

Ambler Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	100397
Local authority	Islington
Inspection number	376389
Inspection dates	28–29 February 2012
Lead inspector	Sarah McDermott

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	209
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alex Bols
Headteacher	Juliet Benis
Date of previous school inspection	11–12 June 2009
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Sarah McDermott

Additional inspector

Colin Lower

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The team observed fifteen lessons taught by ten teachers, totalling seven and a half hours. The inspectors held meetings with governors, members of the senior leadership team and several groups of pupils. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. They observed the school's work and scrutinised school documentation including school development planning. They also investigated procedures for keeping pupils safe, scrutinised behaviour logs and analysed responses to pupil and staff questionnaires as well as 25 returned by parents and carers.

Information about the school

Ambler Primary is smaller than the average sized primary school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. Nearly all pupils are from minority ethnic groups, predominantly of Black African or Black Caribbean heritage. Over half of pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs is average. Their needs mostly relate to behaviour, emotional and social difficulties or speech, language and communication problems. The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

The Nursery and Reception classes, although accommodated in the children's centre that shares the school site, comprise part of this inspection. The rest of the children's centre provision is inspected separately. The school runs a breakfast club and an after-school club that are included in this inspection. It holds the Healthy School award.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- Ambler Primary is a good school with a positive climate for learning. It is going from strength to strength under the determined leadership of the headteacher. As a result achievement, attendance and behaviour have all improved since the previous inspection. The school is not outstanding because pupils do not always have the chance to use their literacy and numeracy skills across the whole curriculum. The rigour of high quality marking in literacy and numeracy lessons is not evident in all subjects.
- All groups of pupils, whatever their ethnic background, achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics to reach average attainment by the time they leave in Year 6. The most able pupils make good progress because work is well matched to their needs. Boys learn just as well as girls. Pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs, and those who speak English as an additional language, also make good progress. Pupils enjoy reading. Younger pupils tackle unknown words skilfully and are beginning to read with understanding.
- The quality of teaching is good. Teachers plan interesting activities to capture pupils' imagination and extend learning. In particular, they have good questioning techniques to draw out thorough answers from their pupils.
- Pupils behave well because of high expectations and very consistent behaviour management. It is very rare for learning to be disrupted by silly behaviour. Pupils feel safe and know who they can turn to if worried. The good behaviour and attitudes of the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage help them to acquire other skills quickly. Concerted work to improve attendance and punctuality is proving successful.
- Senior and middle managers effectively share responsibility for raising achievement and improving teaching and learning. The performance of teachers is monitored carefully, with support provided where necessary and praise given where praise is due.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in English and mathematics by:

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- reviewing the organisation of the curriculum in order to provide more opportunities for pupils to read, write and practise their mathematical skills in subjects other than literacy and numeracy lessons
- extending the thoroughness of marking and checking of pupils' progress against their targets in literacy and numeracy lessons to all other subjects of the curriculum.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils are mature and sensible in lessons. They understand that good learning in primary school stands them in good stead for secondary school and eventually getting a job. Learning starts promptly because pupils know the expected routines and make sure they have all necessary resources to hand. Good collaboration with their classmates through paired discussions helps them to spark ideas off each other and extend their learning. Although, on occasion, a few pupils are reluctant to share ideas with their partner. Pupils listen respectfully when their classmates are speaking so they can hear different viewpoints and compare these with their own thinking. They are good at working independently and persevering even if the task is hard. This is particularly evident in the Early Years Foundation Stage where children choose their own games sensibly and concentrate for good lengths of time on one activity. Mathematics and English exercise books show a substantial amount of neat and tidy work. At the end of most lessons, pupils are honest and accurate in evaluating the academic progress they have made and identifying what their next steps should be.

Children arrive in the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills well below those expected for their age and make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes. In 2011 attainment in reading was below the national averages at the end of Key Stage 1. Since then the school has successfully improved reading through the systematic teaching of letter sounds to give pupils essential building blocks to confidently read new words. Overall, pupils make good progress across the school and leave in Year 6 with attainment in line with national averages for reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils who speak English as an additional language make good progress because of carefully pinpointed extra support. Pupils who have special educational needs learn well because of the special attention they receive. The school is particularly effective in helping lower attaining pupils reach the expected level (Level 4) by Year 6. In the past the proportion of pupils reaching the higher level (Level 5) has been below average. However, a concerted drive across all classes to challenge the more able is reaping rewards. These pupils enjoy doing more difficult work with the result that the gap is rapidly narrowing between their progress and the progress of other pupils. Parents are pleased with the way their children are progressing. One parent commented, 'My child has gone from strength to strength from Nursery to Year 6 and I would definitely recommend the school to other families.' Parents' views are supported by the inspection evidence.

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Quality of teaching

The vast majority of parents and carers justifiably feel that the quality of teaching is good. Teachers have very good relationships with pupils, often introducing a touch of humour to lessons. They promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Not surprisingly, pupils say, 'We get better in our learning because our teachers make it fun.' Teachers ensure lessons move on at a good pace with a varied mix of adult explanation, independent and group exercises. They are adept at finding activities that engage boys as well as girls. In several good mathematics lessons, pupils enjoyed choosing different types of data, such as those relating to favourite mobile phones or pop singers, for their tally charts. Teachers have a good grasp of how individual pupils are progressing and make sure they set work that is suitably challenging for different abilities. An excellent Year 4 literacy lesson on play scripts, for example, exemplified how teachers adapt the same learning objective for different groups. The lower attaining pupils were given simple scripts to analyse, whereas the more able were asked to write as editors to the BBC identifying what needed to be improved. These are examples of how effectively the curriculum meets the needs of the full range of pupils.

Teachers keep a close check on how learning is progressing, making sure they ask questions of a range of pupils to check their understanding. In particular, teachers persist in encouraging pupils to think deeply about their answers and not just give a simple response. Teachers mark English and mathematics exercise books very thoroughly, giving helpful hints and often setting small extra tasks to embed learning. They are not always marking with the same rigour in other subjects. Nor are they consistently encouraging pupils to refer to their personal targets for literacy and numeracy when practising their writing or mathematical skills in subjects such as science, geography or history. Regular homework complements class learning well and boosts pupils' independence. Teachers place a high priority on reading skills right from the Early Years Foundation Stage. Guided reading sessions in all classes are well organised, productive and important parts of the school day, instilling in pupils a love of books to set them up well for later life.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' behaviour over time is typically good and pupils report that they can get on with learning without disruption. They are polite and courteous, ready to hold conversations with visitors and tell them all what is good about their school. Most pupils move around the corridors sensibly and play together well. If there is any over-boisterous play at break times, pupils know adults are quick to sort things out. Pupils understand the school rules, confident that they are fairly applied. They appreciate a mention in the 'golden book' or the award of extra house points for good work or attitudes.

The vast majority of parents and carers have no qualms about behaviour or bullying and all feel their children are safe in the school's care. Questionnaires indicated that

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a few pupils are worried about incidents of bullying. Following an extensive range of interviews and informal discussions with pupils, the inspection team is convinced that bullying of any type is rare. The school is in the process of revising its anti-bullying policy to include a thorough review with pupils of what it means to be bullied. 'Peer buddies' take their roles very seriously. They are quick to notice if any pupil is feeling left out at playtime and to include them in their games. Staff quickly follow up any concerns pupils may have and prevent any isolated name calling from escalating into anything more serious. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are safe, secure and very much at ease in their surroundings.

The school has worked very successfully to improve attendance. So far this year, attendance is above the national average and is far better than at the previous inspection. Pupils compete keenly to win the weekly attendance certificates, with the ultimate prize of a pizza or ice-cream party. Only a handful of pupils are just a few minutes late each day. One boy spoke for many pupils by saying, 'If you miss school you don't learn.'

Leadership and management

Since her arrival three years ago, the headteacher has worked unstintingly to raise expectations of pupils, carers, staff and parents. One parent commented, 'I am incredibly impressed by our head who is constantly working to improve the school with huge energy, passion and positivity.' The headteacher is successfully showing that pupils with a wide range of needs can make the most of their talents and compete on at least even terms as they move to the next stage of education. Since the previous inspection she has developed her senior and middle managers to take full accountability for attainment and progress. Leaders and managers are clear about where strengths and weaknesses lie in the quality of teaching. They are not satisfied with mediocre teaching and are quick to arrange professional development as needed. Governors give good strategic direction for the school and share the headteacher's commitment for higher standards. The areas for development raised at the previous inspection have been tackled with rigour, resulting in better teaching and improved achievement and attendance for all groups of pupils. Now the headteacher has set her sights on ensuring pupils use their improving literacy and numeracy skills across all subjects of the curriculum. Successes to date demonstrate that the school has continuing capacity for future sustained improvement.

Governors and senior leaders put a high priority on the safety of the pupils and are justifiably proud of the way pupils from all walks of life play and work so well together. Safeguarding meets all legal requirements. Pupils who attend the before- and after-school clubs are well looked after. The school ensures no pupil is discriminated against and all have an equal opportunity to achieve similarly. Pupils have equal access to an interesting curriculum, including French and music, as well as a good range of after-school activities and trips that effectively promote spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Recent awards demonstrate that pupils have a keen awareness of healthy living. The school has good relationships with parents and carers, who appreciate all it does for their children. One parent commented on

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the close working with the children's centre, 'The school links in fantastically with the children's centre to ensure a smooth move up to primary.'

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.

1 March 2012

Dear Pupils



Inspection of Ambler Primary School, London N4 2DR

Thank you very much for welcoming us to your school. Ambler Primary is a good school. You make good progress and leave with average attainment in English and mathematics. You enjoy school and feel you learn a lot in lessons. We judge teaching to be good because teachers find work that is just the right challenge for each of you. They ask good questions to improve your learning. English and mathematics books are marked very well so you know what you need to do better. The headteacher has successfully moved your school from being satisfactory to good. She and her team of senior teachers lead the school well. They work well together and know what needs improving.

You all feel very safe at school and know how to look after yourselves. Your behaviour is good. You have told us you have few worries about any types of bullying, confident that teachers will sort out problems. Your attendance has improved. Well done!

To make your school even better we have asked your headteacher and teachers to raise attainment further in English and mathematics by:

- giving you more chances to use your literacy and numeracy skills in lessons such as history, geography, religious education and science
- making sure your targets are checked and your work in these subjects is marked with the same thoroughness as in English and mathematics.

We certainly enjoyed our visit to your school. We know that your teachers and their assistants make your school a very special place for you. All of you can help by always trying to do your best, continuing to behave well and making your families and the school proud of you.

Yours sincerely

Sarah McDermott
Lead inspector

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