

Bow School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100965
Local Authority	Tower Hamlets
Inspection number	307541
Inspection dates	31 October –1 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Asyia Kazmi HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	648
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Charles Teale
Headteacher	Ms Beverly Dobson
Date of previous school inspection	3 November 2003
School address	Paton Close Fairfield Road London E3 2QD
Telephone number	020 8980 0118
Fax number	020 8980 1556

Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Bow School is a smaller than average, multicultural school, in an area where there are high levels of deprivation. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is nearly five times the national average. A very high proportion of students has learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the proportion of these students with a statement of special educational needs is very high. The rates of student mobility over the course of a year are higher than the norm.

This is a culturally diverse school; approximately 80% of the students are from minority ethnic backgrounds, predominant groups are from Bangladeshi or African heritage. Nearly 60% of students speak English as an additional language.

The school has achieved the Healthy School status. It has very recently applied for a mathematics and computing specialism and is awaiting a decision.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

'The school treats children as individuals, identifying potential, building upon the strengths and rewarding good work and discipline', a parent told inspectors.

Bow School is an improving school, it provides a satisfactory standard of education. The good leadership of the headteacher has provided a common sense of purpose and a strong vision that seeks to overcome the considerable barriers students face. This vision is shared by all staff and has resulted in the good personal development and well-being of students. The drive to improve behaviour, which is now good, has been very successful. The school is a harmonious place for students, and relationships between all members of this diverse school community are strong. Students enjoy their time at the school, and participate enthusiastically in the many activities on offer. They relish the opportunities afforded by the newly convened student council, which is at an early stage of enabling greater participation by students in the life of the school. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school.

There are now strong systems to monitor the work of the school, leading to more effective and precise management of departments by senior leaders. However, these systems are recent, previously have lacked rigour, and so did not facilitate intervention in a few subject areas quickly enough to avoid the drop in standards this year. Governors are supportive of the school, but do not sufficiently challenge senior leaders in order to bring about further improvement.

Middle leaders through departmental self-reviews are developing a better understanding of strengths and weaknesses in their departments. There are some very strong middle leaders, however leadership of a few departments is not as effective, the impact of which can be seen in the lower standards students achieve in these subjects, particularly information and communication technology (ICT), physical education (PE) and design and technology. Standards and achievement in mathematics also fell this year. Senior leaders are taking appropriate actions to address this.

Compared to national figures standards are well below average. Until recently, standards had been rapidly improving; however, in 2007 standards fell significantly in a few subjects. The progress students make between Years 7 and 11, although good in some subjects, is satisfactory overall.

There is some very strong teaching in the school; outstanding lessons are exemplified by well thought out use of resources and teaching activities which engage, enthuse and challenge all students. In these lessons, teachers' questioning and planning has a focus on developing literacy skills. The impact of this can be seen in the confident and articulate way students are able to communicate. However, much teaching remains that is satisfactory. In these lessons, insufficient use of information about what students already know means teaching is not well matched to the needs of all learners and is overly led by teachers so it inhibits students' independence and their progress. A well considered training and professional development programme exists in the school, which is helping to improve teaching.

The capacity of senior leaders and staff to make the school even better is good. This is demonstrated by the considerable impact the school has had in improving relationships and behaviour and ensuring students are ready for learning. It is also evident in the outstanding achievement in subjects such as English, religious education, art and design, and improved progress in science.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the quality of teaching and learning to the level of the best in the school.
- Develop the skills of middle leaders to ensure all are as effective as the best in the school in raising achievement.
- Ensure senior leaders and governors are rigorous in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school to raise standards and achievement.

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

Attainment on entry to the school is below average. Until 2006, standards by the end of Year 9 had been rapidly improving at a rate significantly faster than national. In 2006 standards in English and mathematics were above local authority averages but below national averages. In science, they were well below the national average.

Recently a significant number of students joined the school during Key Stage 3 from a neighbouring local authority. While the school was successful in integrating these students into the life of the school, it had a significant impact on standards. In 2007 standards fell in English and mathematics, they rose in science as a result of better use of data and more systematic monitoring of department practice. Students make outstanding progress in English. Progress in mathematics and science is satisfactory. The school analysis shows that students who start at Bow in Year 7 achieve higher standards than students who join later on.

Standards by the end of Key Stage 4 are well below average. All groups of students, including those learning English as an additional language and those who have learning difficulties or disabilities, make at least satisfactory progress. Standards increased significantly in English literature and in science due to focussed and systematic work to improve teaching and learning. However, standards fell substantially in ICT, PE and mathematics. Senior leaders have worked with middle leaders in identifying causes for the fall in standards and are putting in rigorous actions to address issues such as ensuring accuracy of teacher assessment, coursework and earlier targeting of underperforming students in these subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students enjoy school and report that they feel safe and well cared for. A new security system, the presence of a police officer based at the school, and a developing travel plan makes them feel secure in a harmonious community. Bullying and racial incidents are infrequent and dealt with effectively. Students behave very well in the vast majority of lessons and around the school. They are supportive and encouraging of each other. Attendance is above the national average. Senior leaders had identified internal truancy as an issue, as a result of targeted action and rigorous monitoring this has significantly declined.

Inspectors agree with students' view that one of the main strengths of the school is the strong community spirit. Students' develop good moral and social skills and the diversity of cultures in the school community is used well to enrich the curriculum. Spiritual development is satisfactory. An active school council, recently formed, makes important contributions to the

day-to-day school systems. It has improved environmental awareness by introducing and monitoring recycling in the school. Economic well-being is enhanced by good links with the commercial and business community; although the school is aware that basic skills, including in ICT, need improving. Students understand the benefits of leading healthy lifestyles, they eat healthy diets in school and high numbers participate in extra curricular sporting activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Good relationships between students and teachers mean the learning environment is very positive and the vast majority of students display good attitudes and behaviour in lessons. A students told inspectors, 'Teachers are very friendly, helpful and help us to learn because they give us lots of constructive criticism'.

Students make good progress in lessons where teachers plan tasks that are interactive, varied and matched to the needs of all pupils. In these lessons, teachers ensure students are clear about what they are going to learn and use questioning effectively to deepen students' understanding and check their learning. Senior leaders are aware that this is not always consistent across lessons. In a few lessons, the pace of learning is slow and teaching does not always demand the active involvement of all students. Most students know their levels and targets. In some subjects, such as English and art and design, teachers' comments very effectively help students to improve; however, although practice is improving, there is variability across subjects.

Senior leaders and subject leaders carry out regular lesson observations. This gives them an accurate view of the strengths and weaker areas of teaching and learning. The quality of teaching is improving as the school provides targeted professional support for weaker areas; this includes sharing the outstanding practice that exists in the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The enjoyment expressed by the great majority of students reflects the emphasis the curriculum places on personal development. The curriculum enables the majority of students to make at least satisfactory progress overall. It is supported by an innovative range of targeted intervention programmes aimed at improving students' literacy skills, the impact of this is seen in the very good progress they make in English. A range of after school and holiday clubs further support students' learning.

Statutory requirements are met and senior leaders have a clear vision for serving the needs of students better. They have broadened vocational pathways by establishing successful links with the local college. From September 2008, the Level 1 ICT diploma will be offered in school. Senior leaders have embarked on a consultation process with students to widen the limited range of options in Key Stage 4, including the introduction of drama and languages. English, art and design, citizenship and curriculum enrichment are strengths of the curriculum. Education for health and safety is good. The varied after-school clubs have a high take up and the wide range of activities contributes significantly to the development of students' academic, physical, creative and social skills. Students have excelled in representing their school locally, particularly in debating and public speaking competitions.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Whilst the prevailing caring culture of the school ensures that students receive good care and good support, the quality of academic guidance they receive is satisfactory. Arrangements for the safeguarding of students are robust and regularly reviewed. Health and safety is carefully managed. The school has been successful in putting in place effective systems to ensure that all groups of learners, including those who are looked after, those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language are fully supported and included. For example, there is an ongoing programme of targeted staff training resulting in the effective management of the very high proportion of students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and in the general improvement of teaching and learning. Consequently, students develop a mature attitude to learning and can flourish in a safe learning environment. Students are unanimous in acknowledging and praising the quality of relationships established by the staff. One boy said, 'We enjoy excellent relationships within appropriate boundaries.'

While students know their targets in relation to their personal development, they are not aware of what precisely they need to do to improve in all subjects. The good practice of showing students exactly how to improve their work, either through marking or through setting specific learning targets, is not consistent throughout the school. Provision for careers guidance is good and work-related skills are well developed through links with outside agencies. The school's thorough monitoring of school leavers' destination shows that most students choose to further their education.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management overall is satisfactory. The headteacher provides good leadership. With the support of senior leaders she has established a culture of high expectations and a powerful vision of what is possible for their students. This is seen in the progress students make in some subjects. However, senior leaders recognise that more needs to be done to ensure consistency of outcomes for students across subjects and over time. Governors are supportive of the school, but they do not challenge the school sufficiently. Systems have been put in place to help improve this through training and ensuring that governors each take responsibility for particular subjects.

Senior leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of the school well, but in a small number of areas they have not intervened early enough to impact on achievement. This has now been addressed through more rigorous line management which is ensuring that senior leaders have an accurate view of the work of subjects and hence drive improvements. Middle leaders are now reviewing the work of their department; this is giving them an accurate view of strengths and areas for development. However, the effectiveness of subject leaders in raising achievement is variable. The school's focus on improving teaching, through sharing good practice, coaching of teachers and regular monitoring are helping to drive up the quality of teaching.

The school works very well with external organisations to support students. Creative partnerships with business further enhance students' experiences, raise aspirations and achievement such

as the work with Arsenal Football Club to raise literacy and numeracy standards and the work with national strategies to raise achievement in science.

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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?	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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well 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	2
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 the 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

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?	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 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	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

13 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Bow School, London, E3 2QD

On behalf of the inspectors and myself who inspected your school recently, I would like to thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave us. We valued the discussions we had with you and I would like to take this opportunity to share our findings. It was clear from our discussions with you that you are proud of your school.

Your school provides you with a satisfactory standard of education with several strengths. Some of these are the strong community spirit in your school and how you work together, your good behaviour and attendance and the many clubs and activities you are engaged in. We were impressed with your achievement in some subjects such as English, art and design and religious education. The teaching you receive is satisfactory overall, many of your lessons are good.

Yours is an improving school and your headteacher provides good leadership. Senior leaders are strongly committed to improving further and are taking the right actions to do this. We have asked your school to do three things to improve even further:

- make sure that all teaching is as good as the best in your school
- make sure that all subject leaders work effectively to help you to achieve as well as you do in some subjects
- make sure that senior leaders and governors check all aspects of the school's work so that there aren't any areas where you do not excel.

You can help by ensuring you are fully involved in your lessons, your attendance continues to be good, and you continue to use forums such as the school council and the quality control cycle to feedback your views on how and where things can improve.

I wish you and your school every success.

Yours sincerely

Asyia Kazmi

Her Majesty's Inspector