

Clifton Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134840
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	328988
Inspection dates	29–30 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Michael Merchant

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	716
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Slyvia Fry
Headteacher	Christine Mitchell
Date of previous school inspection	7 June 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	St Pauls Road Balsall Heath Birmingham B12 8LY
Telephone number	0121 464 2926
Fax number	0121 464 4287

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is much larger than other primary schools. It serves a very diverse community and nearly all pupils are of minority ethnic origin. The largest ethnic group are pupils of Asian and Asian British-Pakistani origin, who make up just over a third of the school. The school has a very high proportion of pupils of Yemini-Arab descent, many of whom are recent arrivals to the country. More than 95% of pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than average, as is the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs. The school gained Healthy School status in 2007. There are three Reception classes and one Nursery class in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The headteacher was appointed in September 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Clifton Primary is an outstanding school. Parents endorse this as they attach a high priority to education, and encourage and support their children very well. One parent spoke for many when saying, 'Clifton provides the perfect environment for nurturing young children.' Pupils are proud of their school and enjoy it greatly. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership. She inspires and supports staff and pupils to get the best out of themselves and others. Pupils' achievement is outstanding. Many children have knowledge and skill levels that are very low compared with those expected for their age when they join the Nursery class. They make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage because there is a very strong focus on developing children's social skills and their ability to communicate with each other. From this good start, pupils' progress accelerates as they move through the school and standards rise substantially by the end of Year 6, where they are average overall. This represents outstanding progress. The school is particularly successful in ensuring that the wide range of different needs of its pupils is well met so that those new to learning English and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make excellent progress. However, many pupils find higher-level reading and writing skills very difficult. They need considerable time and support to explain orally how they reason, deduce and infer things from texts. This is a barrier to more pupils gaining high levels in their work. Teaching is outstanding. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, give clear explanations and plan their lessons well. They use questioning in lessons skilfully to promote learning, to analyse and improve pupils' performance, and to set challenging targets for individuals. Teachers and support staff work very effectively together to meet pupils' specific needs. All pupils, at whatever level of ability or need, are extremely well cared for and carefully guided through the school. Pupils achieve very well not just because teaching and learning are excellent, but also because they are encouraged to see their potential and are given the self-confidence to work hard and aim high. Consequently, pupils' personal development is outstanding. Very good relationships and excellent care, guidance and support result in happy learners. Pupils come to school ready to learn, behave impeccably and are eager to contribute to lessons. They take part in a very wide range of sports and are extremely good at adopting healthy lifestyles. Despite their great enjoyment of school, pupils' attendance is average. Many pupils miss school because of faith-based festivals and observances and also, against the very strong advice of the school, many parents take their children away for extended holidays in term time. A very carefully planned, imaginative and varied curriculum inspires pupils to work hard and gain a very wide range of skills. Teachers mark books and set targets for improvement carefully and regularly. As a result, the advice teachers give to pupils as to how to improve their work is very effective and most pupils are clear as to the next steps in their learning. Pupils' knowledge of different cultures in the diverse society in which they live is very secure because the school ensures that all pupils have an appreciation and awareness of the local and national communities in which they live. Staff have created a school in which all pupils get on well together.

There is a strong sense of teamwork and pride in what has already been achieved coupled with a total absence of complacency. School self-evaluation is mostly accurate. Most importantly, the school knows exactly what to do further to sustain its journey of excellence and this, together with the successful action leaders have taken to ensure improvement since the last inspection, means the capacity to further improve is outstanding.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The very positive relationships between home and school ensure that children settle into the daily routines, gain confidence and quickly start to make good progress. Children enter with very low standards compared with those expected for their age, especially in their speaking, listening and communication skills. Children are eager to participate in all that is provided for them and they work hard and make good progress to leave Reception with standards that are below age-related expectations. Good teaching underpins this good progress. Staff provide a carefully balanced programme of activities led by adults and tasks children can choose for themselves. Core skills, including early sounds and words work (phonics), are taught well through whole-class and small group activities. Classrooms are attractive and stimulating, although they are small, making it difficult for staff to develop activities such as painting and water play. It is difficult to access the outdoor play area. This means that children's climbing, clambering and physical skills are not as well developed as they should be. Provision for Early Years Foundation Stage is well led and managed, with staff planning stimulating activities that are well matched to the children's needs. Teachers' planning is well informed by highly skilled observation and assessments and effective self-evaluation. Parents are secure in the knowledge that their children's welfare is given a very high priority and is of outstanding quality. One parent reflected the views of many when saying, 'The school keeps parents very well informed and really supports us as well as the children.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide more opportunities for pupils to develop higher-level skills in reading, writing and speaking.
- Discourage families from taking their children out of school for holidays in term time.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils' achievement is outstanding and they make excellent progress, from a very low baseline, to reach standards that are broadly at the national average. Pupils make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and this continues into Years 1 and 2. With outstanding teaching, careful tracking of progress and a strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy, pupils' progress accelerates in Years 3 to 6. Work seen by inspectors, and the school's tracking of pupils' performance, shows that standards are close to average by the end of Year 6. This is an improvement over the previous year when standards dipped owing to long-term illnesses of a large number of key staff. The major factor preventing pupils' standards being higher is the difficulty they have in explaining their ideas when they have read a text, which in turn inhibits their ability to write well. Pupils produce high quality art and music and these enrich their all-round achievement very well. The excellent progress that pupils make in their key literacy and numeracy skills prepares them exceptionally well for the next stage of their education.

All groups of learners, including those from diverse ethnic backgrounds, make outstanding progress given their very low starting points. The exciting curriculum, highly effective teaching and outstanding support and guidance contribute to this. For example, pupils with learning difficulties are very well supported and, as a result, many reach the expected standards by the end of Year 6. The pupils who join the school partway through their primary education, including

those who join from abroad, make progress that is just as good as their peers because of the excellent support that they are given.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils enjoy school greatly and are excited by all that it has to offer. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding, and they are polite and respectful. The focus on social skills starts very well in the Early Years Foundation Stage where children learn how to concentrate, listen, explore new things and work and play successfully with others. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, as evident in the very low incidence of bullying, no incidence of racism and in pupils' involvement in many cultural activities. For example, pupils enjoyed their participation in Birmingham ArtsFest, and value the many theatre visits and work with professional artists and sports coaches. Pupils have a very secure understanding of the need to eat and drink healthily and they take part in an exceptionally wide range of sporting activities. Pupils grow in confidence, share ideas and take increasing responsibility. They willingly work in teams, share ideas and cooperate and this helps them to make an outstanding contribution to the community and care for others. For example, 120 pupils took an active part in the Balsall Heath Carnival, where they collected money for local charities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Sustained challenge and high expectations enable pupils, from a very low baseline, to make exceptional progress and achieve average standards. Lessons are fast paced and fun. Teaching is lively, tasks and concepts are clearly explained, and activities are carefully designed to challenge the pupils to learn at a swift pace. Pupils' levels of enjoyment and motivation are high because there is mutual respect between teachers and pupils and praise is extensively used to motivate the pupils. Teachers take care to ensure that pupils know exactly what is expected of them and what they need to do to improve. Teaching assistants are very effective in their work. All pupils, whatever their learning needs, are fully included in the activities and this has a positive effect on achievement and personal development. Adults ask perceptive questions and these help pupils to think and use more varied vocabulary in their answers. Effective use of 'talking partners', drama, role play and letter and sounds (phonics) activities help pupils who are new to learning English make very good progress in their speaking and writing.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The outstanding curriculum ensures that learning is meaningful and fun because it carefully and imaginatively plans themes with strong links between subjects. Through its topic-based approach to learning and its focus on developing the arts and sport, the school has successfully motivated and enthused pupils and has done much to increase their confidence as learners. Pupils of both genders relished the visit of the Royal Ballet to the school and greatly enjoy the contribution of professional sports coaches from national teams in Birmingham and beyond. There is an excellent focus on using visits to widen pupils' life experiences, such as a recent, school-subsidised visit to the United States. These, together with a wide array of well-supported

creative and educational activities outside the normal school day, make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning, levels of enjoyment and their personal and emotional development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Induction programmes are outstanding for those who arrive throughout the year and those starting in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Child protection procedures are rigorous and the care for vulnerable pupils is exceptionally thorough. Excellent links with specialists help pupils with their learning, social skills and emotional development. Support for pupils with learning difficulties and those learning English as an additional language is especially strong and helps them to achieve exceptionally well. Parental involvement in their children's education is actively encouraged and supported. Staff know the pupils very well and make very effective use of assessment information to track and check pupils' progress, so that extra support can be provided if pupils need it. As a result, pupils are very clear about what they need to do to improve their work. The school has employed a wide range of strategies to bring about an improvement in the pupils' attendance, which is now satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Outstanding leadership and management are at the heart of the school's success. The highly effective headteacher works tenaciously to improve pupils' educational opportunities. She communicates her high expectations persuasively to staff so that all have a shared sense of direction and feel part of a successful team. Leaders check the school's performance rigorously. They are quick to recognise and praise the good work of staff and pupils and are alert to situations where people need more advice and guidance. Because staff benefit from supportive feedback, a climate has been created where everyone is trying hard to make the school even better. Consequently, teamwork is strong, staff morale is high and pupils' progress is accelerating. Responsibility is delegated evenly and the members of the senior leadership team and the subject leaders fulfil their responsibilities very well. However, there is no hint of complacency and there is a determination from staff at all levels to sustain and build upon the many gains of recent years. School governance is excellent. The governors are committed and astute and fulfil their roles very well. A particular strength of the governing body is the exemplary way in which they have involved members of the very diverse local community groups as well as national and international visits and visitors, in their drive to promote very real community cohesion. Leaders have worked tirelessly to ensure that pupils are developing into caring citizens who respect and value the views of others and that a set of common, shared values is embedded in every child.

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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?	1
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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

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?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

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

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	3
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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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**

1 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Clifton Primary School, Birmingham B12 8LY

Thank you all for the warm welcome you gave to us when we visited your school recently. What a lovely two days we had. We enjoyed meeting and talking to you. Clifton is an outstanding school and you are right to be proud of it. Here are some of the really good things we found out about it. You make excellent progress as you move through the school and, by the time you leave at the end of Year 6, you reach standards in all your subjects that are similar to those in most other schools. This is because your teachers teach you very well and you also work very hard. Your behaviour is excellent and you look after each other so well. You enjoy working in groups and you like to help your classmates when they find things difficult. Members of the school council work hard to find out what you think and, as a result, have made your school even better. You particularly like the very wide range of extra-curricular events and the out-of-school clubs and trips, and you take a full part in lots of arts, sports and music activities. Your teachers and teaching assistants take very good care of you. They make sure that everyone feels safe and secure. They also give you a lot of advice about how you can improve your work. Your outstanding headteacher and all your other teachers know exactly how to make sure that your school continues to stay outstanding. To help you to do even better, we have asked your school to give you more opportunities to develop higher skills in reading, writing and speaking. We have also asked them to discourage some of your families from taking you out of school for holidays in term time.

Please continue to work hard and keep helping your teachers to make sure that Clifton Primary continues to be an outstanding school in which to learn. I send you my best wishes for the future.

Yours faithfully

Michael Merchant

Lead inspector