

Parsons Down Junior School

Hérons Way, Thatcham, RG19 3SR

Inspection dates 14–15 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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

- The rate of pupils' progress in English and mathematics has been uneven over time so that, overall, pupils' achievement is no better than expected.
- Lower attaining readers do not make enough progress in gaining basic skills.
- The checks that school leaders make on a regular basis are not fully effective because they focus on whether or not actions are completed or new policies implemented, rather than gauging the impact these have on raising standards.
- A few parents and a very few staff and pupils raised concerns about the management of pupils' behaviour.
- The quality of teaching requires improvement because it is too variable across the school.
- The checklists that teachers consistently provide for pupils to help them gauge their success are not fully effective because, although they list the tasks that must be completed, they do not set out what pupils must include to ensure their work reaches a good standard.
- The varied activities that teachers provide for pupils of differing abilities are not designed well enough to help pupils improve their learning sufficiently.
- Teachers do not act quickly enough to adapt work when pupils find tasks too easy or too difficult.
- The governing body asks penetrating questions about areas of concern at its meetings, but is too ready to accept explanations that do not promote rapid and sustained improvement.

The school has the following strengths

- School leaders have tackled variation in pupils' achievement so that standards are rising throughout the school, particularly in writing, and for pupils in receipt of the pupil premium grant.
- The newly defined leadership roles of the federation have resulted in greater drive and ambition to improve the school.
- Performance management arrangements are robust and have led to higher achievement for pupils right across the school.
- Pupils are engaged and motivated by the curriculum; they thoroughly enjoy topic work, and take pride in their responsibility for deciding some things they would like to find out in these subjects.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 25 lessons, 13 of which were joint observations with the executive headteacher or a deputy headteacher. In addition, the inspectors made a number of other short visits to lessons, some in partnership with the executive headteacher.
- Meetings were held with pupils, three governors, a local authority representative and school staff including leaders in charge of subjects. In addition, some pupils read to inspectors.
- The inspectors took account of the 29 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection and spoke to some parents before school.
- The inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a number of documents, including the school's own information on pupils' current progress, planning and monitoring documentation, records relating to behaviour and attendance and safeguarding records.

Inspection team

Liz Kounnou, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Shelley Davies

Additional Inspector

Trevor Neat

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is about the same size as an average primary school.
- The school was federated with Parsons Down Infant School on 4 February 2013, an executive headteacher is responsible for the leadership of both schools, and there have been several changes to staffing and leadership roles since the last inspection. A new governing body has been formed with responsibility for both schools. The federation is called the Parsons Down Partnership.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below average. The pupil premium provides additional funding for looked after children, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and pupils who have a parent in the armed services.
- The proportion of pupils who are of minority ethnic heritage is lower than average, and very few speaks English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action, through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average. This group mainly has moderate learning difficulties, behaviour, emotional and social difficulties or speech, language and communication needs.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better by:
 - providing clearer guidance for pupils in lessons so that they know precisely how to succeed and improve their work
 - making sure that teachers adapt their lessons promptly when they notice that pupils find work too easy or too difficult
 - making sure that the different activities teachers provide meet the needs of all pupils and help them reach the next steps in learning.
- Increase the impact of school leaders on raising achievement, particularly in reading, by:
 - making sure that leaders at all levels check more robustly the difference that new initiatives have on improving learning for all pupils
 - providing clearer support and guidance for lower attaining readers, and their parents and carers, so that they know how to improve their reading skills.
- Address the few concerns that parents, staff and pupils raise about the management of pupils' behaviour by making sure that school leaders identify any patterns of inappropriate behaviour that occur and respond to these in a consistent way.
- Improve the effectiveness of the newly formed governing body by:
 - making sure that the challenging questions governors ask in meetings are followed up persistently so that school improvement is rapid and sustained.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Pupils' achievement requires improvement because although there is a rising trend in pupils' attainment and progress, this is not yet fully embedded and has not been established for long enough to secure good achievement for all. The progress of pupils from all ability groups has varied from year to year. Some pupils of all abilities do well by the time they leave the school, but in the past too many have made slow progress.
- Pupils' achievement has improved substantially this year because leaders have tackled previous underachievement robustly. This improvement extends right across the school, and is particularly strong in writing. When pupils join the school in Year 3, their attainment varies but is typically just above the national average for their age. By the time pupils leave the school, standards in English and mathematics are not yet comparable, but show a clear trend of improvement from previous years.
- Pupils do better in writing than they do in reading. Lower attaining pupils struggle to master basic reading skills and make slow progress because they do not have clear enough guidance and support. Few pupils in this group are able to explain confidently what they need to practise in order to improve their skills, and many are unable to read their learning targets. Information for parents and carers is not sufficiently helpful to enable them to support their children fully with reading.
- Previously, pupils in receipt of the pupil premium grant did not achieve well. Last year, their attainment in both English and mathematics was typically two years or more behind that of other pupils at the end of Year 6. School information about the attainment and progress of this group throughout the school shows significant improvement and their achievement is now broadly in line with other pupils. Effective use of the grant has included the provision of Easter school and Saturday school to boost their achievement.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make steady progress due to tailored support. Closer tracking of pupils' progress results in more thought about matching work to pupils' needs. Nonetheless, there is insufficient precision in the work to secure a good rate of progress for these pupils. Teaching assistants are well trained and provide particularly good support for pupils with specific learning difficulties.
- The achievement of the small group of pupils who are of minority ethnic heritage matches that of other groups and is not yet good due to a mismatch between the tasks they are given and the next steps they must master to move on. The few learning to speak English as an additional language gain confidence because there are many opportunities for them to talk about their work with others in the class.
- Progress in mathematics is increasing because pupils have opportunities to make decisions about what mathematical knowledge they must apply to solve problems, and there are plenty of opportunities to explain their thinking. In Year 4, pupils were completely absorbed in working out together how many slices of bread they needed to make sandwiches for 50 people attending a party if they were all allowed a certain number each, or how many 1.5 litre bottles of water they would need, so that everyone could also have a full 175ml glass to drink.
- Most pupils enjoy writing and know precisely what they must do to reach their writing targets. Older pupils, in Years 5 and 6, take responsibility for deciding when they have mastered one target and should move on to the next. As a result, they are highly motivated to do well.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teachers usually provide varied activities for pupils of differing abilities, but these are not linked clearly enough to levels of prior attainment and the knowledge or skills that must be developed to reach the next steps in learning. This limits the progress that pupils make as they move through the school.

- Teachers share objectives with pupils at the start of all lessons and include a list of the key features they expect to be included in pupils' work. Pupils use these lists regularly to assess their success in lessons and their development towards individual learning targets. This is not fully effective because the lists typically outline the tasks that must be completed rather than providing clear guidance on how to improve the quality of pupils' work.
- Teachers do not readily adapt their lessons when it becomes clear that pupils are finding work too easy or too difficult. On occasions, this means higher attaining pupils complete work quickly and those who find learning more difficult do not know how to tackle the tasks without support.
- Pupils' progress is limited by a predominance of shared recording tasks in English, mathematics and topic work. Pupils enjoy working together, but too often there is not enough for all of the pupils to be fully involved, so that some are merely observers, whilst others do all the recording. This often goes unnoticed by teachers.
- Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and include regular comments that show pupils how they could improve their work. These are usually written in 'bubbles', and pupils are given 'bubble time' in some lessons so that they can respond to teachers' comments. This helps pupils to gain skills but is not yet leading to good progress because the comments are not linked precisely enough to the skills required to reach the next level.
- Teachers regularly ask pupils to discuss answers to questions they pose in pairs or groups, leading to a lively and purposeful atmosphere. Pupils report that lessons are more challenging than they were and that they have a lot of fun. This is because many of the activities require pupils to be active in their learning and work things out for themselves.
- Teachers use rewards and praise effectively to motivate and encourage pupils. 'Learning gems' are highly valued by pupils and awarded when they demonstrate skills that transfer to learning in all subjects, such as attempting a new challenge or coping with distractions.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- The behaviour and safety of pupils require improvement because a few parents and a handful of staff and pupils raise concerns about the way that behaviour is managed over time. This small, but significant, group of stakeholders does not have full confidence that everything possible is done to eliminate bullying and inappropriate behaviour.
- Staff use different systems to record any incidents across the school. The lack of a central system for recording any bullying that is reported, or any inappropriate behaviour of a more serious nature, means that school leaders do not have a clear overview of how and where incidents arise, or how they were resolved. This leads to some inconsistency in behaviour management systems.
- Pupils have a good understanding of all forms of bullying, including cyber bullying, and they talk with authority about how they gain the knowledge to keep themselves safe in Safety Week. Almost all pupils feel safe at school and are confident that adults deal effectively with any bullying that occurs. A few pupils raise concerns about the behaviour of other pupils and occasionally avoid some outdoor areas to keep themselves safe.
- The great majority of pupils behave well, show good levels of consideration for one another, and are unfailingly polite to adults. Their behaviour sometimes slips when tasks require too little effort.
- All staff have high expectations for pupils' behaviour and act promptly so that pupils are quickly reminded to adapt their behaviour if they fail to maintain these high standards. Pupils are well aware of school expectations and the sanctions that will result if they fall short of these.
- Pupils are often highly enthusiastic about their work. This is because they have a lot of opportunities to work together and to be active in lessons. They have the opportunity to suggest aspects they would like to find out about before each new topic begins. As a result, pupils show good attitudes to work and enjoy coming to school. Their attendance is above average.
- Pupils take pride in the responsibilities they are given, from being a book monitor to standing for election to the school council or as a house captain. They wear their merit stars prominently and

explain in great detail how these are gained.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Over time, pupils' progress has been uneven mainly due a lack of confidence in information about pupils' attainment on entry to the school. Since the last inspection, the headteacher has been appointed as executive headteacher of the partner infant school. In February the Parsons Down Partnership was formally established, with combined leadership of both schools.
- The school's capacity to secure improvement is demonstrated by a sharp upward trend in achievement this year. This results from a much more robust approach to tracking pupils' progress, higher expectations for achievement, and clearer responsibilities for school leaders at all levels to drive improvement for all pupils. New systems are beginning to have an impact, but leadership requires improvement because these are not yet strong enough to secure good achievement for all pupils.
- There are well-organised procedures for checking how effectively actions outlined in the school's strategic improvement plan are being implemented across the school. These include regular feedback to staff about areas that need more development. These processes are not fully effective because leaders focus mainly on whether or not actions have been completed and policies implemented, rather than robustly considering what difference these make to improving outcomes for all pupils.
- The leadership team demonstrates a good level of ambition to secure improvement. Diligent performance management procedures are a strength. Robust and rapid action is taken to promote improvement when issues arise from regular checks on the quality of teaching. Challenging targets for all staff set high expectations and are beginning to show clear improvement in the quality of teaching and, consequently, in improved achievement. School leaders are working hard to ensure all pupils are treated equally and that there is no discrimination.
- The curriculum motivates pupils well and covers a good range of work in English and mathematics. A wide range of extra activities promotes pupils' moral and social development very well, but is less effective in promoting pupils' cultural development. Topic work is popular with pupils but not planned precisely enough to secure a good development of skills as pupils move through the school.
- The local authority provides a good level of support for school leaders, to increase skills in gauging how well the school is doing when compared to national benchmarks, and to support leaders through the reorganisation of roles and responsibilities in the newly established federation. As a result, school leaders' view of the school's effectiveness is mostly accurate.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is newly formed since the establishment of the federation, so that governors are in the early stages of setting up professional development opportunities in order to increase their skills in holding the school to account. Nonetheless, governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and urgent priorities, in addition, governors are rapidly gaining a clear view of the quality of teaching. Governors ask penetrating questions about the summaries of pupils' standards and achievement; however, they are sometimes too ready to accept the explanations provided by school leaders without requiring further action to promote improvement. Governors have ensured good use of the pupil premium funding this year, using the funds to enable pupils in receipt of the grant to participate in Easter school and Saturday school; this has resulted in improved achievement for this small group. Performance management procedures are well understood, but at this stage there has not been a full cycle to align pay with performance.

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	109923
Local authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	412246

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	252
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jonathan Taylor
Executive Headteacher	Petrina Winsor
Date of previous school inspection	14–15 January 2010
Telephone number	01635 866700
Fax number	01635 874499
Email address	office.pdp@pdp.w-berks.sch.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

[Piccadilly Gate](#)
[Store St](#)
[Manchester](#)
[M1 2WD](#)

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2013

