

Alton Park Junior School

Alton Park Road, Clacton-on-Sea, CO15 1DL

Inspection dates 26–27 September 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Teaching is not consistently good. Senior leaders and middle managers are working together with rising success to eliminate poor teaching.
- Improvements in teaching put in place by the new headteacher are raising achievement levels but have not yet had full impact.
- Progress in English is stronger than in mathematics but progress rates are rising in both subjects.
- Opportunities for pupils to develop their learning independently are sometimes limited because teachers do not give pupils enough time to work on their own.
- Links with parents and carers are growing as the school seeks to involve them more closely in helping to advance learning but are not yet well developed.
- Attendance rates are low but rising.
- Behaviour is improving and more consistent across the school.
- Governors are supportive of the school but the challenge they offer is at an early stage of development.

The school has the following strengths

- Senior leaders and managers are focused on improving achievement and teaching, and there is a clear trend of rising standards.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a growing strength of the school.
- Pupils are well supported through a wide range of intervention strategies and school partnerships.
- Pupils contribute effectively through their work on the school council and their increased focus on doing their best.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed teaching throughout the school. They visited 23 lessons taught by 18 teachers.
- They held meetings with three members of the governing body, staff, a representative from the local authority and groups of pupils.
- Inspectors took account of the 10 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning and carrying out the inspection and also looked at the school's own record of parent surveys.
- They observed the school's work and looked at pupils' books, the school's improvement plan, assessment and tracking data, monitoring and self-evaluation procedures, a range of policies and procedures and arrangements for safeguarding.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read.

Inspection team

Michael Sutherland-Harper, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Matthew Klimcke	Additional inspector
Concetta Caruana	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than average.
- The very large majority of the pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and of those for whom English is an additional language are below the national average.
- The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is significantly above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium is significantly above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The headteacher took up his post full-time in January 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - sharing best practice in teaching and learning, using strengths within the school and the school's locality
 - having higher expectations of greater progress rates
 - increasing opportunities for pupils to develop key skills of independence, allowing them to be more responsible for their own learning
 - ensuring that the balance between teachers' input and pupils' working allows greater time for pupils to develop their learning
 - reviewing the use of teaching assistants across the school.
- Raise standards across the school by:
 - increasing the focus on key skills such as problem solving in mathematics and enriching language use in English
 - ensuring that target sheets are consistently and regularly completed with pupils' involvement
 - ensuring that teachers use their knowledge of pupils' prior learning in order to plan tasks that are more closely matched to their needs
 - developing links with parents and carers further so that they can assist more effectively in the learning process.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - making sure that teachers take full responsibility for the progress their pupils make and can demonstrate where value has been added
 - increasing the challenge offered by the governing body by encouraging governors to find out more for themselves
 - ensuring that the governing body takes teachers' performance into account when considering pay increases.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Pupils' achievement requires further improvement. Pupils enter the school with knowledge and skills below those expected for their age. Until relatively recently, standards were low. They have begun to improve but pupils' current progress is not yet sufficiently consistent to be judged good.
- Progress rates rose closer to national levels in 2011 and continued this upward trend for Year 6 and other year groups in 2012. The school's predictions for 2013 and beyond, based on accurate assessment data, show further improvement in both English and mathematics in some cases but not yet consistently to above national expectations. Current data show an on-going trend of improvement. Close links with the neighbouring infant school now ensure consistent monitoring and assessment procedures.
- Pupils make expected progress in reading. They show some good skills in linking sounds and letters when they encounter unfamiliar words. Pupils read regularly at home but teachers sometimes choose books for them rather than letting pupils develop their own interests. Pupils show reasonable skills in comprehension and in predicting how the story may turn out. Ability to use more imaginative language and vocabulary in pupils' speaking and writing about what they have read is a current focus for further development.
- More focused interventions and support, such as mathematics booster sessions, are beginning to eliminate any possible underachievement. Pupils have clear target sheets in their books, showing their present level and what is required to improve, but are not consistently asked to self-assess progress towards those targets.
- Pupils now make steadier progress in the development of skills in literacy. The school is focusing on driving up mathematical standards and skills in problem solving through successful initiatives like small-group work. Recent data confirm some improvement in this area with support from external consultants and the local authority.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are closely tracked to ensure progress is similar to that of their peers. Sharper interventions and more rigorous tracking are increasing the number of these pupils making more than two levels progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils for whom English is an additional language or who are from minority ethnic groups make generally better progress than their peers and gaps in standards are now closing. The school has carefully examined the ways in which it applies the pupil premium to help raise standards. As a result of small, precisely targeted intervention groups, one-to-one support and initiatives like the Easter and Saturday schools, the performance of all groups, including those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, is now improving.
- Pupils say they enjoy school. They are starting to participate more in lessons and to engage with learning because more approaches link imaginative work to their own experiences. As a result, pupils are working increasingly well with each other and with adults. They are making more use of information and communication technology (ICT), which allows pupils to extend their skills and understanding, supplemented by clubs, visits and visitors.
- Expectations of pupils' progress vary in lessons. An over-emphasis on adult-led activities at present means pupils cannot sometimes reach the high levels they should attain. The school is at an early stage of working to develop pupils' skills and confidence in taking their own learning forward independently.

The quality of teaching**requires improvement**

- The proportion of good teaching is increasing but the overall quality is inconsistent in promoting progress and allowing pupils to reach higher standards. Teaching is strongest in the upper school and weaker in Years 3 and 4. Sharing of best practice to ensure consistently good teaching is at an early stage.
- The large majority of the very few parents and carers replying to the online Parent View say their children are well taught. Pupils agree but would like to know more about their different subjects. Inspectors found lessons are sometimes teacher-dominated with too much reinforcement of skills before pupils are allowed to work independently.
- Teachers have secure subject knowledge. Some teachers use questions well to evaluate pupils' learning but higher order questions asking for reasons are less frequent. In the best lessons, as in a Year 6 ICT class, teachers are prepared to take risks so pupils become self-sufficient learners, helping to develop each other's thinking, but too often such opportunities are missed.
- Teachers do not always use classroom assistants to best effect, so that learning in some areas progresses less swiftly than elsewhere.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a growing school strength in line with the headteacher's philosophy that part of the raising of standards is creating a culture of expectations, values and respect. The school increasingly takes pupils to places they have never been before in terms of visits chosen imaginatively to broaden their outlooks. In a good Year 4 literacy lesson, pupils were encouraged to imagine how to present Greece as a magical place.
- The school is improving its assessment procedures. Work is regularly marked but comments indicating next steps towards targets are more common in literacy than in mathematics. Pupils have inconsistent opportunities to assess their own work. Presentation is variable.
- Lessons are carefully planned but planning concentrates more on the teacher's actions than on expectations of pupils. Lessons are not always matched to pupils' changing learning needs as they progress. Support systems have been refined and are more effective in ensuring that pupils, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs or who are potentially vulnerable, can make even faster progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils**requires improvement**

- The school has clear systems and policies in place to ensure that behaviour is improving and is always acceptable. Pupils' relationships with each other and adults now facilitate learning. When asked in a meeting whether behaviour was getting better, pupils responded with a resounding 'definitely'.
- Pupils want to learn and are usually on task but, where expectations are low and materials do not engage pupils, low-level disruption occurs and behaviour deteriorates. Over-long teacher talk means pupils sometimes drift off task.
- Pupils say they feel safe and that there is always an adult to whom they can talk. Issues are resolved but pupils feel this is done more quickly in some cases than in others. Close supervision outside is improving behaviour at breaks and lunchtime.
- Adults manage behaviour securely, including for pupils who are potentially vulnerable, but expectations vary between classes. Transition arrangements into the school are effective due to increasingly close collaboration with the neighbouring infant school.

- Intervention strategies and partnerships are effective in ensuring that pupils develop cooperative behaviour, confidence and social skills so that school becomes a positive place to be at all times.
- Pupils know how to stay safe. They welcome the opportunity to help each other that comes with school council membership and are keen to make their school better. Pupils understand the different forms of bullying, including name-calling and homophobic bullying. They approve of the school's recently introduced 'Good to be Green' approach to behaviour and contributed by insisting that pupils misbehaving were not given too many chances before the application of sanctions.
- Attendance is low but improving as a result of clearer school approaches and work with parents and carers to emphasise the importance of coming to school. Persistent absence has been reduced.
- Parents and carers consider that behaviour is improving in and around the school. School surveys show that parents and carers feel their children are safe in school and increasingly well cared for.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The new headteacher has focused rigorously on raising achievement, standards, teaching and learning. The new systems, supported by senior leaders, staff and the governing body, are now leading to more rapid improvement in these areas and are realising the shared aim of making the school a place where children learn to succeed.
- A wider core group, including heads of year and subject leaders, now meets monthly to ensure standards continue to rise at their present rate through clear expectations, though the impact of this is not yet consistent.
- Middle managers are using data more rigorously to analyse pupils' progress, prioritise interventions and hold teachers to account. Further steps put in place, and now having an impact, include a closer focus on planning and training needs, and increased work scrutiny to ensure pupils' presentation and the quality of work remain as high as now expected. Planning has been further refined as a result of weekly tracking and close attention to improving attainment for any pupils who may be experiencing difficulties with current concepts in mathematics or literacy.
- Staff share the headteacher's determination to improve. They understand that movement to upper pay scales depends on results, that they are accountable in performance management for class progress, that there is still some way to go to produce consistency and that they need to audit their skills accurately against the new Teachers' Standards.
- The broad, balanced curriculum has been successfully modified since January to make subjects more interesting and engage pupils more with learning. Staff are starting to discuss with pupils how topics are delivered so children feel they are contributing more to what they learn.
- The safeguarding of pupils meets requirements. Staff are appropriately trained and systems are in place to ensure effective child protection procedures.
- Communication with parents and carers now makes expectations clear. More families come into school for shared learning experiences and celebration of achievement at Thursday assemblies but work remains to be done to enable parents and carers to help in their children's learning at home.

- The local authority provides effective support for the school's drive to raise standards and the quality of teaching and learning.
- The school has capacity to improve because self-evaluation is accurate, there is a clear focus on raised standards and the quality of teaching is improving because all areas are now regularly and closely reviewed.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- offers good local knowledge and supports the school through regular visits but is at an early stage of challenging the school
- uses pupil premium funding thoughtfully to meet the needs of pupils whose circumstances might make them potentially vulnerable
- is applying the new performance management procedures in order to reach the high standards to which it aspires.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	114721
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	401461

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	420
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Bolton
Headteacher	Barry Hawes
Date of previous school inspection	14 September 2009
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