

INSPECTION REPORT

PARSONS DOWN JUNIOR SCHOOL

Thatcham, Berkshire

LEA area: West Berkshire

Unique reference number: 109923

Headteacher: Mr R A Ashmore

Acting headteacher at the time of inspection: Ms J Moore

Reporting inspector: Mrs Christine Huard
27290

Dates of inspection: 11 - 12 March 2002

Inspection number: 194171

Short inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Junior
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	7 to 11 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Herons Way Thatcham Berkshire
Postcode:	RG19 3SR
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr J Taylor
Date of previous inspection:	6 May 1997

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	10
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	17
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	17
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	18

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Parsons Down is a large junior school in Thatcham, just outside Newbury, and teaches pupils between the ages of seven and eleven. At the time of the inspection there were 341 on roll, an almost equal number of boys and girls. Pupils come from a wide range of social backgrounds and most live close to the school. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals (8.2 per cent) is below the national average. There are very few pupils from ethnic minorities, and none is at an early stage of learning English. There are 56 pupils on the register of pupils with special educational needs. The school is already working to the new SEN code of practice, which means it is not possible to make meaningful comparisons with other schools. Learning difficulties identified include, dyslexia, speech and communication, autism, and developmental delay. Pupils' attainment when they start at the school is broadly average. At the time of the inspection an acting headteacher was in post due to the illness of the headteacher.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good school with several very good features. Standards are above average in English, mathematics and science. The school provides a broad curriculum embracing all the foundation subjects and pupils' work in these is of a good standard. The school meets the needs of all pupils well and makes very good provision for pupils who are particularly able, and for those with special educational needs. The very good systems put in place by the absent headteacher have enabled the acting headteacher to continue to give a clear and positive direction to the work of the school. She is proving to be most competent and able in his absence. The behaviour of the pupils is good. The quality of teaching is good, overall, with considerable strengths, and enables pupils to learn effectively. Staff and governors are committed to development and improvement. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Standards are above average in English, mathematics and science.
- The overall quality of teaching is good.
- The school provides an exciting and stimulating curriculum, which enables all pupils to learn effectively.
- The attitudes, behaviour and personal development of the pupils are good.
- The school makes very good provision both for pupils with special educational needs and also those who are gifted and talented.
- Leadership and management are very good.

What could be improved

- The monitoring role of the subject co-ordinators is not sufficiently developed.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in May 1997. Improvement since that time has been good, overall, and the school has addressed successfully all the key issues identified then. Assessment is now used to identify accurately strengths and weaknesses in subject areas and the means by which shortcomings might be addressed. It also enables planning to be more focused. The role of the governors has been substantially improved. They have established an efficient committee structure and are far more involved in decision-making processes. The school development plan is a useful working document, clearly identifying priorities and closely matching these to budgetary requirements. In addition, standards have improved steadily over the five years. This is mainly because of the good quality of teaching the pupils receive. The school is in a good position to improve further.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 6 based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	Compared with			
	all schools			Similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
English	C	C	A	C
Mathematics	C	C	A	B
Science	B	B	A	A

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

Attainment on entry to the school is broadly average. Pupils' achievements are consistently good overall, because of good teaching that provides appropriately for the differing abilities of pupils. Results attained in national tests for pupils in Year 6 are well above average in English, mathematics and science. When compared with similar schools, results in English are average, in mathematics above average and in science well above average. The school's results have improved year on year since 1999, at a faster rate than the national trend and at a generally higher level. In 2001, results improved significantly in all three core subjects. Targets set for 2002 are based appropriately on pupils' achievement to date and the results of nationally recognised and standardised tests. Those for English are similar to those for 2000, reflecting the similarity in attainment levels. Targets are suitably challenging and the school should be able to achieve them.

Inspection evidence shows attainment in the current Year 6 to be above average in English, science and mathematics. In English and mathematics, pupils are set according to ability and this enables teachers to plan work more closely matched to pupils' needs. Attainment in speaking, listening, reading and writing are good, overall. Pupils' literacy skills are good and pupils have many opportunities to develop the skills learned through appropriate extended writing activities. Numeracy skills are also well-developed and extended through challenging investigative and problem-solving activities. Both literacy and numeracy skills are used and developed effectively through work provided in other subjects, such as history and science. In information and communication technology (ICT), pupils' achievements are good; efforts are being made to integrate ICT fully into all subjects. Pupils with special educational needs and those who are gifted and talented make good progress because work is well matched to their needs.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. The pupils enjoy being in school. They generally concentrate very well in lessons, especially when these are lively and interesting. They try hard, settle well to the tasks set and take pride in the presentation of their work.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils behave well around the school and in lessons; this supports their learning effectively. Staff expect good behaviour and pupils generally behave sensibly when moving around the school. Nearly all are polite and considerate.

Personal development and relationships	Good. Pupils in all classes are encouraged to take responsibility for a number of tasks in the classroom. Monitors and school council members carry out additional responsibilities. They fulfil these efficiently and maturely. Relationships among pupils and with adults are good. Pupils work and play very well together.
Attendance	This is satisfactory and broadly in line with national averages. Pupils arrive at school punctually and lessons begin and end on time.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils in:	Years 3 – 6
Quality of teaching	Good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

Teaching in the lessons observed during the inspection was satisfactory or better, and ranged from excellent to satisfactory. All permanent teachers in school over the two days were observed. Teachers are confident, have good subject knowledge and present this in a way that stimulates and excites the pupils. Teachers generally match work very well to the needs of pupils and there was a good balance of well-planned activities. This ensured that pupils' pace of learning was maintained throughout the lesson. In most lessons teachers introduced topics in a lively manner which captured pupils' interest. The good relationships that teachers have with their pupils, combined with effective techniques for managing classes, ensure that pupils work hard. From the start, teachers show respect for their pupils' opinions and ideas, listen carefully to what they have to say and encourage other pupils to do the same. For example, in a Year 6 English lesson pupils discussed intelligently with one another the texts they were evaluating and then wrote up their judgements maturely. English and mathematics are generally taught well and the basic skills of literacy and numeracy are consolidated effectively across the whole curriculum. The school has raised standards effectively in writing by allocating specific time to this each week. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is good, and pupils participate in a range of individual or group sessions according to need. Gifted and talented pupils are identified and appropriate extension programmes planned for them.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. This is broad, balanced and well organised to ensure that all areas of the curriculum are covered comprehensively. The curriculum is enriched by a variety of activities outside school hours and a wide range of visits. Visitors to the school share their expertise effectively with the pupils.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The Individual Education Plans for these pupils are detailed and precise. There are also useful weekly targets. These all help teachers plan work that takes account of individual need. Good teamwork among teachers, the special needs co-ordinator and support assistants ensures that pupils receive effective guidance and make good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural	Good. Provision for pupils' personal development is well supported by the strong ethos of the school, the good role models provided by the staff, and good relationships between pupils and adults. The school develops

development	pupils' spiritual, moral and social awareness effectively and improvements have been made in pupils' cultural awareness.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school cares well for its pupils and has successful procedures for promoting good behaviour. The effective monitoring of academic and personal development helps teachers to plan for individual needs.
Partnership with parents.	The school has established a particularly strong partnership with parents

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher has instigated excellent procedures which have enabled the school to function effectively in his absence. The acting headteacher provides very good leadership and is supported very well by her senior management team. Subject co-ordinators manage their areas efficiently but their monitoring role is not fully developed as they have too few opportunities to observe teaching or to work alongside colleagues.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors fulfil their responsibilities efficiently. They are involved effectively in the school, have a good knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses and support its development well.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school rigorously evaluates its own performance and sets appropriate targets for improvement. The monitoring of teaching by the headteacher is of particularly high quality and has been used effectively to identify strengths and weaknesses in teaching and pupils' learning and, thus, to raise overall standards. However subject co-ordinators have had too little opportunity to take on this role.
The strategic use of resources	Finance has been used well to support the school's priorities for improvement. Educational and financial decisions are carefully considered to ensure that the school provides good value.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children like school. • The teaching is good and children make good progress. • Children are expected to work hard. • The school is well managed and led. • Children are helped to become mature and responsible. • The behaviour is good. • The headteacher and staff are approachable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about their children's progress. • A greater variety of visits out of school.

Inspectors agree with the positive views of parents but found that the concerns regarding information about children's progress and visits outside school are unfounded. There are suitable arrangements for parents to discuss their children's progress with teachers. Pupils' reports provide appropriate information on their achievements and some indication of what is needed to improve. The school takes pupils on relevant visits to support their learning and invites a range of visitors into school to share their expertise with the pupils. These all help to extend the curriculum in an exciting and stimulating way.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Standards are well above average in English, mathematics and science.

1. The pupils' achievements in National Curriculum tests have improved steadily since the last inspection and last summer were well above average in English, mathematics and science when compared with the results achieved by pupils in schools nationally. When compared with schools of a similar kind the results were average in English, above average in mathematics and well above average in science. However, the comparison of the schools results with those of a similar kind should be treated with some caution. This is because the judgement is made based on the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals. At Parsons' Down this changes frequently because the percentage falls on the borderline between two bands. Last year the school fell into the band which identified the school as having a below average percentage of pupils who were eligible, this year it falls into the average band.
2. The school has adapted the National Literacy Strategy and is using the framework effectively and in a way that meets the needs of the pupils in the school. Writing has been identified as an area for improvement and the school has made provision for this by providing an extra session once a week devoted to extended writing. This ensures that it is an integral part of its own literacy strategy. Through careful planning the school now has a programme for English that is varied and matches the needs of all pupils. It provides a stimulating curriculum, which challenges and excites the pupils and enables them to tackle more complex texts with confidence and enthusiasm. By setting pupils by ability for English the school ensures that the tasks set closely match the needs of all, including those with special educational needs and those who may be gifted or talented. All these initiatives have been instrumental in raising standards in the school.
3. In Year 6, pupils have been writing their own ghost stories. They have studied relevant texts, discussed ways of opening the story so that it immediately attracts and keeps the attention of the reader and taken a good deal of care over the content and presentation of their work. The finished stories show that they have clearly understood the need to provide suspense and many pupils have been able to provide a twist in the plot to add extra spice to the whole. They are developing an awareness of the effectiveness of writing strategies, such as the use of short, sharp sentences and appropriate punctuation to gain greater effect. In the lesson observed, pupils were evaluating texts created by their peers. After a stimulating discussion of the criteria for a good ghost story, they carried this out sensibly and maturely. Pupils showed that they were aware of the need to balance praise and criticism. The levels of concentration were very high in this lesson and pupils could recall previous learning and put it to good use in class discussion.
4. There is good provision for all pupils, and careful teaching ensures that pupils of all levels of ability are able to complete tasks. In Year 5, lower-attaining pupils revised spelling rules. However, the teacher took the opportunity to present a task, which also served to revise pupils' knowledge and understanding of the layout of a play script. This was useful reinforcement of work the pupils had been covering during the term. By skilful questioning and very constructive interaction with individuals the teacher assessed the level of pupils' learning during the session and, consequently, was able to move on or provide additional explanations as appropriate. By the end of the session the majority of pupils could clearly explain how words change when a 'y' is added to them and nearly all completed the written task successfully.
5. Throughout the school, work is very well planned and texts chosen and tasks prepared that stimulate and interest the pupils. In Year 3, the pupils thoroughly enjoyed the challenge of using dictionaries to find words with silent letters. They used the information they had been given during the lesson and demonstrated their understanding by working well and sensibly, often collaborating usefully with a partner. The fact that the teacher set a time target also spurred them on to

complete the task quickly. Pupils in Year 4 were working on extending sentences by the addition of clauses. The teacher motivated them by providing them with a sentence from 'The Hare and the Tortoise', which interested them and gave plenty of scope for extension.

6. Throughout the school, the National Numeracy Strategy has been embraced with enthusiasm. Pupils in Year 3 relish the challenge of quick-fire mental arithmetic questions to start a lesson and show a good ability to recall tables and make simple calculations. By using whiteboards for 'write and show' starter sessions the teacher is able to assess instantly pupils' recall of tables and their ability to carry out simple calculations. Teachers have high expectations and the pupils respond extremely well. Positive relationships and interesting tasks enable pupils to sustain their concentration and ensure their active participation in lessons. Pupils answer questions confidently from an early age, and share ideas and strategies for solving mathematical problems, which build on previous work and methods.
7. Pupils are set according to ability for mathematics. This assists considerably the progress of all pupils. All groups of pupils study the same topic at an appropriate level, which ensures that they are all challenged and can achieve high standards for their own ability level. For example, at the start of the year higher ability pupils in Year 3 were tackling place value and calculations involving thousands, hundreds, tens and units, whilst others were developing and improving calculations involving hundreds, tens and units or tens and units as appropriate. High standards are achieved because pupils are constantly on task; they listen attentively and respond promptly to questions. All work builds on what has gone before. Higher-attaining pupils in Year 6, for example, were confident in working out quite complex money problems involving long multiplication. They helped and supported each other aided by the teachers. Self-esteem is raised by teachers encouraging pupils to share their work and by the methods employed in solving problems with the rest of the class.
8. Throughout the school there is a wide range of work covered. The school uses the National Numeracy Strategy plans effectively and is also piloting the National Numeracy Strategy Pilot Unit Plans. It is clear from examination of pupils' work that tasks are well-matched to pupils' needs and, although the same topic is covered across year groups, work is at a suitably challenging level for the pupils in each group.
9. Pupils of all ages achieve well in science. By the end of Year 6, pupils attain standards that are above average. In recent years, performance in the national tests and teacher assessments for pupils in Year 6 have consistently been above average. Pupils show a good level of factual knowledge and a well-developed understanding of practical skills. A major factor in the school's success is the good provision for the experimental and investigative aspects of science, which promotes high standards and ensures that pupils understand their work. This forms the basis for the entire science curriculum and pupils' knowledge from Year 3 to Year 6 is enhanced through practical investigation and experimentation, which encourage and support the development of their questioning attitudes. During the week of the inspection a 'Science Week' was in progress. This involved the pupils in a range of imaginative investigative activities, many devised by the pupils themselves, as well as a visit from a science show, 'The Magic of Science', to stimulate further and add to their knowledge and understanding.
10. Pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding develop systematically as they move through the school. Pupils in Year 3 are encouraged to predict what will happen in their experiments and to use the appropriate technical vocabulary, such as 'spectrum' and 'prediction' when working. They have started considering questions such as 'What will happen to the colours when the disc is spun?' Pupils are encouraged to write up investigations from an early stage and, as they move through the school, they draw on the wide range of experiences they have had in the past. They broaden the range of recording methods they use - for example, older pupils used a computer to record and analyse data and draw a graph of their results. Cross-curricular links are strong: pupils in Year 6 were observed devising a game which would include a magnetic force and they showed a good knowledge of the science required - for example, that like poles repel and opposite poles attract. They were able to determine what factors needed to be taken into consideration when making the game. This was all part of their work on forces but also took into account their prior

knowledge of the design and making requirements of design and technology. In this lesson, pupils' attitudes were positive and their approach mature. They organised themselves very competently in small groups and allocated tasks fairly. Within the group, they co-operated and collaborated well.

The overall quality of teaching is good.

11. The quality of teaching is good, overall, and is a strength of the school. In all the lessons observed, the teaching was sound or better. The teaching and the opportunities it provides for pupils to improve their learning skills are the major factors contributing to the high standards that the school is constantly striving for and achieving.
12. Teachers' planning is thorough and detailed. Teachers plan across parallel classes to ensure consistency in what is taught and this helps maintain the good standards achieved throughout the school. Lessons are carefully sequenced to ensure full coverage of a topic or Programme of Study. Plans outline clear learning objectives for each lesson, and teachers tell the pupils exactly what they are going to learn. Grouping is considered carefully and teachers ensure that activities are planned that match the attainment levels of all pupils. A brief recap at the start of each lesson prompts pupils' memories and allows some useful assessment to take place. For example, in a Year 6 science lesson, pupils could remember appropriate technical vocabulary associated with forces, and particularly magnetism, before dividing into groups to devise their games. The pace set is lively throughout, and lessons are well-structured and relevant to sustain pupils' interest. Written tasks are fully explained to pupils before they carry them out and they record work in a variety of appropriate ways.
13. Expectations of what pupils can achieve are high, particularly in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. The use of setting for literacy and numeracy enhances the provision in these areas. The literacy and numeracy strategies have been well implemented and all pupils are fully occupied with suitably challenging tasks during the times when the class teacher is concentrating on one group of pupils. Pupils are able to work unaided because the work is carefully matched to the needs in each group and teachers give clear instructions as to the work to be tackled and ensure that the pupils understand what they are to do before they start.
14. The expertise and enjoyment that teachers bring to their lessons are evident. In a history lesson in Year 6 the pupils were studying the Victorians. The topic was schools and the visit of the schools' inspector. The humour of the situation was evident to everyone, but also added interest and pertinence to the situation and to pupils' questions, observations and comparisons. Throughout, the teacher had high expectations of the pupils' abilities to be sensible and to ask and answer relevant questions. The pupils were lively and stimulated and responded enthusiastically. They drew on their own knowledge and made apt and well-thought-out observations. The teacher supported learning effectively throughout the lesson by her very good interaction with the pupils and her use of focused questions.
15. Whole-class teaching is used effectively to promote the learning of pupils with special educational needs and is very good, overall. Careful questioning by the teachers ensures that these pupils can take a full part in all lessons. Praise and encouragement are used effectively. When pupils are involved in small group work, work is carefully matched to their abilities and support takes place discreetly during the literacy hour. For example, in a Year 5 literacy lesson, lower-attaining pupils were working on an individual 'Toe by Toe' programme with the aid of a very well briefed support assistant. This took place in the classroom as part of the session, with the pupils able to take part in the rest of the literacy hour as part of the whole group before and after without having lost the thread of the lesson.

The school provides an exciting and stimulating curriculum, which enables all pupils to learn effectively.

16. The school has positively and thoroughly reviewed its planning systems in the light of Curriculum 2000. As a result, the curriculum offered to the pupils is both exciting and stimulating. The school mostly uses nationally approved schemes of work, adapting and modifying these effectively to fit its requirements. The school provides a wide and interesting range of learning opportunities and the links established between subjects are particularly effective. The requirements of the National Curriculum are fully met. It is evident from the examination of pupils' work that, although the school reacted positively to the recent national emphasis on literacy and numeracy, it sought at all times to ensure that its pupils continued to be provided with a broad range of activities in all subjects. This has resulted in overall standards across the whole curriculum being good.
17. The national strategies for literacy and numeracy have been implemented effectively. The literacy strategy has been adapted effectively to meet the needs of the school and writing allocated additional time as a priority for further development. This focuses more clearly on the skills required for extended writing and has been effective in raising standards throughout the school. The numeracy strategy has resulted in good quality, focused oral starter sessions being incorporated into each lesson. These are brief, pacy and linked to on-going mathematics topics, and time is used effectively before moving on to the taught topic for the day. In addition the school is also piloting the use of the National Numeracy Strategy Pilot Unit Plans; during the inspection a problem-solving unit was being used particularly effectively.
18. Not all subjects were seen being taught during the inspection but lively and interesting displays of work in all subjects and evidence from pupils' work indicate that the school is successful in providing links across several subjects in order to ensure very good learning opportunities. For example, work on the Tudors in Year 4 has included research into the design of styles of dress for the rich and poor of the time. Pupils have then created their own figures, using collage effectively, to discriminate between the two. In Year 5 work on the Second World War has resulted in some imaginative and evocative silhouettes of night air raids. Pupils have investigated their own emotions successfully and written sensitively how they think they would have felt as evacuees. Overall, the very good planning ensures a rich and dynamic curriculum which, coupled with good teaching, results in pupils making very good progress.
19. There are good policies to underpin provision and a clear overall statement of the school's curricular aims. Many of the policy documents contain constructive and viable ideas as to how topics may be extended across different areas of the curriculum. In particular, the use of ICT is integrated particularly effectively into all subject areas. Agreed procedures and a shared approach to the work ensure consistency and depth in long-term planning by teachers in similar year group classes.
20. The school provides a very good range of extra-curricular activities. Many involve music and sport, but there is a good variety for pupils who do not have a particular interest in these two areas. These include such diverse activities as glass painting and the school magazine. These all enable the pupils to reinforce and extend their personal interests and also enhance the positive relationships between the pupils and adults in the school. In addition, experts are invited into the school to share their expertise with the pupils. As a result, pupils may have the opportunity to be Roman gladiators for a day, or scientists for a week. These visits and focused events are very well planned and thought out to ensure that they are relevant to what the pupils are currently learning and will increase their knowledge and understanding.

The attitudes, behaviour and personal development of the pupils are good.

21. Pupils are very enthusiastic about school. They are keen to learn and many bring very positive attitudes about the value of learning from home, which are built on and extended by their experiences in school. An equally positive atmosphere for learning is created by the headteacher and the staff. The combined approach of pupils, parents and teachers in partnership results in effective learning and in pupils who show good levels of personal development.
22. Pupils appear comfortable and relaxed in school. They grow in confidence and maturity as they move through the school and respond well to the many opportunities to take initiative in their

learning. The school's ethos and approach are built on the joint principles of teamwork and independence in learning and are successfully communicated to the pupils. A notable feature, especially among the oldest pupils, is the extent to which they sustain concentration in their work and show the capacity to work both independently and also as part of a small or large group. Pupils from the earliest time in school are enabled by staff to organise their own work where this is appropriate - for example, by choosing their resources or setting up equipment for their group. Often, when working in groups - for example, in science - they show that they are working as a team, allocating roles and duties accordingly.

23. Relationships between pupils and teachers are good. Adults and children show respect for one another and are polite in their conversations. Examples were seen of high quality discussions and negotiations between teachers and pupils about planned activities. Pupils also relate well to each other. They appreciate and cultivate their friendships and care well for others on a daily basis. Older and more able pupils in each team support and encourage those who need help.
24. Pupils' personal development is good. Pupils are encouraged to be reflective during lessons as well as in assemblies and collective acts of worship. Acts of worship are appropriately themed and are well prepared so that they are relevant to the pupils' interests and experiences. Staff are excellent role models for pupils, who know the difference between right and wrong and are developing a clear moral sense. The school code of conduct is brief, positively reinforced and well adhered to. Pupils' very good behaviour contributes to the positive ethos in the school. Social development is encouraged through a wide range of tasks around the school. The school council discusses pertinent issues such as the planning of quiet 'patio areas'. There are good levels of co-operation and awareness of the needs of others. This is particularly necessary in an open-plan school where the classrooms themselves have to act as corridors. Pupils are developing a sense of social responsibility through their support for a range of charities embracing a wide range of national and international causes. Pupils have good opportunities to develop their cultural awareness. A range of visits and of visitors to the school enhance the curriculum positively, and residential visits enable pupils to enlarge their experiences as well as giving them the chance to develop independence and co-operation. Pupils have the opportunity to study a range of cultures through the curriculum in geography and history as well as through literature. All these initiatives help prepare the pupils for life in a multi-ethnic society.

The school makes very good provision both for pupils with special educational needs and also for those who are gifted and talented.

25. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is highly effective. Pupils are identified early and activities in lessons cater for the full range of abilities, including those with special needs and the most able. The setting of pupils for literacy and numeracy allows for their needs to be particularly well met. There are clear Individual Education Plans for pupils who need extra support in their learning. These contain targets that are well defined and state clearly how they are to be achieved. In many cases, pupils also have more specific weekly targets which they work towards on a daily basis with support assistants. Throughout the school, support for special educational needs is good. Parents are fully involved. Individual Education Plans are reviewed regularly by the class teacher, special needs co-ordinator and parents together, and parents immediately provided with a copy of the new plan. There is very good support by auxiliary staff, which enables the pupils to make very good progress. The teaching staff have good relationships with their support assistants and use them effectively in classrooms.
26. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is very well managed. There is a very good policy, covering all the statutory requirements. A comprehensive development plan deals with practical and administrative issues - for example, the computerisation of all Individual Education Plans - as well as items such as the implementation of the new Code of Practice. The governor for special educational needs is supportive and visits the school regularly. The co-ordinator ensures that targets are referred to in planning for class work. She monitors to ensure that plans are implemented and provides extra support. Where necessary, appropriate diagnostic tests are administered and outside agencies involved. The co-ordinator has a very good relationship with these agencies, including the psychologist, with whom she has regular meetings to prioritise appointments and discuss individual needs. The co-ordinator liaises closely with both the infant school, from which most pupils come, and the secondary schools to which they transfer.
27. The school has appropriately identified a number of pupils as being gifted and talented and also the particular areas in which they excel. These vary from all-round excellence to a particularly high ability in one area such as mathematics, English or art. Teachers provide work, which both challenges pupils and also seeks to improve on any areas of relative weakness. As a result, pupils learn at a rate which is appropriate to them and maintains their interest in their work.

Teachers' planning builds effectively on what has gone before so that they recap effectively, reinforce and extend pupils' learning in ways which ensure that their retention and recall are very good. Policies and resources for able pupils and differentiation define the approach of the school as well as providing a myriad of practical suggestions and extension materials. The school has an effective strategy for offering meetings and workshops to help parents deal with the needs of more able pupils - for example, mathematics master classes are held on Saturday mornings at one of the linked secondary schools and pupils are encouraged to attend. The very good action plan for the next year includes the provision of resource boxes specifically for each year group, relating to topics being covered, and also the introduction of nationally approved resources for gifted and talented pupils.

Leadership and management are very good.

28. The overall leadership and management of the school is very good. The acting headteacher has had to take on the running of the school due to the illness of the substantive headteacher. She has done so very capably and with a quiet confidence that is most impressive. It is clear from the documentation that the substantive headteacher is extremely competent, has excellent procedures in place for the running of the school and provides strong leadership and clear educational direction. The acting headteacher has continued to implement the strategies and procedures in place most effectively, but has also shown the capacity to make decisions and to work effectively with the senior management team, staff, governors and parents.
29. The main focus is to maintain and improve the already good standards, but the school actively plans to fully develop the personalities of the pupils so that they are well prepared to enter society as well-rounded individuals. In this the school has been particularly successful, with the unstinting help and support of the staff and governors. Together they have devised a full, exciting and diverse curriculum which fully achieves the school's aims.
30. The role of the subject co-ordinator has generally been well-defined and developed. Each subject has an identified manager and all are enthusiastic, knowledgeable and conscientious. They identify and provide essential resources from their own carefully managed budgets. Very good strategies are used for monitoring achievement. This is particularly evident in the core subjects, where analysis of past work, test papers and results are part of an ongoing annual review system in order to ensure that subjects are taught effectively. All co-ordinators monitor planning, and have recently begun to scrutinise written work as an additional means of tracking pupils' progress. There is a comprehensive programme of classroom observations. However, the majority of these are carried out by the headteacher and not by the subject co-ordinators, so they are not gaining sufficient first-hand knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning in their subjects.
31. The governors are knowledgeable, involved and supportive. They have termly meetings, for which the headteacher provides detailed reports. They have established committees, each with agreed terms of reference, and each reports to full governing body meetings. The governing body as a whole has established a very good working relationship with the headteacher and undertakes the role of 'critical friend'¹ very successfully. Governors review test results and are actively involved in target-setting with the staff; they fulfil their responsibilities successfully and their involvement in the strategic direction of the school is very effective.
32. The school development plan clearly identifies relevant priorities. It shows developments in areas that are identified under the headings of 'New Targets' and 'Continuing Targets'. New Targets include such items as promoting the development of ICT, whilst raising standards is a Continuing Target. There is a well-laid-out action plan for each area, with the budget implications clearly identified. Currently, the main curriculum priorities, are raising standards in the core subjects of English (particularly extended writing) mathematics, and ICT. In addition, possible future targets are identified providing a suitable longer-term dimension to the plan. The document as a whole

¹ Critical friend - one who monitors constructively the activities and achievements of the school, identifying the areas that are strong and those that are weaker and require improvement.

provides a very good focus for continuing development.

33. The school aims are highly appropriate. They are published in the prospectus for parents to share and there is a strong emphasis on the involvement of the parents in their children's education. The aims address a range of relevant issues, including personal, social, moral and spiritual development, the curriculum, and home and community links. The underlying values of celebrating achievement and promoting the individual development of every pupil are very clearly evident in the day-to-day life of the school. The school provides a welcoming, friendly environment. The staff work industriously as a united team and provide effective role models for the pupils. The ethos is very positive and reflects the school's strong commitment to ongoing improvement and good relationships.
34. The school manages its financial resources very well, overall. Financial planning is effective and fully supports the improvement of teaching and learning. Expenditure is carefully considered and planned to ensure cost-effectiveness. The good deployment of staff expertise promotes the development of the curriculum and the improvement of teaching and learning. Staff are very well deployed and very good use is made of support staff. The effective use of time and resources to support the use of setting according to ability for literacy and numeracy has had a positive impact on the levels of pupils' attainment.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The monitoring role of the subject co-ordinator is not sufficiently developed.

35. The school has a very good programme of monitoring. A range of strategies is employed, including the monitoring of planning, examination of pupils' work and classroom observations. The information collected is well used to track pupils' progress and also to identify areas for further development. This approach has proved to be highly effective and has been instrumental in raising standards.
36. Performance management procedures are well established and all staff are involved. Members of the senior management team are delegated team leaders and all are involved in the process of interviewing and the setting of targets in order to increase teachers' effectiveness. However, the role of the subject co-ordinator, although it has been well-developed in other ways, does not yet include the vital area of regular classroom observation. Subject co-ordinators are involved appropriately in the examination of pupils' work - a relatively new strategy - and in the monitoring of colleagues' planning. However, the great majority of classroom observations are carried out by the headteacher. This is useful and ensures that the headteacher has a very good idea of exactly what is happening in the school but it lessens the effectiveness of the co-ordinator. Effective observation of teaching and learning in the classroom means that the subject co-ordinators can learn at first-hand what is happening in their subjects. It should also enable them to share their expertise and help colleagues to benefit from this. By identifying areas of strength and weakness they can arrange appropriately for further training to take place or seek advice as to how specific issues could be addressed.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

37. Parsons Down School is an effective school and provides a good education for its pupils. Monitoring is already identified within the school development plan. However, in order to improve further the headteacher and senior management team should:
 - (1) Take steps to further develop the monitoring role of subject co-ordinators by enabling them to observe and work alongside colleagues in the classroom in order to identify strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning, and share best practice.
(see paragraphs: 30, 35, 36)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	18
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	11

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	1	3	11	3	0	0	0
Percentage	5	17	61	17	0	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting these percentages as each lesson represents more than five percentage points.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y3 – Y6
Number of pupils on the school's roll (FTE for part-time pupils)	341
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	28

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Y3 – Y6
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	7
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	56

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	1

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	5
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	8

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	4.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.7

National comparative data	5.6
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National comparative data	0.5
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Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 (Year 6)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	2001	47	30	77

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	40	41	45
	Girls	28	23	30
	Total	68	64	75
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	88 (85)	83 (77)	97 (92)
	National	75 (75)	71 (72)	87 (85)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	36	43	44
	Girls	24	25	27
	Total	60	68	71
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	78 (72)	88 (76)	92 (79)
	National	72 (70)	74 (72)	82 (79)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	2
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	324
Any other minority ethnic group	15

This table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only.

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	2	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

This table gives the number of exclusions of pupils of compulsory school age, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y3 – Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	16.2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	21
Average class size	26.3

Education support staff: Y3 – Y6

Total number of education support staff	15
Total aggregate hours worked per week	247

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000-01
	£
Total income	658,598
Total expenditure	679,249
Expenditure per pupil	1,974
Balance brought forward from previous year	49,431
Balance carried forward to next year	28,780

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	3
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	5
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1.4
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	341
Number of questionnaires returned	127

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	43	51	6	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	46	49	2	1	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	31	61	3	0	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	27	62	7	1	3
The teaching is good.	41	57	2	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	35	54	10	1	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	63	31	5	0	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	56	42	2	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	36	51	10	1	2
The school is well led and managed.	38	56	2	2	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	38	57	4	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	45	45	9	0	2

Other issues raised by parents

- A very small minority thought that the school should take pupils to local places of interest such as Donnington Castle.