the end of Year 6 has been above average in three of the last four years and the school's accurate tracking data indicate that attainment will be above average for the current Year 6. Standards have risen in English, mathematics and science. In the 2008 unvalidated test results, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher Level 5 in mathematics and science rose significantly. Work seen and the school's comprehensive data on pupils' progress indicate this improvement has been sustained into 2009.

All groups of pupils achieve outstandingly well. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make excellent progress because their specific learning needs are promptly and accurately identified and high-quality support is rapidly put in place. Highly effective assessment and monitoring systems mean that the impact of extra provision is regularly reviewed and provision revised when necessary. Those pupils who are learning English also receive high quality dual language support which enables them to make rapid progress. Pupils identified as gifted and talented make excellent progress because of the very well targeted support they receive.

While pupils obviously enjoy school enormously, attendance is broadly average. Despite the school's robust attitude to absence, a small number of parents take their children away on extended and unauthorised leave. Governors, particularly parent governors, are doing all they can to further reduce the number of absences.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Their excellent social development is reflected in the very positive relationships within the school. While pupils have a strong sense of their own identity, they are eager to explore the beliefs and lives of others. They respect the values and views of other people and relish the wide range of cultural provision such as yoga lessons, visits to theatres and museums, and the opportunity to work with the Young Shakespeare Company.

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?	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?	2
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	1

The quality of the school's work

Almost all teaching seen was good. High quality planning ensures good organisation so that pupils are clear about what they are expected to learn and the available time is used well. Good whole-school assessment systems and regular monitoring result in work which is matched exceptionally well to the differing needs of individual pupils. Those pupils with identified gifts and talents are exceptionally well supported both in the classroom and through the provision of extra sessions, such as the 'town

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

planning' activity for pupils identified as being more able in respect of design technology. Day-to-day assessment against learning targets and the quality of marking are less consistent. Effective teamwork means that additional adults provide very good support for learning. The school is eager to enable pupils to become more independent learners. Pair and small group working to provide peer challenge, and assessment to make pupils more active participants in their learning and encourage greater independence are underdeveloped. Teachers have good subject knowledge, contributing to the good levels of challenge in lessons. Pupils enjoy their lessons and concentrate very well. They are often surprisingly earnest and take the enterprise of learning seriously. Teachers use the relatively new interactive whiteboards effectively to enliven learning but there was limited evidence of their use by pupils to demonstrate and explain their answers.

The curriculum is innovative and creative. In addition to a wide range of well-supported clubs and activities, pupils have access to specialist teaching in physical education, dance, drama, music and yoga. As a result, pupils say they really enjoy lessons and find them interesting and challenging, and most parents agree. Because the curriculum is very well matched to the needs of learners, standards in English, mathematics, science, and information and communication technology have risen rapidly. The school is currently trialling the International Primary Curriculum which is intended to provide greater integration across subjects and encourage creativity. Once the impact of this initiative has been assessed, it is planned that the curriculum will be further tailored to meet the particular needs of Smithy Street and its learners. Learners are exceptionally well cared for. Pupils know they are highly valued as individuals. As a result, they and their families have a great deal of trust and confidence in the 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	1
Support, guidance and care	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The outstanding nature of the school's leadership and management is best illustrated by the seamless transition during the headteacher's absence and the minimal effect it has had on the forward momentum of the school. This is because of the very strong shared ethos of teamwork, mutual trust and support and a clear focus on school improvement. Even those aspects of its work that the school evaluates as outstanding are not immune from scrutiny and innovation. The promotion of equality through high expectations lies at the heart of the school's work. All members of the school community are valued for the contribution they can make to improving life for everyone. The school has a comprehensive improvement plan for promoting community cohesion based on a clear understanding of the school's context. It has forged links with a range of schools with pupils from different backgrounds, including schools in rural Essex, Thailand and another local school. As a result of its analysis of

its place in the wider community the school has successfully introduced 'mother tongue' classes in Bengali and Somali. These and the well-attended fitness class for women attest to the impact of the school's actions. The school is working closely with Goldsmith's University on the promotion of community cohesion and is part of a national research project promoting links between community language schools and primary schools. The most eloquent testimony to the success of the school comes from its pupils who are passionate about the importance of equality among all people and the place of education in its promotion. All safeguarding regulations are fully met. The school and governors have established robust systems to ensure that pupils are safe when working in the school and that comprehensive risk assessments for visits are carried out. Safeguarding training is not only up to date for all staff but forms an important early part of the induction procedures for all staff. As a result, procedures are highly effective and pupils rightly feel very safe when in the care of the school.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	1
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	1
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	1
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	1
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	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children in the Reception classes receive consistently good and often outstanding teaching. As a result many children reach or exceed the goals expected of them at the end of the Reception Year across all the areas of learning. The good programme for dance, drama and physical education means all children reach the required goals in physical development. The dual language support children receive throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage, coupled with an effective phonics programme, helps children rapidly improve their spoken English and begin to develop early reading and writing skills.

Behaviour is excellent and allows staff to work with small groups of children or individuals to extend their learning. For example, in one session children were learning to recognise and name accurately solid shapes, such as cuboids and pyramids. Later they successfully applied their new knowledge, making three-dimensional shapes from two-dimensional shapes that stick together.

There are good opportunities for the children to make the most of their creativity in art and role play. The outside learning environment is exploited very well in the two Reception classes but this is not always the case in the Nursery so that links between learning in the classroom and outside are sometimes underdeveloped. A key priority identified through self-evaluation is to improve the provision for outside play and the importance of this is confirmed by inspection evidence. The curriculum offers children many activities that are relevant to their age and motivates them to want to learn. In the Reception classes this allows children to make decisions and solve problems.

Assessment files indicate that astute observations of children's learning are used effectively to plan next steps in learning, especially in the Reception classes. Leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage are outstanding. The phase leader is a skilled practitioner and shares these skills effectively to raise the quality of teaching.

How good are the outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	1
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?	1
Overall effectiveness: how well does the setting/school meet the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	1

Views of parents and carers

Most parents and carers who responded are very positive about almost all aspects of the work of the school. They say enjoyment levels are very high and almost all say the school keeps their children safe. These replies correspond well with the school's own regular parent questionnaires. While the school is already working closely with parents and has recently run a very well supported series of curriculum meetings, many parents say they would welcome more information about how well their children are doing and what they can do to help them do even better.

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 Smithy Street School, London, E1 3BW

Thank you for making me and the other inspectors feel so welcome when we visited your school. We were lucky enough to meet with some members of the school council and other pupils. We also managed to talk to some of you in the dining hall and on the playground. The things you told us were very helpful in reaching our judgement on how well the school is doing. The good news is that you attend an outstanding school. This may not greatly surprise those of you we spoke to or your parents or carers because it matches very well what we were told.

Yours is a happy, polite and hard-working school. You told us you all get along together very well and that behaviour is very good. We agree wholeheartedly. You make excellent progress because of good teaching and an outstanding curriculum. You work together very well and you listen to adults and to each other carefully. You are very well prepared to be active citizens both in London and in the wider world. You told us about your passion for equality and how much you value education as a way of making sure everyone does as well as they can.

Your headteacher and others who work in the school are doing an excellent job. They know the school very well and have good plans in place to enable it to continue to improve. One of the improvements the school would like to see is in attendance. You told us how much you enjoy your lessons and how important a good education is so please try to attend as often as you can. The school knows that even an outstanding school can improve. We are making a few suggestions to help with this. We have asked the school to:

- use more partner and small group working so that you can discuss your work and more of you will have the chance to contribute
- make sure more marking tells you how well you are doing and what you need to do to improve further
- ensure that your parents and carers know how well you are doing and how they can help you in your learning.

Yours faithfully

Robert Lovett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.