

Uplands Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120035
Local Authority	Leicester City
Inspection number	327180
Inspection dates	29–30 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Paul Weston 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)	486
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	F Haider
Headteacher	Mary-Ann Davis
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2006
School address	Melbourne Road Highfields Leicester LE2 0DR
Telephone number	0116 253 8407
Fax number	0116 262 1673

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large multi-racial primary school close to Leicester's city centre. Almost all pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. A very high proportion of the pupils do not speak English as their first language; Gujarati, Urdu, Bengali and Somali are the most common. A higher than average number of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is similar to that found nationally but there are fewer with a statement of special educational needs. Significantly more pupils join or leave the school at times other than the usual starting or leaving points. The school has received a number of nationally recognised awards in recent years including Investors in People, the Inclusion Quality Mark and the Healthy School award.

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 that is rapidly improving. The energy and determination of the new leader has certainly created a tangible team spirit where governors, staff and pupils work hard together and eagerly take on new ideas. The headteacher has identified where the school needs to improve and responded with well thought out plans that are starting to be implemented. However, subject leaders, although keen and enthusiastic, have still to fully develop their monitoring and evaluating skills so that they can identify more precisely what needs to be done, to boost standards and achievement in their areas of responsibility. Governance is satisfactory. Governors are very supportive, but are at an early stage of developing their role of 'critical friend'.

When the pupils join the school in Year 3, their standards are broadly average, and they are still broadly average when they leave at the end of Year 6. Pupils' progress is satisfactory, but they make better progress in reading, mathematics and science than in writing. While teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, they are quickly improving with an increasing proportion of lively lessons that enthuse the pupils. Occasionally, teachers spend too long introducing lessons and this limits pupils' opportunities for working independently and practising their skills. Work is not always carefully matched to pupils' abilities; as a result, it can be too difficult for less able pupils and the more able pupils mark time. Nevertheless, the school's commitment to equality of opportunity is evident and the school is becoming more inclusive as support mechanisms improve.

This is a happy and friendly place, providing pupils with a safe and caring environment. Parents are appreciative of the school's work and the approachability of staff. One parent summed this up by saying, 'All staff are caring, supportive and helpful.' Pupils also recognise this strength and those spoken to say, 'Our teachers are kind and look after us.' Pupils' good personal development is reflected in the way they work happily together, behave well and are considerate to others. This results in very calm and friendly classrooms. Pupils enjoy coming to school. They willingly adopt a healthy lifestyle, understanding the need for regular exercise and a healthy diet. They are keen to help others, either through the school council or through collecting money for 'Children in Need', for example. Although pupils are sensible and are eager to work together, teachers do not always use strategies to ensure all pupils are involved in lessons. At times, there is too much teacher control, and this limits the development of pupils' independent learning skills.

The curriculum is satisfactory. An appropriate range of clubs, visits and visitors enhance pupils' experiences. Although pastoral care is good and safeguarding requirements are met, academic guidance is not as strong because the use of assessment information to plan the next steps in pupils' learning is not consistently rigorous. Strategies to improve this aspect of guidance are at an early stage of implementation. The partnership with the neighbouring infant school is rapidly developing, and overall the school has satisfactory capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' standards and progress in writing throughout the school.
- Increase the amount of good teaching and, in particular, ensure that teaching is closely matched to pupils' specific needs and consistently challenges them.
- Ensure accurate assessment information is used rigorously so all pupils make at least good progress in English, mathematics and science.

- Develop the monitoring and evaluation skills of subject leaders so that they are able to identify more precisely what needs to be done to boost achievement and raise standards.

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

In recent years, pupils' standards on entry to Year 3 have improved steadily and they are now broadly average. Analysis of the school's data, observation of lessons and scrutiny of work show that progress is satisfactory overall. However, it is uneven through Years 3 to 6 with pupils making better progress in some year groups than others. There are also significant variations in pupils' progress in different subjects as they move through the school. Pupils' progress in mathematics has improved this year but progress in writing has not improved at the same rate. Standards are average overall. However, standards are held back in English throughout the school because, although pupils do well in their reading, they are not as confident in their writing. Although some opportunities are provided to write in other subjects, these are not frequent enough. In addition, the overuse of worksheets in some classes further restricts opportunities for writing at length. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and pupils from minority ethnic groups make the same satisfactory progress as other pupils because they receive appropriately focused support. Most learners are on track to achieve their suitably challenging targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They have a good understanding of right and wrong and incidents of bullying are very rare. Pupils know who to turn to if they have any concerns and say any problems they have are resolved promptly by adults. This is supported well by school councillors, who operate a 'worry and suggestions' box where problems and issues can be raised. Pupils appreciate their circle time lessons, which help develop important social and emotional skills. Assemblies are also used effectively to encourage self-reflection. Pupils feel safe in school. They work together in an atmosphere of trust and where all cultural backgrounds are fully respected and tolerated. Pupils enjoy good relationships with adults, who support them well. They say they enjoy coming to school and this is evidenced by their good attendance. Pupils are keen to talk about their work and the things they like, such as the 'mad' science lesson or the trip to Twycross Zoo. Pupils know the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle and show good awareness of the importance of exercise, fresh air and a healthy diet. Pupils are adequately prepared for the next stage in their education and for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

There is evidence of some good teaching throughout the school, where pupils are fully engaged throughout because the teacher effectively brings the learning to life. A good example of this was in a Year 6 literacy lesson where pupils were smelling the aroma of pizza and tasting it in

order to develop their descriptive vocabulary and language. In some less effective lessons, however, teachers talked for too long, and consequently the pace slowed and the pupils had limited time to practise taught skills independently. Pupils' involvement is increasing through strategies such as talk partners. Although this enhances pupils' personal development by providing them with good opportunities for collaboration, it is not yet fully developed in a way that moves children on in their learning. Support assistants are deployed effectively to facilitate the learning of children in the early stages of learning English. They provide effective translation when required, and this enables participation in lessons. Classes are managed effectively throughout the school. The warm and respectful relationships between pupils and all adults within the school are very noticeable.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum makes a satisfactory contribution to pupils' enjoyment of school and their achievement in the key subjects of English, mathematics and science. However, these subjects are often over-emphasised at the expense of other subjects such as geography, and there is no cohesive whole-school plan to identify relevant cross-curricular links or opportunities to develop the progression of key skills and creativity. A wide range of art is displayed in classrooms and corridors. Pupils talk enthusiastically about their enjoyment of sporting activities in lessons and at lunchtime. Year 6 pupils spoke with knowledge and confidence about their history project on Britain since 1930, which they enjoyed immensely. However, work in books generally reveals a lack of depth in subjects such as history, with too much reliance on worksheets in some classes. The curriculum is enriched by an interesting range of clubs, visits and visitors. Pupils readily take part in a wide range of activities. In fact, 80 pupils auditioned for parts in the end of year production while the inspectors were in school!

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Good levels of care and pastoral support ensure pupils feel happy and enjoy their education. Parents agree that their children are safe and well cared for. Child protection procedures and arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirements. The school works effectively with a range of agencies to promote pupils' safety, health and well-being, and sound arrangements are in place to support pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Academic guidance is satisfactory. Assessments of pupils' learning are variable across the school. They are not consistently accurate and information about pupils' prior knowledge is not used well enough to inform next steps of learning. The school recognises this. Leaders are now introducing systems to sharpen up the tracking of pupils' progress. Teachers are beginning to use the outcomes to intervene more quickly with those not making expected progress. Some pupils are developing an improved awareness of what they need to achieve through the use of individual learning targets and through the feedback from teachers when marking books, but this is not consistent throughout the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The new headteacher has quickly established a good awareness of what needs to be tackled in order to improve pupils' rate of learning. Her energetic and enthusiastic leadership has

pointed the school in the right direction and has already led to many improvements. Staff say that the new headteacher is 'a real driving force'. She is empowering other leaders in the school and, as a result, they are very keen and enthusiastic to bring about change and to do their best for the pupils. Through the introduction of improved tracking procedures, senior leaders are starting to analyse carefully pupils' performance and to identify where there is potential underachievement. Teachers are already benefiting from well tailored professional support to help them identify, share and develop good practice in teaching and learning. Subject leaders and governors are very supportive, but know that they are not yet sufficiently involved in monitoring and evaluating the school's provision. They are aware of the importance of ensuring that everyone has the necessary skills to help accelerate the rate of learning and support the headteacher in driving forward school improvement. Leaders have a firm commitment to promoting cohesion, with satisfactory levels of success in the school, local and national communities.

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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?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

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	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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	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**

1 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Uplands Junior School, Leicester LE2 0DR

Thank you for being so friendly and polite when we came to inspect your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you and would like to say a special thank you to the school council and the children who gave up their time to talk to us. I am writing to tell you what we found out. Your school is satisfactory and it is getting better all the time. We were pleased to see that you all behave well and work hard in class. You reach broadly average standards in English, mathematics and science and your achievement is satisfactory. You have a good understanding of how to keep fit and stay healthy. Adults look after you well and we were pleased to know you feel safe in school. Your parents and carers also think you are happy, enjoy school and are cared for by all staff. The curriculum is satisfactory and there is a range of additional activities provided for you to help you enjoy school.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory but improving, and many of your lessons now help you to learn more quickly. We did notice that in a few lessons you had to listen to the teacher for too long and did not have enough chance to practise your skills. We have asked your teachers to improve this, together with the quality of your writing, and to make sure that you always get work to do that is not too hard or too easy for each of you. Teachers also need to be sure of exactly what you know already and need to learn next. This information could then be used carefully to plan work that helps all of you make good progress in English, mathematics and science. Although your headteacher knows exactly what the school is doing well and what needs to improve, we have asked that all governors and staff with leadership responsibilities are very clear about improvement points, take action and then check how the action has helped you to reach higher standards and make faster progress in your work.

We know your teachers are eager to make these improvements and you can help them by continuing to do the best you can.

Yours sincerely

Paul Weston

Her Majesty's Inspector