

Sir Thomas Abney School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100251
Local Authority	Hackney
Inspection number	335511
Inspection dates	4–5 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Ruth McFarlane

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 of pupils on the school roll	404
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Leonie Allister
Headteacher	Ms Geraldine Fitzmaurice
Date of previous school inspection	6 June 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. Twenty lessons or part lessons were observed, and 16 teachers or teaching assistants were seen leading lessons. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, staff and the Chair of the Governing Body. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at responses to staff and pupils' surveys, minutes of meetings, planning, policies and procedures, monitoring records and 40 parental questionnaires.

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

- the impact of strategies to improve attainment, especially in writing and mathematics and the attainment of the more able pupils
- the impact of strategies to improve attendance and behaviour
- the impact of the work of the Language Resource School
- middle managers' impact on the drive for improvement.

Information about the school

This is a larger than average school. A much smaller proportion of pupils have White British heritage than is usually found. Of the wide range of ethnicities present, about a quarter of the pupils are Polish, a much higher proportion than is usually found. Higher proportions than average have Black African or Black Caribbean heritage. A much higher proportion of pupils than average speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is higher than found nationally and more than usual have statements of special educational needs. Their difficulties are mostly in the behavioural, emotional and social spectrum or in speech, language and communication, for which the school is a designated Resource School. The school has achieved several awards for its provision including Basic Skills Quality Mark and Eco Schools Silver Award. The Early Years Foundation Stage comprises a Nursery and two Reception classes. Extended services are provided that provide before and after school activities. A toddler group is held on the site, not managed by the governing body and not a part of this inspection.

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

Sir Thomas Abney is a good school. Its particular strengths include highly effective practice in safeguarding children, and outstanding levels of care, guidance and support. This is focused on praising achievement for each and every child in every possible way, in line with the school byline, 'We all Shine.' As a result, pupils' personal skills and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness are well developed. Attendance has improved rapidly and is now above average. Pupils behave well, enjoy coming to school and they work hard. One pupil commented: 'My school is fantastic!' The majority of parents support the school and all value its caring and harmonious atmosphere.

From their satisfactory start in the Early Years Foundation Stage, pupils make good progress so that attainment is broadly average by the time they leave Year 6. The school's attractive, recently refurbished learning environment makes it an interesting place to study and pupils are fully involved. The outside area for the Early Years Foundation Stage is a spacious and potentially stimulating area, but the activities are not always effectively planned for each individual child's needs or fully linked to purposeful and active learning.

Teaching is good overall and the impact of the drive to improve pupils' attainment in mathematics and writing is evident. However, sometimes tasks are not matched carefully to pupils' different abilities. This occasionally limits the challenge to the more able. Teachers' marking sometimes helps pupils to understand what they need to do to improve but in a number of classes, marking is less helpful. The curriculum engages pupils well and has some significant strengths, such as the provision for pupils with speech and language difficulties in the Resource School. A wealth of additional activities provided by the extended provision is open to everyone.

There are a number of reasons that show the school has good capacity to improve further, based on pupils' good and improving progress and effective assessment. Leaders have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and areas to improve and have made good strides since its last inspection. Much better systems to track pupils' progress give a clearer picture of how well pupils are doing, and identify promptly any who need additional support. The headteacher and senior leaders work effectively together in holding staff accountable for pupils' achievements and in monitoring and improving the quality of teaching. The middle leaders' part in this key work is not yet fully developed. Governors are supportive of the school and have a good overview to help them lead the school forward.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

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- Increase the proportion of good and better teaching by:
 - providing tasks matched precisely to pupils' different abilities, particularly to challenge the most able
 - improving marking so that pupils know how to move on in their learning.
- Develop the skills of middle leaders to enable them to monitor teaching rigorously in their areas of responsibility.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, accelerate progress by:
 - making better use of the outside area to capture the needs and interests of each individual
 - providing a greater proportion of active learning opportunities.

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

Pupils really enjoy their learning and achieve well. They speak highly of how teachers make lessons interesting for them. As one told inspectors, 'Lessons are fun.' During the inspection, Year 6 pupils relished the opportunity to write a persuasive letter to their headteacher about extending the range of sports as part of their work on different styles of writing. Pupils in Year 3 took delight in reading to their partners, often with a range of expression that captivated the listener. Pupils work comfortably together in groups, and help each other to achieve the learning objectives.

In the past, higher attaining pupils have not done so well in writing and mathematics as in reading. A strong focus on developing writing and mathematical skills means more are working at the higher levels this year. Pupils of all ethnic groups make good progress. Those at an early stage of learning English make good progress because they are given good support. Those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported extremely well so that they meet their individual targets. Pupils with a statement of special educational needs benefit from additional expertise in the Resource School.

A pupil commented, 'I feel safe in school and all the adults care about me.' This reflects the views of most pupils, who are happy at school, and behave well. Pupils know how to stay healthy and they are aware of the value of a healthy diet and exercise. They are aware of green issues, and are proud of the Eco-Schools Silver Award. The school council is active in canvassing pupils' views. Pupils love learning about the wide range of cultures and traditions represented in the school and they get on well together.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

¹ 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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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	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
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

A pupil said, 'I'm learning to do more things more quickly now.' Although marking is inconsistent, pupils are aware of their progress because their learning targets are relevant and referred to in ways that help pupils to monitor their learning. This motivates them. The quality of teaching is good with some outstanding teaching observed, but the quality is not yet consistent. In most lessons, a good pace injects excitement and the confident use of technology interests pupils. Better teaching of basic skills is ensuring that most pupils' basic skills are more effectively developed. For example, Year 2 pupils loved their jumping activity in a live number line, to demonstrate their understanding of the number of tens and units in three-digit numbers. The school is reviewing and further developing the curriculum to make it even more relevant and creative for all pupils. Excellent enrichment is provided by the range of extra activities. Competitive chess is especially successful and popular. Pupils benefit from the opportunity to take part in visits at different stages during their time at the school. They were keen to tell inspectors of their visit to a concert venue to take part in musical activities with other schools, and to a premier football stadium to be coached in football. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' good progress, and are deployed well during lessons. Support for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties is strong. Pupils with speech and language difficulties and those who speak English as an additional language are able to access all aspects of the curriculum. They are very well provided for in the mainstream classrooms in school as well as in the special resource facility, where expert care and tuition and appealing material resources are available. The excellent levels of care make a very positive contribution to learning,

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effectively helping pupils from all backgrounds overcome any difficulties they may have.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and her senior team provide effective leadership that embraces a common vision for the school and drives forward improvement. The tools senior managers use to measure performance are honed to pinpoint exactly how each individual pupil is doing and to analyse trends across different groups and across periods of time. This enables them to build up a very accurate picture and to intervene to tackle any possible underachievement. As a result, equality of opportunity is good, with all pupils welcomed and included fully. There remains some variation in how the more-able pupils perform, as they are not always challenged sufficiently. Leadership is in the process of being distributed to an enthusiastic team of middle managers, keen to develop their skills. Currently most of the checks on learning are carried out by the senior team. This means that middle managers have a less clear view, for instance of how well assessment is used in the classroom and the effectiveness of teaching. Governors take a lead role in ensuring that the school is a very safe environment, contributing to the school's outstanding safeguarding arrangements. Meticulous records are kept and all requirements are fully implemented. Leaders have developed extremely good partnerships with a range of organisations that contribute very well to pupils' academic and personal development. The school promotes community cohesion well, locally and in the wider world, including globally and in the United Kingdom. Annual participation in activities such as the local carnival procession does much to cement multicultural and community awareness.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2

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The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children have a satisfactory range of opportunities to experience different areas of learning. As a result, they achieve satisfactorily and an increasing number are now meeting the early learning goals by the end of the Reception Year. Staff have, rightly, identified the need to develop the use of the extensive outside space further. Satisfactory assessment systems ensure children's needs are identified. Most needs are catered for, but individual interests and needs are not always taken fully into account. Hence, activities are not always clearly linked to planned learning. Children are happy and secure and play cooperatively together in the attractive and welcoming setting. They have a ready awareness of keeping safe. 'Be careful,' one told the headteacher in the café role-play area. 'This pizza might be hot so we'll need a cloth to take it out of the oven.' Records of achievement contain detailed information on the children's progress. Leadership is satisfactory. A cohesive team of teachers and assistants works well together, showing a good understanding of how young children learn. Staff encourage hygiene. They ensure there is a good mix of child-initiated and adult-led activities in the nursery. Such a balance is not so evident in Reception classes where, during the inspection, children sat and listened for too long.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers had been issued with a school questionnaire immediately before the inspection questionnaire was sent out and a great many more responses to the school questionnaire were received than to the inspection questionnaire. In their responses to

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the inspection questionnaire, parents and carers showed strong support for the school. All those responding agreed that their child enjoys school and feels safe, and all indicated that they are happy with their child's overall experience at school. A very small minority of parents and carers have mixed views about the extent to which their opinions count, and the way they are informed of their child's progress, but inspectors found that the school does take account of parents' and carers' views. Communication about progress is well signalled and regular.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Sir Thomas Abney 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 40 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 404 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	25	63	15	37	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	30	75	10	25	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	24	60	14	35	1	3	1	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	23	58	17	42	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	26	65	13	33	1	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	21	53	17	43	1	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	20	50	19	48	0	0	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)	18	45	19	48	1	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	18	45	20	50	1	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	20	50	17	43	0	0	1	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	15	38	19	48	2	5	1	3
The school is led and managed effectively	21	53	15	38	0	0	1	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	26	65	14	35	0	0	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">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.



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8 March 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Sir Thomas Abney School, Stoke Newington, N16 5ED

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited your school. Thank you for completing the questionnaire; it was very helpful to know how much you enjoy being at STA. Yours is a good school and it has some outstanding features.

The school cares for you extremely well. You told us you feel safe at school and you have a good understanding of how to stay healthy. You behave well and enjoy your lessons. Teaching is mostly good so that you make good progress. There are plenty of trips for you to enjoy. You all do well at school, but some of you find tasks too easy. We have asked your teachers to make sure the activities are just right to challenge you. You could let staff know whether the work is just right for you.

Your school leaders are doing a good job, but we have asked that other teachers who have responsibilities are given the skills to do a bit more checking up of what happens in lessons.

We have asked that the activities set out for the youngest children to choose from inside and outside are always clearly linked to what they need to learn next. We want Reception children to be a bit more active, rather than sitting too long on the carpet.

You can help by listening to your teachers and working as hard as you can. Thank you again for helping us.

Yours sincerely

Ruth McFarlane

Lead inspector

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