

Northbury Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101196
Local Authority	Barking and Dagenham
Inspection number	323418
Inspection date	1 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Heather Yaxley HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	406
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Brian Cooper
Headteacher	Mr Nick Munns (Executive) / Mr Richard November (Associate)
Date of previous school inspection	10 May 2006
School address	North Street Barking IG11 8JA
Telephone number	020 8270 4750
Fax number	020 8270 4433

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. The inspector evaluated the school's overall effectiveness and investigated whether or not the outcomes for all groups of pupils are sufficiently good, the extent to which pupils' personal development and well-being is outstanding, and how leaders and managers at all levels measure the impact of their actions. Evidence was gathered from: published assessment data; scrutiny of documentation; questionnaires from parents and carers; interviews with staff, pupils and the chair of governors; and observations of the school at work. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Northbury Junior is larger than most schools of its type and, with the addition of a fourth form of entry across the school, has grown in size since the last inspection. The large Victorian building, which is shared with the infant school, has been extended to provide additional classrooms, administrative areas, a new hall and a car park. The school moved into the new facilities this term. There are currently two headteachers running the school. In November 2008, the headteacher was seconded to a local school and retains oversight of Northbury Junior as the executive headteacher. The deputy headteacher is the associate headteacher and has day-to-day responsibility for the leadership and management of the school. There is also an acting deputy headteacher. These temporary arrangements will continue into the next academic year.

Pupils and their families represent a wide range of different cultures. Over two thirds of pupils come from Asian or Black heritages, with the predominant groups being from Africa and Pakistan. This is over three times the national average. Over five times the national average do not speak English as their first language. The proportion of pupils joining or leaving the school at times other than at the beginning or end of the key stage has increased over the last three years, and is slightly higher than average. This is owing to a programme of regeneration in the borough as well as pupils joining the British education system for the first time. A fair proportion of new pupils are at the early stages of learning English, and some have had no previous school experience. The proportion of pupils eligible for a free school meal is almost three times greater than that seen nationally. A higher than average proportion of pupils have a learning difficulty and/or disability. This includes pupils with moderate learning difficulties, emotional and behavioural needs, and those with speech and language difficulties.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school that has made steady, secure improvements since the last inspection and is in a good position to improve even further. This is because there is a rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluating the difference that the provision makes to the pupils' achievements and personal development, with a thorough understanding of exactly what they need to do next. This not only builds upon the improvements effectively, but also ensures that potential barriers to pupils' success are identified and addressed methodically. All main aspects of the school's work are good, with the exception of pupils' personal development and well-being, which is outstanding. It is testament to good strategic leadership by senior staff, together with some outstanding aspects of pastoral care, that, in spite of the challenges facing the school at this time, pupils do well and staff morale is high. The steadfast commitment by staff is appreciated by pupils and their families alike. Almost 300 questionnaires were received from parents and carers, which represents a much higher proportion than normally found. The responses show that the majority of families are pleased with all aspects of the school's work.

It is the ambition of all staff that pupils not only make good progress from their starting points but that they also attain high standards. A few years ago, the headteachers accurately identified that standards were too low to ensure that pupils have the opportunities in the future to which they are entitled. They took a firm, strategic lead in raising expectations. This enabled staff, pupils and their families to identify and eliminate the things that could prevent pupils from doing well, such as low aspirations, poor attendance, the challenge of acquiring the English language and a lack of self-belief. As a result of actions taken, standards have risen steadily and in 2008 reached national averages for English, mathematics and science for the first time.

As standards rise, more pupils make good progress from their individual starting points and attain National Curriculum Levels 4 and 5. This pattern of improvement exemplifies how staff successfully build upon improvements, while at the same time tackling the next priority effectively. For example, in 2007, having been significantly below national averages, standards in mathematics and science were in line with those seen nationally, although standards in English were not. The planning and delivery of English was revised, and in 2008 standards in this subject also reached the national average, while those for mathematics and science continued to rise. Unvalidated results from the recent national tests indicate that this improving trend is continuing. This is likely to be the third year in a row that the proportion of pupils making good progress by the end of Key Stage 2 is significantly above that seen nationally.

However, the focus has not only been on improving achievement in different subjects. The achievement of different groups of pupils has been improved too. For example, at the time of the last inspection, the most-able pupils were not always reaching the highest standards. As a result of improved curricular opportunities, such as special clubs, and activities in lessons that are more closely tailored to their needs, the proportions of pupils reaching Level 5 in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 6 has improved steadily, and exceeded national averages in all three subjects in 2008. Other groups make equally good progress. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and others with individual education plans have not always made enough progress, but this is not now the case. Their academic progress is tracked more carefully and their emotional needs are addressed more effectively through targeted support at optimum times. This made a considerable difference to those currently in Year 6, and they have done particularly well this year. In fact, many Year 6 pupils can hardly contain their delight at their test results. They attribute their success to: the way that teachers 'explain

things again and again, and in different ways that are fun'; that 'when we need help the most, they help us out'; and the belief that staff have in them, which helps them to believe in themselves and want to do better.

The senior management team rightly give a high strategic priority to the assessment and tracking of pupils' work. It is clear that as these aspects have improved, so has the attainment of pupils in English, mathematics and science. Increasingly, senior leaders use the data to give teachers a clear steer on how well pupils in their class should be doing each year. This ensures that expectations are high and that pupils' progress is measured, evaluated and acted upon regularly and robustly, so that the good progress made by pupils in Years 3, 4 and 5 contributes to their success in Year 6. In turn, this leads to a good level of professional debate among staff about how pupils can be challenged to reach higher goals. This is then appropriately linked to the quality of the curriculum and of teaching. The tracking system sets targets for all pupils to make two National Curriculum levels of progress during their time at the school. However, as they demand more of the data, staff have accurately identified that the current system does not give them as much detail as they need for looking more closely at the progress of different groups and individual pupils, and across other subjects of the National Curriculum.

The governing body is now at full strength and although it fulfils its statutory responsibilities, governors are not always able to challenge the school's work fully. The chair of governors is very supportive and active, but too many aspects of governance fall on his shoulders. As a result, some parts of their work are not well developed, such as the strategic planning and review of the school's contribution to promoting community cohesion. However, there are good links with the local community, including a range of activities linked to sharing cultural heritages and religious beliefs. This not only strengthens the breadth of the curriculum but also helps pupils to develop a sense of citizenship.

The upheaval caused by the building work, increasing numbers of new pupils, long-term staff absences covered by temporary teachers, and changes in leadership provided considerable challenges this year. Senior leaders quite rightly focused on maintaining a sufficiently good quality of teaching to ensure that pupils achieve well. Through regular monitoring of lessons and pupils' work, and appropriate levels of support and training, inconsistencies and weaknesses have been addressed effectively. Weaknesses in teachers' marking of pupils' work, as identified at the last inspection, have also been addressed well. Some inconsistencies remain, particularly in ensuring that pupils respond to the suggestions for improvement. Nevertheless, the system is a good one, and works well in tandem with a strong emphasis on giving pupils sufficient time to reflect on their work and assess how well they are learning. This is having a very positive effect on pupils' understanding and involvement in lessons, particularly those who need a little more time to assimilate the information because they are still developing their use of English. Teachers are also very skilful in asking carefully targeted questions to stretch pupils' thinking and to prompt discussion and greater participation. Pupils say that this helps them to think harder. Written prompts and displays are more effective in some classrooms than others in helping pupils to develop their use and understanding of vocabulary.

Pupils respond well to high expectations from staff, and they know that they have to play their part as well as accepting the support available to them. They appreciate that homework is a good thing because it helps with their class work, and they enjoy the extensive range of after-school clubs. Those pupils who are invited to attend extra clubs to improve their literacy and numeracy do so regularly and say that 'it's not boring, and gives us confidence'. Pupils take their work very seriously. They are keen to do well and are proud of themselves and their school. Pupils who are new to the school settle quickly and say that they find it easy to make

friends. Some pupils are worried about their safety, and this is also mentioned by several parents and carers in their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire. In talking to pupils, this was not found to be widespread, and mostly concerned the use of equipment on the playground and fears about what happens within the local community. Pupils acknowledge that the curriculum prepares them well for a range of issues relating to their health and safety, such as safe relationships, cycling, and road and rail safety. They are also confident that staff will sort out any problems and that there are ways to express their views and concerns.

Members of the school council are very conscientious in their responsibilities, and there are clear lines of communication between the council and the classes. This encourages a high level of debate and creates an understanding of what is possible and how all pupils can all make a difference. They know that they have made a difference. For example, there are now toilet monitors at playtimes because pupils were fed up with the misbehaviour of a few pupils, and the new green slip system has been introduced because they felt that good behaviour was not recognised enough. The council, together with the high profile of personal, social and health education within the curriculum, helps pupils to have an exceptionally good understanding of the views of others. It is no surprise, then, that pupils not only value the company of friends from backgrounds that are different from their own, but also have a very well developed understanding of cultural and religious differences.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the involvement of governors, so that they challenge the work of the school more effectively and take a more strategic role.
- Refine the assessment system in order to track pupils' attainments in greater detail and across other National Curriculum subjects.

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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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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	2

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?	2
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?	3
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**

13 July 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Northbury Junior School, Barking, IG11 8JA

I am writing to say a big thank you for your welcome and kindness when I came to inspect your school recently. I thoroughly enjoyed my day with you. I think that I was able to see most of you, either in class, at assembly or on the playground, and I was pleased that so many of you came up to me to talk about your school. I spoke to some of you in groups too, including the school council. I received about 300 questionnaires from your families, so please pass on my thanks to them. All of these things helped me to get a good picture of how well the school educates you and cares for you.

The staff and governors think that Northbury Junior is a good school, and I agree with them. This is what you think too, and so do your families. You told me that there are lots of good things about your school, and I was able to see some of them for myself. For example, the way that you respect one another's different cultural and religious backgrounds is impressive. As your headteacher said in assembly, there is something unique about each of you, and you value this in your friendships. Your headteachers lead your school well, and all of the staff have high expectations for you. I know that you have high expectations of yourselves too. You know that staff will help you reach high standards of work, but you also know that you have to help yourselves. You also believe that you can make a difference to your school community through the school council, and more widely in the work that you do to help others in the local community and in other countries.

I have asked the staff to look at two things that will help to make your school even better. First, more governors need to find out more about what happens in school, so that they can ask questions about what they see. Second, the way that the staff track your progress and set you targets needs to be more detailed.

Thank you once again. I hope that you have a great summer holiday and wish you well in all that you hope for the future.

Yours faithfully

Heather Yaxley

Her Majesty's Inspector