

Charles Dickens Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100781
Local Authority	Southwark
Inspection number	307478
Inspection date	10 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Wendy Simmons

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	295
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Caroline Croft
Headteacher	Mrs Teresa E. P. de Quincey
Date of previous school inspection	2 June 2003
School address	Lant Street London SE1 1QP
Telephone number	020 7407 1769
Fax number	020 7403 5324

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- how well reading skills are developed, especially between Years 1 and 3
- the overall quality of teaching and learning
- the provision for creative arts.

Evidence was gained from lessons and the school's own evaluations of its work. Discussions were held with staff and pupils and a range of documentation was evaluated. Pupils' work was scrutinised and the views of parents were gathered from questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified. These have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Charles Dickens Primary is a large school situated in a culturally, socially and ethnically very mixed community. Some areas have very high levels of social deprivation. Close to a half of all pupils receive free school meals. Most pupils come from Black African heritages. The next largest groups include those from White British, Bangladeshi and Black British Caribbean backgrounds. A high proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language. Over 35 different languages are spoken in the school. A high proportion of pupils have learning difficulties. These largely link to moderate learning difficulty and problems with social skills, behaviour and speech and communication difficulty. The proportion of pupils who join and leave the school at unusual times throughout the school year is very high. The school has gained the Arts Mark Gold and The London School Environment Award at the gold status level.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Charles Dickens Primary is an outstanding school where pupils' achievement is excellent. Pupils are thoroughly prepared for their future lives due to the impressive work of the headteacher, senior leaders, governors and all staff. They ensure that pupils benefit from a very rounded and enjoyable education. Almost all parents hold the school in high regard. In the words of one parent, 'This is an extraordinary school with excellent teaching'. Staff are dedicated to doing the best for the pupils. The care shown by adults is impressive. The school is a very harmonious and inclusive place to be. The relationships between pupils, staff, parents and the community are exceptionally strong.

As pupils move from class to class, they benefit from many exciting learning opportunities. Teachers are often extremely skilled. Very effective questioning and discussion work help pupils to develop their understanding and knowledge of new things. Teachers and assistants constantly look for ways to give pupils all the help that they need to improve. Work is very well planned and flexible enough to allow for spontaneous learning, whilst also meeting pupils' interests and individual needs. Pupils enjoy finding out about new things and they actively take part in many 'hands on' investigation activities. These help them to become independent in their learning. The activities help pupils to do very well in mathematics and science.

Because of the outstanding teaching, curriculum and care, pupils reach above average standards of work by the end of Year 6. Standards are especially high in science and above average in English and mathematics in Key Stage 2. From their often very low starting point, pupils make excellent progress. The school is to be congratulated for helping pupils to do so well. This is especially so considering the pupils' sometimes complex needs, diverse backgrounds and the fact that high numbers of pupils that join and leave the school throughout the school year. All groups of learners achieve well. Pupils in receipt of free school meals, those learning English as an additional language and pupils from Bangladeshi, Black African and Caribbean heritages do exceptionally well. The school also helps boys to do much better than is usual.

Leaders are ambitious to lift standards in English, so that they also are above average. Staff work very hard to enrich pupils' reading and writing skills. In particular, there has been a major focus on reading. This is having an impressive impact on the way that pupils are now racing ahead with their skills in Years 1 to 3 and is evidence of the school's outstanding capacity to improve. This is very good because it sets pupils up well for reading for greater pleasure and accuracy in Years 4 to 6. The many visits by authors and poets and use of the library contribute much to all pupils' enthusiasm for reading and their development of skills. An excellent DVD has been produced to guide parents in how to help with reading. Pupils regularly write in a lively style about different books that they have read. The school places a very good emphasis on helping pupils to work out new words by linking letters and sounds together (phonics).

Since the last inspection, the school has improved standards and the quality of learning especially well. Attendance in the school is slightly below average due to a few parents taking long holidays abroad to visit their families. The school has rigorous systems in place to ensure that parents bring their children to school as regularly as possible.

Leaders have also worked successfully to improve the playground areas, although these spaces remain extremely cramped. The school has exciting plans to build an outside classroom and extend the gardening and sports provision still further. Overall, pupils are adopting healthy lifestyles well, with a good range of sports clubs and activities but the school wants pupils to

do more sports and outside activities, so that this aspect of the school's work might become outstanding in the future. In their drive to give pupils the best possible opportunities, they have gained an extra piece of land opposite the school. However, this is difficult to access easily. Leaders are exploring ways for the school to expand directly into the additional space and pupils are thrilled about this initiative.

Links with the wider community contribute greatly to the very exciting and exemplary creative arts work. This supports pupils' spiritual, social and cultural development exceptionally well. As a result, pupils develop their imagination and their ability to work with others and gain a superb sense of thrill when learning. Most importantly, they are given plenty of time to be creative. They regularly work with musicians, artists and dance and drama specialists. Pupils also enjoyed working with an architect when coming up with ideas for their new outside classroom. Governors promote creativity very well. They want pupils to thrive and enjoy learning.

The links between subjects enliven pupils' creative work and make learning meaningful and interesting. As a result, pupils behave and concentrate well. A good example of this is evident in the way that pupils have composed a musical piece entitled 'Zamani's Drum' with a skilled musician from The Guildhall School of Music. Following this, pupils develop their skills in English, art, geography and design work. They keenly take on responsibility and contribute much to the community, especially through their arts work. Pupils have purchased a piece of the Amazonian Rainforest, which demonstrates their very strong interest in caring for their planet.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children join the Nursery showing low skills and knowledge. They make good progress. By the end of the Foundation stage, their skills and knowledge, although improved, are lower than is usually expected. This is especially evident in their physical development and in their knowledge of the world around them. Teachers skilfully utilise halls, the main playground, the dedicated Nursery outside area and local parks and the new garden area to compensate for this. However, the lack of extensive outside learning area hampers better progress in these aspects. Children do well in gaining social skills and confidence. All staff work hard to help pupils to enrich their language and ability to communicate with others. The rigorous drive to improve pupils' understanding of letters and sounds is quickly helping them to read and write. As one parent said, 'My child has come on in leaps and bounds'. Opportunities for children to select activities for themselves are very good. The staff know the children very well and assess their learning in a skilled way.

What the school should do to improve further

- Pursue plans to develop the outside learning and play areas.

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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?	1
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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

18 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Charles Dickens Primary School, London, SE1 1QP

You may remember that a school inspector came to your school recently. Thank you for being so friendly. I am writing to let you know what I found out.

You go to an outstanding school. This means that many things are wonderful. Very little needs improving. Your headteacher and all of the other adults are working very hard to make the school as special as possible for you. Your teachers give you many exciting activities, which make learning fun. You work hard, behave well and make very good progress in learning new things. Clearly, you enjoy coming to school and you value the many clubs, activities and visits. You show very good respect for others and are developing fit and healthy lifestyles. I am especially impressed by your music work. You have many opportunities to become creative and this is often because the adults in the community work with you so well. I was delighted to see how teachers help you to understand your learning. They ask especially helpful questions and link subjects together very successfully. I could see that you are often thrilled and engrossed in the activities. For example, I loved your work on the 'Lady of Shallott' and 'Zamani's Drum'. Please keep up your very good reading work and excellent contributions to the community.

The adults care for you very well and help you to learn many important skills for the future. Your school is working well to help as many of you as possible to get to the level that we expect in English. Many of you do even better than this in mathematics and science.

I agree with you and your headteacher that the playground is very cramped. To make the school even better for you I would like the adults to continue with the exciting plans to enlarge and develop the outside learning and play areas.

Thank you for welcoming me to your school.

Yours sincerely,

Wendy Simmons

Lead Inspector