

# Columbia Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	100897
<b>Local Authority</b>	Tower Hamlets
<b>Inspection number</b>	335615
<b>Inspection dates</b>	24–25 November 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Howard Dodd

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	430
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Alan Russell
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mary Igoe
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 February 2007
<b>School address</b>	Columbia Road Bethnal Green London E2 7RG
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 22 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff, groups of pupils and parents. They observed the school's work, and looked at documentation, including development plans, governing body minutes, policies, external monitoring reports, security checks, risk assessments and pupil-tracking information. They also analysed 125 responses to the parents' questionnaires, 17 from staff and 56 from pupils in Key Stage 2.

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

- provision for, and the progress of, different groups, particularly the boys, girls, more able pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- whether recent improvement in mathematics is being maintained
- the robustness of management systems such as self-evaluation and the way in which governors challenge school performance.

## Information about the school

This is a large, urban primary school with limited external play area. The school has Nursery and Reception classes fully integrated in an Early Years Unit. The school serves a mixed community that is diverse in its racial and cultural heritage. The Bangladeshi children form the largest group and constitute just over 50% of the school population. About a quarter of pupils are from other minority ethnic groups with about one in five of White British backgrounds. Almost two-thirds of pupils have English as an additional language. The number entitled to free school meals is very high. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is similar to other schools.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**2**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**2**

## Main findings

This is a good school. Pupils achieve well and enjoy their lessons because all staff care very much about each individual's academic progress and personal development. The school enjoys a good reputation in the local community as a place where pupils, parents and visitors are made to feel very welcome. Pupils make an excellent contribution to the success of the school because they are proud of being part of its community and that of the locality. Over recent weeks, for example, they have raised over  $\pounds 1,500$  to support the homeless people of Hackney. The extremely caring and supportive nature of all those at the school, and the excellent role model provided by the teachers, results in pupils feeling entirely safe and able to fully concentrate on their work. The most vulnerable pupils receive excellent support in the school's Learning Support Unit particularly in the 'nurture group' sessions. The school has a number of outstanding features, one of which is pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Children's skills on entry are well below those typically expected for their age. They are particularly weak in the key areas related to language, using numbers, and social and emotional understanding. Children develop these skills rapidly during their Nursery and Reception years as a result of good provision. Despite this good start, pupils' attainment is below average when they move into Year 1. Their physical development is currently suffering from the limited outside play facilities.

There is good continuity between the Reception Year and Year 1 where the focus remains on teaching pupils how to learn and interact with other pupils and adults. This creates a good atmosphere for learning which permeates throughout the school and creates a productive, harmonious and respectful environment for all. Recent initiatives to improve attainment in writing and mathematics have brought about clear improvement but, despite this, pupils' attainment at the end of Year 2 remains below average. In the 2009 national tests, standards in writing and mathematics were average but well below average in reading. This is now the main focus for improvement. The termly cycle of monitoring the progress of the pupils in Years 1 and 2 is not frequent enough to identify underachievement at an early stage.

There is good progress throughout Years 3 to 6 and the results in the 2009 national tests show that pupils reached average standards. This, together with their excellent personal development, makes them well equipped to embark on the next phase of their education. The progress of all pupils in science and English is particularly strong. In mathematics, despite significant improvement since the last inspection, fewer than expected more able pupils secure the higher Level 5. The school has an outstanding curriculum and this has much to do with the well-rounded and confident attitudes of the pupils.

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The school has worked hard to improve pupils' attendance and it is now average, but their effort continues to be frustrated by the persistently high number of unauthorised absences. Parents are often reminded of the link between attendance and progress but some remain reluctant to follow the school's guidance.

Pupils' good progress is largely due to good teaching. All staff are very skilled at recognising and fulfilling the needs of the pupils. Teaching and non-teaching staff work very effectively as teams and the high investment in support staff is a key factor in good provision and outcomes.

Good leadership and management from the headteacher and senior staff have maintained the school's strong position from its last inspection. Governance is outstanding. With strong middle management and a deep commitment to improvement among staff, the school is well placed to sustain its progress.

**What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Raise the attainment of pupils in Key Stage 1, particularly in reading, by monitoring their progress more frequently and intervening speedily to help those who are underachieving.
- Improve pupils' attendance by reducing the number of unauthorised absences.
- Improve the outdoor facilities in the Early Years Foundation Stage to help all pupils make better progress in their physical development.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****2**

Pupils' work and lessons observed show that their skills and understanding improve quickly because they enjoy being at Columbia School. They feel safe, secure, happy and settled. Many of those who start in the Early Years Foundation Stage, or who join the school later, have previously experienced difficulties in learning which are successfully overcome during their time in the school. Most pupils develop excellent self-esteem and confidence because staff continually reaffirm their academic or personal successes. Those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress in lessons because of well-targeted help from teachers and support staff.

Behaviour around the school is good and in lessons it is often exemplary with pupils fully engaged with the learning. Pupils are friendly and polite to visitors. Feedback from the staff at places such as the Royal Opera House where pupils visit are invariably very positive and often describe the Columbia pupils as 'highly polite, well mannered and confident'. Pupils use such visits and experiences well in lessons. For instance, in a Year 6 lesson they made excellent use of their learning from a recent, residential visit to Gorsefield Rural Studies Centre. The pupils were very enthusiastic about this experience and this was reflected in their PowerPoint presentations. The enjoyable and thought provoking assemblies also contribute well to pupils' outstanding social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding.

Pupils make an excellent contribution to the life of the school and their local community. The school council is very active and is involved in all new school initiatives such as the

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design of the new 'creative curriculum'. The 'friendship squads' play an extremely important role in making all pupils feel safe and happy in the playground and they are given the responsibility of reporting any incidents to a senior leader on a daily basis. Pupils understand what constitutes a healthy lifestyle and, despite the shortage of outdoor space, they participate actively in many sporting activities. Rich opportunities, such as visits to cultural centres and universities, help to raise pupils' and parents' aspirations for the future, a key objective for the school. By the time pupils leave, their ability to work well in groups combined with satisfactory attendance, secure literacy and numeracy skills provides a firm foundation for the next phase of their education and later life.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	3
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>1</b>

**How effective is the provision?**

Teaching is good, and sometimes outstanding, throughout the school. It promotes good relationships and good behaviour which helps pupils to learn in a settled atmosphere. Pupils benefit from creative and practical activities, such as excellent art work playing musical instruments and carrying out science experiments. Some teachers have a

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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tendency to talk for too long at the start of the lessons and this leads to some pupils losing interest. Reading is now taught more effectively, particularly for the boys, but the school is aware that there is room for improvement. All staff are consistently good at getting pupils to assess their own work and that of their peers, which develops their independent learning skills and boosts their self confidence. Assessment information is increasingly being used to spot those needing extra help. Day-to-day marking is good across the school with teachers conscientiously correcting errors and giving pupils clear guidance on how to improve their work.

Underpinning this good teaching is an outstanding curriculum, which is extremely broad and well-balanced and includes an excellent range of extra-curricular activities. The school is a designated 'School of Creativity' and has the Artsmark gold award. A systematic programme to foster pupils' emotional, health and social development is highly effective in giving pupils confidence to express their feelings in positive ways. Activities to promote basic skills are well planned and special activities have stimulated pupils' interest in a range of cultures.

The quality of care, guidance and support of pupils is good and is particularly effective in identifying and supporting those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, with the result that they achieve well. Pupils report that their physical safety is well catered for. Those who find speaking or reading English more difficult also have good levels of support. Most pupils spoke highly of the school's care but a small proportion the younger ones worry about the exuberant behaviour of some of their older schoolmates outside. Rules and routines to encourage good behaviour in the playground help to ensure mishaps are kept to a minimum.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

**How effective are leadership and management?**

Senior leaders have succeeded well in their drive and determination to develop the school's position from its last inspection. This has been challenging, as standards on entry remain low. There is a strong commitment to equality of opportunity for all and staff have maintained an extremely cohesive school community where all share the same values and objectives in a friendly, harmonious environment. All staff are good at listening to pupils and parents and feed the information they gather into the self-evaluation process. Safeguarding procedures are good so pupils feel very secure. Community cohesion is promoted well at the local level and on a national and

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international basis. In addition to well established collaboration with the school in Zaragossa, the headteacher has visited Sri Lanka to create a strong link with a school working in very deprived conditions. Engagement with parents and carers is particularly strong with a rich variety of events to keep parents informed and to make them feel an important part of the school community. Very effective partnerships with outside agencies, greatly enhance pupils' learning and self-esteem. The governing body is a highly effective team of specialists, ably led by the chair who provides an ideal balance of support and challenge to the senior leaders of the school. School resources are used and managed well to achieve good value for money.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## **Early Years Foundation Stage**

Children make a good start in the Nursery and Reception classes including those who speak little English and those with special educational needs and/or difficulties. The children are encouraged, from the outset, to take responsibility for small tasks, such as putting away toys and putting on their coats. They quickly learn to play well together, take turns and help each other. The welfare arrangements are very good and staff quickly establish an excellent partnership with parents and carers. The indoor facilities are good but the outdoor arrangements are barely satisfactory. For example, there are no large-wheeled vehicles for pupils to ride on and apparatus is generally old and well-used. Teachers ensure children have a good range of both indoor and outside activities and maintain a good balance of tasks that the teacher chooses and those that the children choose for themselves. Despite the very low starting point of many of the



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children they make good progress in most areas of learning, particularly in their personal, social and emotional development. The development of language and calculating skills is slower. Well-briefed teaching assistants help to ensure that children make good progress and all staff are effective at assessing children's personal and academic needs. The good leadership and management of the unit ensures children have a very secure start to school life.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

## Views of parents and carers

The level of response to the questionnaire for parents and carers was good, and they were overwhelmingly positive in nature. Parents were particularly pleased with the quality of teaching and how much their children enjoyed school. They appreciate the richness of the opportunities provided, and the warm welcome they and their children get from all staff. Several parents commended the good care, guidance and support their children receive. A number who moved their children from other schools, comment in particular on the very positive difference they feel the move has made. One wrote, 'My son started at Columbia School in September 2009, since he has started, I have noticed his speech, language and personality shine. He often asks at the weekend if he can go to school.'

Some parents requested more homework to be set. Others wanted more information about when the school plans to teach sex education.

### Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Columbia Primary school to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 125 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 430 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	78	62	45	36	2	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	67	53	54	43	4	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	61	49	55	44	8	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	46	37	63	55	10	8	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	70	56	50	40	5	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	48	38	61	49	14	11	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	61	49	60	48	5	4	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	57	46	53	42	5	4	3	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	35	28	67	54	13	10	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	52	42	58	46	10	8	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	46	37	55	44	13	10	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	46	37	70	56	3	2	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	60	48	57	46	5	4	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

### Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



27 November 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Columbia Primary School, Bethnal Green London E2 7RG

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we came for the inspection. We enjoyed being at your school very much and were pleased to visit your lessons, to look at some of your work and to talk to several of you. I am writing to tell you what we found out.

Columbia is a good school where you make good progress in your personal development and in your class work. All the adults in the school keep you safe and make sure you are doing well. We were very pleased to see how much you enjoy your lessons and your parents tell us that you really love learning. We were impressed by your good behaviour and how friendly you are to visitors, including us. The visits you make to interesting places really help your learning and give you lots to talk and write about.

We noticed that the older pupils make better progress than those in Key Stage 1. So, we have asked your teachers to check on the progress of younger pupils more often so that they can help you if you are finding some of the work too hard.

We also discovered that the outdoor equipment used by the children in the Nursery and Reception classes is not as good as it should be and we have asked Ms Igoe to try to improve this so that you are able to enjoy playing even more.

Some pupils stay away from school to go on holiday and do other things with their parents during term time. This means that learning is interrupted and we would like you to help your teachers by making sure that you always come to school. You could also ask your parents to help the school by not keeping you away.

We found that the people who run the school do a good job and that they are trying to make the school even better.

Thank you again for your friendliness during our visit.

Yours sincerely

Howard Dodd

Lead inspector

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