

Garden Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132168
Local Authority	Merton
Inspection number	331572
Inspection dates	18–19 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Selwyn Ward

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	436
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	25
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Nick Matheson CBE
Headteacher	Ms Jan Peek
Date of previous school inspection	17 March 2008
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Abbotts Road Mitcham CR4 1JW
Telephone number	020 8679 3707
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This large school serves an ethnically diverse population. Almost half the pupils are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties is below average, but a very high proportion has a statement of special educational needs because the school incorporates a unit for pupils with speech, language and communication difficulties. Although an above average proportion of pupils join the school part-way through their primary education, rather than in the Early Years Foundation Stage, this mobility rate is much lower than it has been in the past. Staff turnover has also been high. The school offers a range of extended services through the Ivy Gardens Children's Centre, although this is currently separately managed and has been separately inspected. When the school was last inspected, it was given a notice to improve because of very low standards and achievement in Key Stage 2. Although previously in the school on a temporary basis, the headteacher was formally appointed in January 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. Garden Primary provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. As a parent explained, 'The school has improved immensely over the past 18 months. This we attribute to strong leadership'. Although there remain gaps in the leadership team because some posts rely on temporary staff, middle managers are making a much more effective contribution than before in steering their subjects. Their monitoring of pupils' progress and of the quality of the school's provision has improved, and this has helped to drive the process of change for the better.

The headteacher and other school leaders have a very realistic picture of how well the school is doing. They point with pride to how far the school has come since its last inspection but they very readily acknowledge that it still has further to go. In some classes, pupils have too little recorded work to show for their efforts and work has too many gaps or remains unfinished. This is especially the case in science. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, so that pupils now make satisfactory progress. Teachers have a better understanding of the progress of each of the pupils in their classes, although not all make enough use of this information to match work to pupils' very different capabilities. Pupils new to learning English are given appropriate support so that they make similar progress to the others in their classes. The same is true for pupils who have learning difficulties, including those in the unit. Pupils who join the school with challenging behaviour are managed well. However, not all teachers ensure that all pupils listen and work with concentration. Sometimes a small minority of pupils make slower progress than they should. This is because they are quietly uninvolved, and the low-level misbehaviour and off-task chatter of some of the younger pupils detracts from their learning. Nonetheless, pupils grow in confidence and self-esteem as they move up the school. They very much enjoy school and are increasingly keen to learn. Their good personal development is also very evident in the harmonious relationships between pupils from diverse backgrounds.

Although pupils' achievement is satisfactory, standards are below average. This is due to the legacy of past underachievement which has meant pupils are moving forward from a low base. School leaders are very aware of the fact that progress needs to be accelerated further in order for pupils to catch up on previously lost ground. They have, understandably, given priority to filling gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding in English and mathematics, so that science has taken a lower priority over the past 18 months. This means that, although the school succeeded in substantially narrowing the gap behind national averages in 2008, standards in science remained low. Children are now getting off to a faster start in the Early Years Foundation Stage so that they are now joining Year 1 having attained the skills expected for their age.

In the past, teachers' planning has not ensured sufficient continuity as pupils move up the school. That meant that pupils underachieved because they were not helped sufficiently to build on what they had learnt before. This has changed. The curriculum now satisfactorily meets the pupils' needs. Parents voice particular praise for the way in which the school looks after their children. A parent of a pupil new to learning English was pleased that, 'My son at school feels safe and he has new and good friends'. Marking generally gives pupils helpful guidance but the targets that pupils have are not focused enough to help them improve their work. Pupils often have a long list of targets stuck in the front of their books and they have no idea which ones they should be concentrating on.

The success that school leaders have had in tackling the issues from the last inspection and the acuity of their school self-evaluation show Garden Primary's good capacity for continued improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children join the Nursery with capabilities below those expected for their ages, especially in their communication and language skills. Many are at a very early stage of learning English as an additional language. The children make good progress, so that they now attain broadly average standards by the end of the Reception Year; an improvement since the last inspection. Parents recognise that provision is well run and that 'the staff have made many positive changes'. One parent explained how her son has 'quickly started to master his numbers, colours and letters. He sings his ABC song with confidence'. Adults are careful to explain new vocabulary and develop children's speaking and listening skills. All six areas of learning are connected in an exciting and vibrant learning environment, both inside and out. For example, children excitedly entered the 'space shuttle' to carry out their emergent writing skills. Children are encouraged to develop their independence through activities they choose themselves. Children's welfare is very well promoted. The children are happy and they learn to work cooperatively with each other. However, on the occasions when they are given uninteresting tasks to do in Reception, they misbehave and their progress slows.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all pupils are attentive and fully involved in lessons and that they are set work that is carefully matched to their different abilities.
- Identify and fill gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding in science and ensure that all pupils have good quality and quantity of written and recorded work to show for their efforts in this and other subjects.
- Give pupils sharper and more specific targets so that teachers and pupils all know what they need to focus on to move learning on.

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

Pupils are making faster progress than at the time of the last inspection and their achievement is satisfactory. Improvement has been most marked in the Year 6 tests, but standards are below average because pupils are still catching up on gaps from previous years when they underachieved. This is especially the case in science, which has hitherto been given less priority than English and mathematics. In the last inspection, pupils learning English as an additional language did less well than they should because they were not given the support they needed. That shortcoming has been resolved, so that these pupils now do at least as well as the others in their class. Some of the pupils new to learning English make very rapid progress. The progress that pupils make in their key literacy and numeracy skills prepares them satisfactorily for the next stage of their education and for future life.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' enjoyment of school is evident in their positive attitude in lessons. Pupils take an increasingly active role in the school, including through a council that meets weekly. They help to play a part in the local community through various fundraising activities, particularly in support for aspiring local sportspeople. Relationships throughout the school are good and one of the striking features of the school is how well the children from different backgrounds work and play together. Pupils feel very safe in school and express confidence that any minor instances of bullying are quickly dealt with. Behaviour is satisfactory rather than good, however, because, in a small number of classes, pupils are slow to settle and are easily distracted by some silly behaviour and off-task chatter. Attendance is satisfactory, and it has improved because pupils are enthusiastic about winning the weekly trophy for the best class attendance. The school has been awarded Healthy School status and this reflects the pupils' enthusiasm for keeping healthy through regular exercise and eating sensibly.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Improvements in teaching and learning have helped to increase the rate of progress that pupils make in lessons but there remain inconsistencies. Teachers now make more effective use of assessment information so that they know how well their pupils are doing. However, they do not always make full use of this information in planning their lessons. Although there is often now more challenge for the more able pupils, there are still too many lessons where pupils with very widely different capabilities are all expected to do essentially the same work. That can mean work is too easy for some. Those for whom it is too difficult can fail to complete work. Teachers know and get on well with their pupils. In most classes, behaviour is managed well, including that of pupils who have behavioural difficulties. Pupils are well motivated so that the great majority participate with enthusiasm. Not enough emphasis, however, is placed on the teaching skills needed to reach the pupils who are hardest to teach. Too often, even when others are learning well, a small number of pupils are quietly inattentive. Generally, good use is made of teaching assistants, particularly to help those at an early stage of learning English, children based in the unit and other pupils who have learning difficulties. Sometimes, however, teaching assistants are underutilised in the parts of lessons when the teacher is talking to the whole class.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

School leaders identified that, in the past, the curriculum was not planned with sufficient care to enable pupils to steadily build on what they had learnt before, especially as they moved up the school each year. Changes have been made to tackle this shortcoming and to make the curriculum more interesting and exciting for the pupils, including through activity weeks that focus on investigation and discovery in science. Some of the changes are too recent to have had a significant impact on standards but their benefits are already evident in pupils' greater enthusiasm for learning. Pupils especially enjoy the opportunities they have to learn through practical activities and, as a parent noted, 'Homework tasks allow the children to develop both literacy and number skills but still have fun'. Priority has been given to identifying gaps in

pupils' knowledge and understanding in English and mathematics. In science, scheduled for a focus in the coming year, gaps remain. This is a subject where some pupils' books show too little recorded work and work that is incomplete. Pupils greatly appreciate the wide range of clubs that enable them to pursue many different sports and other out-of-school activities. The older pupils also enjoy the opportunity they now have to learn German.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Child protection, safety and safeguarding systems are rigorous and promote a safe and supportive learning environment. Strong links with outside agencies ensure that the most vulnerable pupils, including those in the unit, benefit from well-targeted support. Pupils' academic progress is now more carefully tracked in order to ensure that they make the progress they should. Where a pupil is identified as falling behind, they are given extra help. Work is regularly marked, giving pupils some guidance on how they might improve, but the quality of this marking is not consistent throughout the school. Pupils have targets for improvement but these are not specific enough to show pupils where they need to focus their efforts. Pupils have very long lists of targets pasted in the front of their exercise books. Although teachers mark off when a pupil has achieved one of the targets, these are undated and so do not give the pupils or the teachers themselves a clear enough indication of progress. The long lists leave pupils confused about what their targets are.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Parents appreciate that the headteacher has achieved much in driving forward the many improvements in the school since the last inspection. The headteacher is the first to point out, though, that the school still has further to go. Some of the leadership team are only newly in post and some are only in role temporarily while covering maternity leave. The process of improvement has been gradual rather than transformational, as the headteacher, leaders and governors have moulded the staff into an increasingly effective team. Monitoring has given leaders a very accurate picture of how well each pupil is doing and of how learning can be accelerated so that pupils catch up on previously lost ground and standards rise. There is scope, however, for greater rigour from leaders in following up identified points for development to ensure that improvements are fully embedded, for example in the way staff make use of assessment information to plan lessons matched to pupils' different abilities. Much effort has been made to reduce the disadvantages of working in two very separate buildings, and the generous space is put to good use. Governors have a clear understanding of what is happening in the school. They use their meetings not only to support school leaders but also to offer constructive challenge. The school has been a focus for bringing the community together, not least through the children's centre which provides courses for local people and support for families. However, activities further afield are more limited and some are still at an early stage. For example, links with a school in Germany are too recent to have had much impact on the pupils.

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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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

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	3
The behaviour of learners	3
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 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	2
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	2
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**

28 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Garden Primary School, Mitcham, CR4 1JW

Thank you for making us so welcome when we came to visit your school. We could see how much Garden has improved over the past year. It is providing you with a satisfactory education and it no longer needs a notice to improve. That doesn't mean everything is perfect, of course. It is good that your headteacher and the governors have such a sharp picture of how the school is doing and of where further improvements are needed.

The children in the Nursery and Reception classes are making good progress but standards are still below average higher up in the school. Although you are now making reasonable progress in lessons, some of you still have further to go to catch up from the period when you were not doing as well as you should. We have asked the school to help you to make even faster progress by making sure that work is better matched to your different abilities. Where you all do the same work in lessons, it is often too easy for some of you and too difficult for others. Some of you who find the work too hard do not always write or record enough in lessons. We noticed this particularly in some of your science books, where some of you still have gaps in what you should have learnt in the past. School leaders have concentrated so far on improving English and mathematics, and we have asked them to look now at also making sure you all do as well as you should in science.

We were pleased to see how well you all get on together and how much you enjoy the clubs and the interesting things you get to do in class. Behaviour in most lessons is good, but it is let down by some of you sometimes paying less attention than you should. We have asked staff to make sure that every one of you is fully involved in lessons. This is something you can help with too by doing your very best to listen hard and join in. Staff take good care of you, which is why you feel so safe and happy at school. Much of the marking is helping you to improve your work, but we could see that many of you are confused by the long list of targets that you have in your books. We have asked teachers to make these more specific so that you each know what you most need to focus on to improve your work. Of course, this is again something that you can help with by making sure that you know your targets and are working as hard as you can to achieve them.

Best wishes for the future.

Yours faithfully

Selwyn Ward

Lead Inspector