

The Alton School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101033
Local Authority	Wandsworth
Inspection number	354932
Inspection dates	2–3 December 2010
Reporting inspector	Jane Chesterfield

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	217
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Carpenter
Headteacher	Ruth Hudson
Date of previous school inspection	12 February 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They visited 12 lessons taught by 12 teachers. They held meetings with pupils, staff and members of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at school policies and documentation, safeguarding records, pupils' work, assessment data, monitoring records, strategic planning and the minutes of governing body meetings. Questionnaires completed by staff, pupils and 21 parents and carers were analysed.

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

- The current picture of attainment and progress across the school, particularly for boys.
- How well teachers meet the needs of all pupils in their classes, particularly in their marking and guidance.
- How well leaders at all levels are supporting and improving teaching and learning.
- How effectively the Early Years Foundation Stage promotes children's independence and literacy skills.

Information about the school

The Alton School is a smaller than average primary school, and serves an estate of social housing in inner London. Three-quarters of the pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds and almost half are learning English as an additional language. These figures are high compared with the national picture. Over half of the pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals, which is also high. The school has a unit on site, known as the Resource Base, for 20 pupils with moderate learning difficulties, and 18 places are currently filled. As a result, the overall proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the proportion who have a statement of special educational needs are high. The school offers Early Years Foundation Stage provision in its Nursery and Reception classes. Out-of-school care is available on the premises, but this is run by a private provider and subject to a separate inspection. The school has gained Healthy Schools status.

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

The Alton School is a good school which has improved considerably since its last inspection. Pupils get a good start to their education, make good progress and achieve well throughout the school. They are happy at school and enjoy what it offers them. One commented, 'We're better taught now and the school is better managed than before.' Another said simply, 'We have fun at school.'

Thanks to the good pastoral care, pupils feel safe at school and are confident about turning to adults if they have a problem. They have a clear understanding of right and wrong, and are keen to take on responsibility around the school. They get on well with one another, and respect others from different backgrounds. In the recent past, pupils' attendance has been low, often because of holidays and other time off taken in term-time. The school has worked closely with parents and carers to overcome this, and managed to reach average levels of attendance last year. However, the school has recognised that the improvements are fragile and not yet fully embedded.

There has been a rising picture of attainment throughout the school since the last inspection. Improvements in standards are now apparent in Key Stage 2, where pupils achieved well to reach broadly average standards in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 6 this summer. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage also make good progress from their low starting points. This summer the number of children who reached the levels expected for their age group by the end of Reception represented a marked improvement on previous years. This good progress continues in Key Stage 1.

The school has been successful in raising the achievement of boys, so that most are now doing as well as girls in literacy and numeracy. The focus in recent years on giving pupils a good grounding in these basic skills has been effective. It has rightly identified making the curriculum more stimulating and creative as the next stage in this process by extending the links between different subjects and helping pupils to use their skills in different situations. This particularly applies in the Early Years Foundation Stage, where the activities available to children do not always encourage them to be independent and the surroundings do not always boost their literacy skills. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are learning English as an additional language are supported effectively so they make good progress against challenging targets. Pupils in the Resource Base often make outstanding progress as a result of the high quality support they receive.

The headteacher and senior leadership team give the school excellent direction. Staff who responded to the questionnaire commented repeatedly on the sense of teamwork and purpose in the school. Senior leaders have introduced very effective systems for monitoring teaching and tracking progress, and this has led to an improvement in the quality of teaching and assessment. These are now consistently good, resulting in the

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improved achievement of pupils. Senior leaders and the governing body have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and school development planning identifies the most important priorities for the future. This means that the school has a good capacity for further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Work with parents and carers to maintain and build upon the recent improvements in attendance, particularly for the younger pupils.
- Create more planned links between subjects to enable pupils to practise and consolidate their skills in different situations.
- Improve the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - increasing the opportunities for independent learning and exploration
 - ensuring that the written word is promoted wherever possible.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

The work seen in lessons and in pupils' books confirms that attainment is broadly average by the end of Key Stage 2, and that pupils are making good progress throughout the school. Pupils have positive attitudes and are ready and willing to learn. In a Year 6 literacy lesson, for example, pupils were totally engrossed in the teacher's introduction, and produced beautifully presented written work. In the Resource Base too, pupils showed that they were able to listen well and concentrate on their learning, because the teaching and support were so well matched to their needs. Pupils show a good capacity for learning independently and using their initiative. In a Year 2 numeracy lesson, for example, one group of pupils applied themselves very diligently to making up their own word problems, while others persevered for long periods with solving problems set by the teacher. Boys across the school now enjoy learning as much as girls do.

Pupils like coming to school, and this is evident in their improved attendance. They behave well in class and around the school. Their behaviour in lessons is often outstanding if they are motivated by and absorbed in their work, although this is not always the case if tasks do not hold their attention well enough. At morning breaks during the inspection, staff organised snowball fights for all the pupils in the playground, and the pupils' behaviour here was excellent. They managed to have great fun without compromising the safety of themselves or others. Pupils are happy to take on responsibility in school. The pupil leadership team and the school council work closely with senior leaders to improve the life of the school, for example in making the decisions on how to spend the library budget this year. Pupils have fewer opportunities to be active in the local community. They show a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and of how to lead a healthy lifestyle, as recognised by the school gaining Healthy Schools status. They are satisfactorily prepared for moving on to secondary school and later life.

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Most teaching is now good and some is outstanding, especially for older pupils and in the Resource Base. Teachers adopt a consistent approach to ensuring good learning across the school. They have high expectations of their pupils and give them plenty of challenge. They match work well to pupils' different needs and make good use of other staff to support pupils of different abilities. Modern technology, such as the interactive whiteboard and the visualiser, is used particularly well to bring teaching and learning to life. Teachers regularly check pupils' understanding in lessons and use assessment information skilfully to plan for the next steps in pupils' learning. Marking is of a very high and consistent quality throughout the school, so that pupils have a good insight into what they need to do next to improve their work.

Pupils enjoy a well-balanced curriculum which has focused on literacy and numeracy in order to drive up standards. Senior staff have identified that pupils do not always have the opportunity to use their various skills for different purposes, and subject leaders are therefore planning to make greater links between the subjects to motivate and inspire pupils further in their learning. There is a good range of sporting, cultural and other activities beyond lessons, and the school makes very effective use of the art galleries and museums of London to give pupils new and exciting experiences. The quality of care, support and guidance for pupils is good. They are kept safe at all times, and their individual needs are well supported. The learning mentor works closely with pupils and

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their parents and carers to help them overcome any barriers to learning, and the school accesses a wide range of support services to provide the necessary help for pupils whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable.

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	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and senior leaders are committed to giving pupils the best possible start to their education. They have been particularly successful in establishing very clear structures for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school, so that strengths can be recognised and areas of weakness tackled. Subject leaders carry out their roles well, and have had a positive impact on improvement in their areas. The effective governing body is kept well informed and provides the school with the right balance of challenge and support. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are rigorous. Required checks on adults who come into contact with pupils are carried out, and risk assessments are thorough. Procedures for child protection are stringent, and staff training is up to date.

The school works effectively to promote equality of opportunity and tackle discrimination, and is successfully reducing the gender gap between boys and girls. It tracks the performance of different groups of pupils carefully to ensure that any dips in progress can be swiftly addressed. The school does its best to support parents and carers, for example by providing adult education and gym facilities on site, and encourages them to become involved in their children's learning. It is beginning to have success in working with parents and carers to improve their children's attendance. Partnerships are used well to give pupils opportunities they might not otherwise experience, and to provide specialist support for those with particular needs. The school makes a good contribution to community cohesion. In particular, its links with schools elsewhere in the country and abroad help pupils to understand the different circumstances in which other children live and learn.

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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	3
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	2
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 make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Relationships between adults and children are very supportive, and consequently children feel safe and happy. They are friendly and lively, but when they arrive in Nursery they are often very dependent on adults and cautious about exploring activities on their own. Adults work well with the children, promoting their speaking and listening skills and their vocabulary. However, the activities designed for children to work on independently are not always exciting enough to entice the children to try them out. In the Reception class, opportunities for independent learning are better. The 'Christmas office', for example, provided an excellent area for children to try out their creative, literacy and mathematical skills as they measured paper to wrap presents and wrote out gift tags to stick on them. They showed great application and perseverance as they did so. The Reception class is a word-rich environment, where children are able to make the link between words and objects and try to write for a purpose. In the Nursery class, opportunities for children to do this are sometimes missed.

The Early Years Foundation Stage is well led. Assessment procedures are good, and children's work is very carefully annotated in order to record how well children are doing. Information from staff observations is used well to inform teachers' planning for future sessions. Children are well cared for, and staff work hard to form positive relationships with their parents and carers. Senior leaders have a good understanding of the strengths of the provision and know what needs to be done to improve it further.

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These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers responding to the questionnaire was well below the national average for primary schools, and so it is difficult to determine whether the views expressed are representative of the parent and carer community as a whole. Most who did respond are satisfied with the school, and any negative responses represent very small numbers of parents and carers. A few felt that the school does not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour or help their child to have a healthy lifestyle. Inspectors investigated these concerns but judged that staff throughout the school manage pupils' behaviour uniformly well, and pupils have a good understanding of how to live a healthy lifestyle, and the school has gained an award for its promotion of this.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Alton 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 21 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 213 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	11	52	8	38	2	10	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	15	71	6	29	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	9	43	12	57	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	12	57	9	43	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	11	52	10	48	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	7	33	11	52	1	5	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	8	38	9	43	3	14	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)	9	43	8	38	2	10	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	8	38	12	57	1	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	9	43	8	38	4	19	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	8	38	11	52	1	5	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	7	33	10	48	0	0	1	5
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	8	38	13	62	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 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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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 pupils' 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.



6 December 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Alton School, London SW15 4PD

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school in the snow recently, and for helping us with the inspection. We really enjoyed talking to you, looking at your work and sharing your lessons.

We found that The Alton School is doing well and giving you a good start to your education. These are just some of the things we liked about your school.

- You enjoy being at school and your attendance has really improved over the last year.
- You are making good progress in your lessons, because you are well taught.
- You behave well we were particularly impressed with how sensible you were during the snowball fight.
- You have good relationships with one another and your teachers, and you are respectful of one another's different backgrounds.
- You feel safe at school and you are well cared for, especially those of you in the Resource Base.
- The senior leaders are doing a good job and know how to make the school even better.

To help the school improve further, this is what we have asked the staff to do:

- make sure that your attendance continues to improve
- make your learning even more fun by increasing the links between different subjects
- give all the children in the Nursery and Reception classes more exciting things to do each day.

You can help by making sure that you only miss school if you are ill, and by asking your parents and carers not to keep you off school at any other time.

Yours sincerely

Jane Chesterfield

Lead inspector

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