

Towers Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102313
Local Authority	Havering
Inspection number	323618
Inspection dates	9–10 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Margaret Coussins

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)	229
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter Adams
Headteacher	Mrs Marilyn Whiskerd
Date of previous school inspection	16 May 2006
School address	Windsor Road Hornchurch RM11 1PD
Telephone number	01708 449872
Fax number	01708 478926

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Towers is an average sized school. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. Most of the pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is around average. Their needs relate mainly to speech, language and communication, or moderate learning difficulties. The school has a number of national awards including the Healthy School Award and Sports Activemark. The leadership and management roles of the school were disrupted by the unforeseen and protracted absence of the current headteacher during the last academic year. The deputy headteacher was the acting headteacher from January to July 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school. It successfully includes pupils and their families from a range of backgrounds and is a happy working community. There is a good ethos where pupils feel safe and valued and consequently develop confidence and good personal skills. Pupils' academic progress is satisfactory from their above-average starting points, although they are not always challenged sufficiently. Consequently, although standards are above average when pupils leave the school, their achievement from their starting points is satisfactory. The school provides good pastoral care for its pupils and this contributes effectively to their good personal development and well-being, including good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Inspectors were very impressed with pupils' enthusiasm and willingness to express how much they liked their school and enjoy their learning. Most parents are supportive of the school. One parent wrote, 'I have every respect for the way staff work tirelessly to promote the most comprehensive education and opportunities for pupils and ensure that parents are given every opportunity to be fully included in that education'.

Standards in mathematics remained above average in the 2008 national tests but there was a decline in the number of pupils who reached the higher levels, and the school did not meet its targets. In English, the more able pupils did well, with many more pupils reaching the higher level than found nationally. This was an issue for improvement at the last inspection. Standards in science have remained more consistent over time and are above average.

The purposeful leadership of the headteacher and new leadership team is providing clear educational direction to deal with the effect of the disruption in leadership roles so that pupils make better progress in all subjects and mathematics in particular. Tighter and more frequent checks on pupils' achievement are helping teachers to identify any underachievement and to intervene at an earlier stage. As a result, pupils are now making more even progress across the year groups. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 are benefiting from working in ability groups for mathematics, which means that work is better matched to their needs and the pace of learning is accelerated.

Although much teaching seen during the inspection was of a good quality, the school's systems for checking pupils' progress have not been frequent or detailed enough to ensure that pupils always make the good progress they should. Leaders recognise that progress needs to be accelerated across the school in order to raise pupils' achievement from satisfactory to good. New procedures for tracking and target setting are in place but are not yet fully embedded and, therefore, have not yet had an impact on raising pupils' achievement. Leading teachers are using assessment information to set targets for pupils' next steps in learning in English and mathematics but this is not consistent in all classes. As a result, the progress of some pupils slows and they are not always sufficiently challenged in their learning. Pupils who have moderate learning or speech, language and communication difficulties make similar progress to others because of the inclusive ethos and the extra help provided for them.

The school has correctly identified a need to review the satisfactory curriculum because there are not enough links between different subjects to make learning more meaningful, exciting and relevant. There are too few opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects. A successful focus is given to personal, social and health and physical education which, along with the school's work to gain the Healthy School Award and Sports Activemark, makes an effective contribution to pupils' good personal development and

well-being. There is a good range of enrichment activities. The arts are given a high priority in the school. One parent commented, 'The school has helped to develop confidence in my child by including the arts into the school day'.

Behaviour is good. Relationships between children and adults are trusting and caring and, as a result, pupils say they can always talk to an adult if there is anything they are worried about. There are good systems established to safeguard pupils. Pupils develop confidence and self-esteem and responsibility for their own actions. There are good partnerships with other schools and organisations; these very successfully support pupils' well-being and achievement. For example, pupils worked with local secondary school students on a business enterprise project to plan ideas for television programmes. One pupil said, 'It's fun and exciting working together, the older ones know what to say to you to help you do well'.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher, deputy headteacher and the governing body have a realistic view of what the school is doing well and the areas that need improving. It is too early, however, for the impact of its improvement strategies to be seen in accelerated achievement. Governors support the school well and are active in the life of the school. They supported staff well during the disruption in leadership. Several middle leaders are new to their posts and their role is developing. Roles need clarifying to enable leaders to make a greater contribution to school improvement. The school recognises that work needs to continue to accelerate the progress of pupils while maintaining pupils' good personal skills and enjoyment. There is satisfactory capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all pupils have challenging targets in English and mathematics and know how to achieve them through consistent and effective marking and feedback.
- Ensure assessment procedures give teachers clear information about progress and what the next steps are in pupils' learning.
- Clarify the role of middle leaders to increase their impact on school improvement.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are above average by the end of Year 6 in English, mathematics and science. This represents satisfactory achievement from their above-average starting points in Year 3. Pupils do best in English. Last year, the school exceeded its targets for the numbers of pupils achieving the higher Level 5. This represents an improvement from the last inspection. In mathematics, however, fewer pupils than expected reached the higher level. Pupils currently in Year 6 are attaining at similar levels to 2008. Progress across year groups is more even because the school has started to check on progress more carefully and more frequently.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy coming to school and have positive attitudes to their learning. This is confirmed by their attendance, which is above average. However, a few families take their children out of school during term time for holidays. This means they miss out on important learning. One

child said, 'Teachers make lessons fun and, if you're stuck, they sort it out'. Pupils report that bullying is rare and that, if it occurs, it is dealt with speedily and effectively. Most pupils are courteous and welcoming, behave well in lessons and around the school, and are friendly to each other. They enjoy the opportunities to take on additional responsibilities. The school council plays an active role in promoting pupils' views, supporting local charities and improving the school, for example by getting more playground equipment and ensuring toilets have locks on them. Pupils demonstrate good understanding of healthy lifestyles and know that it is important to keep safe. They like the many opportunities to develop their interpersonal skills that will help them as they grow up, for example through attending the recent pupil voice conference organised by the local authority. Their good personal and basic skills prepare them well for the next stage in their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is often good but there are inconsistencies across the school. This is because procedures for assessing pupil progress are not rigorous or informed enough. As a result, assessment information is not always used well to ensure that pupils learn as well as they can. This slows pupils' progress, especially for those of higher ability in mathematics. Inconsistencies in the quality of marking mean that pupils sometimes lack precise detail about how to improve. There are some good examples of marking which give pupils helpful pointers for improvement but this is not evident in all classes. This is why teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. The school has successfully introduced new systems in English to ensure that teachers use assessment information effectively to inform their planning and the pace of pupil learning. The impact of this work is seen in above-average standards in English, including the number of more able pupils reaching the higher levels. The school has correctly identified that this initiative needs to be applied to other areas of learning. Teachers often maintain a brisk pace and their questions challenge pupils of all abilities. The depth of study of fiction texts is having a positive impact on pupils' writing skills. For example, in a Year 6 lesson, pupils were writing diaries from the main character's point of view. As well as understanding how to write successfully in this genre, they demonstrated empathy with the character because of their close study of the text and the opportunities they had to plan their writing through drama and discussion. Positive relationships and pupils' good behaviour help ensure that most lessons are well organised and run smoothly. Teaching assistants make a significant contribution to pupils' learning by supporting small groups or individuals.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is broad and interesting and gives pupils plenty of opportunities to develop both independence and cooperation and makes a positive contribution to their good personal development and well-being. Provision for literacy and numeracy is well planned and recent developments in information and communication technology are beginning to add an exciting dimension to learning. Some aspects of the curriculum are very good, in particular those related to the performing arts. The school has begun to adopt a more creative approach to learning that crosses subject barriers but this initiative currently lacks cohesion and its impact is not yet evident. There are not enough opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects. A good range of visits and visitors enrich the curriculum. Many

extra-curricular clubs and activities provide pupils with opportunities to develop a good range of skills and interests. They are popular and well attended.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school takes good care of its pupils. Good procedures help smooth the transition between Year 6 and Year 7. One parent wrote, 'The school encourages children to be responsible and independent which puts them in good stead for secondary school. The school is always encouraging parents to address any problems they have and to ensure the problems are discussed so that solutions can be found'. Rigorous checks are made of the suitability of adults to work with children and there are good procedures and policies to keep pupils safe and secure. Academic guidance and support are satisfactory. New procedures to assess and track pupils' progress are beginning to enable teachers to have a clearer idea of where children are and set targets for their learning. This is not yet consistent in all classes.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The leadership of the school is focused on the achievement and well-being of all learners. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school's development that is shared with governors and senior staff. There is now a team of middle and senior leaders who are keen to move the school forward. However, some members of the team are not clear enough about their role and responsibilities. Leaders are correctly focusing on improving ways of assessing pupils' work so that teachers have accurate information about how well their pupils are progressing and on ensuring that pupils have a clearer understanding of how to make their work better. Community cohesion is good because the school works well with its parents and partners in the local community. The school develops pupils' good understanding and awareness of global issues and diversity in society through its charity work, links with a school in Gambia and projects to develop understanding of and respect for people who are different from them. The governors are well informed and have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They provide good challenge and supported the school well during the absence of the headteacher.

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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?	3
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	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
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?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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**

23 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Towers Junior School, Hornchurch, RM11 1PD

I am writing to thank you for making my colleague and I so welcome when we visited your school. Thank you for talking to us about your work and telling us what you think about your school. Your school is satisfactory. This means that you learn new things steadily, but there is still more to do to make the school even better.

These are the things that are best about your school.

- You enjoy coming to school; well done for coming to school regularly.
- You get on very well with each other and all of the staff.
- Your behaviour is good and this helps you learn in your lessons.
- You are doing well in your English lessons and have improved your writing in particular, well done for this. You must now try to do as well in your mathematics work.
- You know how to stay healthy and safe.
- Everyone in the school cares for you very well.
- You are well prepared to move on to your secondary schools.

We want the school to work on the following important things.

- Make sure that all of you know your targets for learning and that when teachers mark your work and talk to you about your learning, they give you helpful information about how you can improve.
- Make sure that the checks made on how well you are progressing give teachers clear information for planning the next steps in your learning.
- We have asked the headteacher to make sure that she informs the teachers who have special responsibilities in your school exactly what she expects them to do to help you. This is to make sure that things can improve more quickly.

Thank you again for all your help and for being so friendly and interesting to talk to.

Yours faithfully

Margaret Coussins

Lead Inspector