

Sir Thomas Abney School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100251
Local Authority	Hackney
Inspection number	285755
Inspection dates	6–7 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Stephen Parker

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	392
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Leonie Allister
Headteacher	Ms Lynne Harrowell
Date of previous school inspection	5 February 2001
School address	Fairholt Road Stoke Newington London N16 5ED
Telephone number	020 8800 1411
Fax number	020 8809 7415

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large primary school with nursery provision. It serves a culturally diverse and mobile population in an area of high social disadvantage. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is much higher than average. Most pupils come from ethnic groups other than White British. English is the second language of more than half of the pupils and a significant number are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is much higher than the national average. It includes 22 pupils with statements for expressive or receptive language difficulties for whom the school has special resources. There has been a high turnover of staff in the last two years. The school has gained Eco and Healthy School awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school provides a good standard of education. From starting points that are significantly below average, pupils achieve well and make good progress in their personal and academic development. The very high turnover of pupils means that fewer than half of those currently in Year 6 have been at the school since the Reception class. Most of these pupils reach the expected standards for their age. Many joining the school at later stages have English as an additional language or learning difficulties and disabilities. These pupils receive outstanding support and the school analyses their progress carefully but for many there is too much ground to make up to reach national expectations. As a result, overall standards overall are still well below average by the end of Year 6.

The school celebrates the wide range of pupils' backgrounds and this is a significant strength. One typically appreciative parent says, 'The school is a loving community' and a very large majority of parents agree that their children enjoy school and do well. The quality of care, guidance and support is good and that for pupils with specific needs is outstanding when they are withdrawn for intensive support. Staff know their pupils very well and give them strong encouragement to do their best. There are well established links with outside agencies so that specialist help is appropriately given where needed. The school is calm and orderly with a happy working atmosphere.

Teaching is good overall with excellent features. Staff teamwork is a particular strength and teaching assistants give good quality help to individuals and groups. Lessons are clearly focused and carefully structured so that pupils learn with confidence. Teachers share their enthusiasm for learning so as to catch pupils' attention and in response they are keen to learn. Pupils' progress in basic skills is assessed thoroughly and the information is carefully analysed to guide teaching. Targets are set for individuals and groups in English and mathematics and more recently in science. Work is carefully adapted for pupils with the greatest need but more able pupils are not consistently set hard enough work. This means that they do not always reach the standards they are capable of particularly in mathematics and science. Provision is good in the Nursery and Reception classes and children make good progress as a result.

The school is well led and managed. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school's development and communicates it with great determination. The management structure has been revised recently so that specific responsibilities are shared through the school. The teamwork of the senior managers is a considerable strength. Middle managers have begun to take responsibility for monitoring provision and standards but there is further to go. Governance is good and all statutory requirements are met. Governors have worked successfully with senior management to lead the school through difficulties since the previous inspection including remedying a deficit budget and many changes of staff. The school reviews its performance thoroughly but the large amount of information now available is not always summarised clearly enough to highlight where improvement is needed. The present staff team has a strong sense of purpose and shared commitment. The school gives good value for money and is well placed to continue to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the work set in mathematics and science matches the needs of the more able pupils.

- Involve middle managers more directly in the new management structure to increase their impact on pupils' well-being and academic progress.
- Refine the analysis of data to identify priorities for improvement more sharply.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children begin the Reception year with standards that are well below those expected for their age overall. Many pupils who join the school in later years have learning difficulties and disabilities or English as an additional language so the range of attainment in each class is much wider than generally found. Pupils make good progress overall. Standards are below average by Year 2 but test results have improved since the previous inspection and pupils are performing well overall with a good improvement in writing. Achievement is good in Years 3 to 6. Test results have remained well below average since the previous inspection but most of the present Year 6 pupils who started in this school's reception class are working at the expected standards for their age. Other pupils are achieving well compared with their starting points. Performance in science was exceptionally low in 2006 but there are signs of improvement following changes to the curriculum. However, more able pupils are not consistently given hard enough work in mathematics and science through the school. Gifted and talented pupils do well in projects designed to challenge them but this is an area for further development. By contrast pupils with specific needs make outstanding progress when withdrawn from class for intensive instruction by specialist staff and good progress in lessons.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. Pupils know what is right and wrong and behave well in classes and around the school. Those with specific behaviour difficulties make good progress because they know what is expected of them. As a whole, pupils are keen to learn and eager to take part in practical activities. They have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles. They speak enthusiastically about the many sports activities on offer and are very proud of their organic garden. Pupils respond well to the good range of opportunities to take responsibility around school. For instance, Year 5 pupils read with Reception children. Members of the school council take their responsibilities seriously and have the evidence of the improved play equipment to know that their views are heard. Pupils make a good contribution to the community and enjoy raising funds for charities. Their good work habits prepare them well for their future. Attendance is close to the national average which is an improvement since the previous inspection brought about by the school's firm action.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good across the school, including the Nursery and Reception classes, with outstanding features. Lesson plans are sharply focused with a good emphasis on learning by doing. Instruction takes learning forward in small steps. The partnership between teachers and assistants in all classes is a significant strength, particularly in helping pupils with specific needs. Staff have high expectations for attentiveness and give warm

encouragement when pupils try their best. Drama techniques are used very effectively to develop speaking skills. For instance, Year 6 pupils took on the part of detectives to report their scientific evidence in an imagined criminal investigation. Their confident performance showed outstanding achievement in this lesson in both science and English compared with their starting points. Teachers mark work carefully and increasingly involve pupils in reflecting on their performance and setting their own targets for improvement. The high quality teaching of specialists, such as those for language, special needs and physical education, makes a significant contribution to pupils' learning and the school's ethos.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and extended well through out-of-class activities. Special provision for pupils with learning difficulties or English as an additional language is outstanding when they are withdrawn for individual or support in small groups because it is intensely and consistently focused on their needs. For the most part work in lessons is adjusted well so that pupils of differing abilities make good progress though it is not always hard enough for more able pupils. There are satisfactory links between subjects to strengthen pupils' understanding, with good use of computers. Learning is skilfully made relevant by imaginative projects such as a visit to a local arts college to produce and present radio adverts. Visitors such as a local artist share their expertise and the excellent work of the artists' club is a stimulating example of how well pupils can achieve in such initiatives. There is a good range of clubs and pupils take part successfully in local arts events and sports competitions.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support is good overall with outstanding features. It is particularly effective for newly arrived pupils. For instance, a Polish-speaking teaching assistant has been employed to help newly-arrived Polish children. Staff know their pupils very well and place a strong emphasis on celebrating their achievements. For instance, the range of certificates includes one for being 'A great pupil to teach.' The learning mentor plays a key part in this excellent level of support, helping pupils to share concerns in confidence. Procedures for child protection, health and safety meet requirements and are well understood. Pupils' academic development is rigorously monitored and outcomes are reviewed each term with class teachers.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher leads the school with exemplary drive, commitment and enthusiasm. She has built an informed and effective leadership team whose work has a strong impact on pupils' progress and personal development. For instance, senior leaders' rigorous checks on the quality of teaching followed by support where needed have raised learning to a consistently good level and helped reduce the disadvantage of the high staff turnover. Self-evaluation procedures are well established, giving a wide range of information on school performance. The information is not always presented in readily accessible form so as to highlight school priorities for those outside the senior management team. Assessment information is used effectively to direct provision for pupils with the greatest need but not consistently for more able pupils. The new management structure has given significant responsibilities to other staff. However, lines of

accountability are not yet sufficiently developed for them to be fully involved in monitoring and evaluating provision, notably that for more able pupils. The governing body has a good understanding of the school and provides both challenge and support.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

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 disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	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 the 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

¹ Grade 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.

Annex A

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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

19 June 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Sir Thomas Abney School, London, N16 5ED

As you know we visited you at school recently. Thank you very much for the welcome you gave us. We thought you were very polite and friendly and were very pleased to see how well you get on with each other. I was very impressed when the young ones sang in English and Gujarati in their assembly; it must be very useful to speak other languages. I wish I could play the guitar like your teacher. Your art displays around the school make it bright and interesting for people when they walk around. Do be sure to look hard at them again before the end of the term because they may not be there after the holidays. Your Eco garden is an excellent idea and we hope you enjoy growing things.

Yours is a good school that helps everyone to do their best. You are well looked after and well taught. We could see that you help yourselves to learn by trying hard when you work on your own or with others.

We know that the adults are really keen for you to do well and we think it would help them to help you if they do these things:

- Make sure that all of you are given work that is not too easy in mathematics and science, especially those of you in the top groups.
- Help the teachers who are also managers to take responsibility for what goes on.
- Present the information they have about the school in a simpler way so that it is clear to everyone what could be done even better

You could also help yourselves by telling the adults when you think you could do harder work and more jobs around the school.

We hope you do well in the future and send you our best wishes.

Yours faithfully,

Stephen Parker (Lead inspector)