



**Office for Standards
in Education**

Inspection report
Parkgate Junior School

Hertfordshire Education Authority

Dates of inspection: 17-18 May 2004

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act

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Basic information about the school

Name of school:	Parkgate Junior School
Type of school:	Junior
Status:	Community
Age range of pupils:	7 to 11 years
Headteacher:	Mr G White
Address of school:	Southwold Road Watford Hertfordshire WD2 7DN
Telephone:	01923 243905
Name and address of appropriate authority:	The governing body, address as above
Chair of governors:	Dr R Southern
Local education authority area:	Hertfordshire
Unique reference number:	117162
Name of reporting inspector:	Mr D Jones HMI
Dates of inspection:	17-18 May 2004

Introduction

1. Parkgate Junior School is situated in a suburb of Watford and serves an ethnically diverse community. The school lies at the centre of an area of late-Victorian private housing. There are 230 pupils on roll, which is average size for a junior school. Most of the pupils come from the immediate area, which has levels of social and economic disadvantage similar to the national average. The proportion of the pupils eligible for free school meals, 10.4 per cent, is below the national average. The proportion of the pupils who are of an ethnic heritage other than white British is 29.4 per cent, which is above the national average, the largest groups being from a Pakistani and Afro-Caribbean background. The percentage of pupils, 19.5 per cent, who speak English as an additional language is above the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is below average at 14.5 per cent and no pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Needs. The pupils' attainment on entry to the school is average.

2. The school was inspected in February 2003. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

3. The governors drew up an action plan to address the key issues from the inspection of February 2003. The school was visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) on two occasions to monitor the progress being made.

4. In May 2004 two HMI inspected the school, assessing the standard of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of February 2003.

Main findings

5. In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils. The main findings of the inspection are:

- since the inspection in 2003 the school has been transformed. It is now a welcoming and stimulating place for pupils to learn;
- standards of attainment are rising steadily following two years of disappointing results. The school's 2003 results in the national tests for 11-year-olds in English were in line with the national figures and those of similar schools. However, the results in mathematics and science were well below the national average and very low when compared to similar schools. The school's predictions for the 2004 national tests, based on sound assessment practice, indicate an improved performance in mathematics and science. Across the school standards in lessons in the core subjects have risen, reflecting the higher scores noted in the pupils' annual tests;
- standards in numeracy lessons are close to those that might be expected for the age of the pupils. The pupils' number skills are appropriate although some have weaknesses in their understanding of symmetry and place value. Most of the pupils have limited confidence in their own investigative skills;

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- standards of speaking and listening are generally at expected levels, as a result of improvements to teaching. Standards of reading are satisfactory overall and at the level to be expected for the age of the pupils. Standards of writing are generally at expected levels; the books of many pupils demonstrate improved standards of writing as the year has progressed;
 - the pupils made at least satisfactory progress in 19 of the 21 lessons; progress was good in nine lessons. Throughout the school, the standards attained and the progress the pupils made improved steadily during the last year. The pupils who speak English as an additional language and those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress, largely due to the effective co-ordination of specialist and class-based support;
 - the behaviour and the attitudes of the pupils were satisfactory or better in 19 of the 21 lessons, including ten where they were good or very good. Behaviour in the school assemblies was very good. Around the school and in the playground the behaviour was good; the pupils displayed consideration and concern for others as well as for the environment;
 - attendance for the school year so far is 95.48 per cent, which is above the national figure, and unauthorised absence is low. Punctuality is good;
 - provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of the pupils is satisfactory and the pupils' development in these areas is sound and at times good. Assemblies contribute well to these aspects of the pupils' education and meet statutory requirements;
 - the quality of teaching is satisfactory overall; however there are some remaining weaknesses. Teaching was at least satisfactory in all 21 lessons, including eight where it was good and two very good;
 - the curriculum meets the requirements to be broad and balanced but is dominated by literacy and numeracy. Insufficient links are made between subject areas, and there are too few opportunities for independent learning;
 - the assessment system is new but reliable; a comprehensive database of information about the pupils' progress is being compiled;
 - the school environment has improved significantly. Corridors and stairwells are bright, with lively displays celebrating the pupils' successes. The links with parents and the community are now good; parents appreciate the support and guidance the school provides;
 - the headteacher and his deputy lead and manage the school well. They have demonstrated considerable energy and determination to improve the school. An effective and hard-working senior leadership team has been established. Financial management and developmental planning are good. Rigorous monitoring, evaluation and support by senior leaders, governors and the local education authority (LEA) have helped the school move forward;
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- the school's routines, policies and practices are well documented and consistently implemented. Roles and responsibilities, including those for monitoring and reporting, are clearly defined;
- subject co-ordinators have a clear understanding of their roles; the most effective lead their areas of responsibility with confidence and authority. Almost all of the staff joined the school in the last year and they have become a hard-working team;
- the LEA removed the school's delegated powers immediately after the inspection in 2003. A strategic management group, which took over some of the governors' duties, secured the permanent appointment of the headteacher and introduced procedures for financial accountability. Delegated powers were returned to the governing body in April 2004, ahead of schedule. The governance of the school is satisfactory;
- the LEA has provided good support for all of the initiatives detailed in the school's action plan. An appropriately structured plan to monitor and support the school over the next academic year is in place.

Key issues

6. In order to improve the pupils' quality of education further, the governors, headteacher, senior managers and staff need to:

- continue to raise standards and improve the pupils' progress;
- continue to increase the proportion of good teaching;
- enrich the curriculum by making stronger links between subject areas and introducing more opportunities for investigation and independent learning.

Inspection findings

Standards achieved by the pupils

7. Standards of attainment are rising steadily following two years of disappointing results in national tests. The school's 2003 results in the national tests for 11-year-olds in English were in line with the national figures and those of similar schools. However, results in mathematics and science were well below the national average and very low when compared to similar schools. In English, the proportion of 11-year-olds who gained Level 4 or above, the standard expected for their age, rose from 75 per cent in 2002 to 78 per cent in 2003. However, in mathematics, the proportion declined significantly from 73 to 53 per cent. In science the decline was from 81 to 75 per cent. The proportion of pupils who attained Level 5 in English was in line with national average and that of similar schools. However, the proportion of pupils who attained Level 5 in science was well below such comparative groups; in mathematics the proportion of pupils attaining the higher level was very low. The school's predictions for the 2004 national tests, based on sound assessment practice, indicate an improved performance in mathematics and science. Across the school standards in lessons in the core subjects have risen, reflecting the higher scores noted in the pupils' annual tests.

8. The pupils made at least satisfactory progress in 19 of the 21 lessons; progress was good in nine lessons. Throughout the school, the standards attained and the progress the pupils made improved steadily during the last year. The pupils made satisfactory progress in 14 of the 15 lessons in the core subjects; progress was good in eight of these lessons. The majority of the pupils in Year 6 made appropriate progress; although many were initially reluctant learners, some pupils proved capable of working above the level expected for their age.

9. Standards of speaking and listening are generally at expected levels and the recent improvements to teaching and provision are leading to raised standards. Many teachers encourage the use of 'talk partners' which gives pupils the opportunity to rehearse and refine responses before making them in front of the whole class. There are increasing opportunities for pupils to speak in public, for example by making contributions to assemblies. The most articulate pupils express themselves clearly, adapting what they say to their audience. The least able pupils struggle to explain their thinking and tend to answer in single words. The listening skills of the majority are at least satisfactory and often good. A significant minority, most apparent in Year 6, do not listen carefully and reveal this through asking for instructions to be repeated and through answering different questions from the ones asked.

10. Standards of reading are satisfactory overall and at the level to be expected for the age of the pupils. Some pupils, of all ages and both genders, read avidly for pleasure and can name the authors they like. Many pupils have a favourite book on their table which they read at various points in the school day. Some confidently tackle challenging authors like J. R. Tolkien and Philip Pullman. Selections of books designed to appeal to Year 6 boys were purchased a few months ago and these have successfully stimulated an interest in reading in the case of some pupils and been read rapidly by those who have already discovered the pleasures of reading. Non-fiction is tackled with confidence by most pupils, and in several lessons pupils negotiated the contents and index to find specific information. The most able pupils read with fluency and expression; this was apparent in all year groups. The least able pupils struggle with unfamiliar words and are stumbling and hesitant when reading aloud.

11. Standards of writing are generally at expected levels. A few of the oldest pupils write very well; for example, a descriptive piece by a Year 6 pupil contained sophisticated vocabulary, varied sentence structure and an assured conclusion. The most able pupils, across the school, can sustain their writing, holding the interest of the reader and using well-chosen vocabulary. The least able writers produce work which is too often unfinished and is marred by basic mistakes of spelling and punctuation. The books of many pupils demonstrate improved standards of writing as the year has progressed.

12. Standards in numeracy lessons are close to those that might be expected for the age of the pupils. The school has made good use of the National Numeracy Strategy. The pupils' number skills are appropriate, although some in Year 3 have weaknesses in their understanding of symmetry. The pupils use mathematical vocabulary correctly. The middle-attaining pupils in Year 5, for example, knew when it was appropriate to use centimetres or kilometres, and understood the difference between metric and imperial measurements. However, the pupils in Year 4 made errors in their calculations that related to their uncertain understanding of place value. Most of the pupils in Year 6 have limited confidence in their own investigative skills.

13. In science, standards of attainment are rising as a result of good planning. The pupils cover a suitable range of topics as they move through the school and understand a range of appropriate scientific terms and processes. For example, Year 4 pupils in their work on electricity correctly used terms such as conductor and insulator and the pupils could explain how electricity flows through a circuit. In their investigative work on living things, Year 5 pupils carefully set up an experiment to discover the conditions required to germinate a seed. However, insufficient time has been given to practical and investigative work.

14. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are at nationally expected levels and the pupils demonstrate appropriate skills. The school is beginning to develop the use of ICT across the different subjects of the curriculum.

15. Only a limited range of lessons was seen in the foundation subjects but there were examples of satisfactory work. In a Year 6 lesson the pupils studying natural environments could name the continents and locate desert and mountain areas. In Year 5 the pupils could name the six wives of Henry the Eighth, and explain what happened to them.

16. The pupils who speak English as an additional language and those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress, largely due to the effective co-ordination of specialist and class-based support. The school made good use of reliable assessment information to develop well-organised small group and booster class sessions. These sessions were well taught by a small number of part-time teachers who employed resources from the national numeracy and literacy strategies to good effect, ensuring challenge and continuity in the curriculum.

The pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

17. The behaviour and attitudes of the pupils were satisfactory or better in 19 of the 21 lessons, including ten where they were good or very good. Behaviour during the whole-school assembly was very good. Around the school and in the playground the behaviour was good, as the pupils displayed consideration and concern for others as well as for the environment.

18. The pupils' attitudes are positive, except for a significant minority of pupils in Year 6 whose behaviour declines towards the end of the day. Most of the pupils are interested in their lessons, keen to learn and proud of their school. They listen well in class, do as they are asked and willingly volunteer answers. The minority of Year 6 pupils who are disaffected with school are slow to follow the teachers' instructions and engage in minor misbehaviour, for example, by repeatedly tilting their chairs back and making distracting noises.

19. The school is successfully promoting good attitudes and behaviour through a range of suitable rewards and sanctions. The rewards include house points and presentations in assemblies for the best house, class and pupil in each class. This high-profile public recognition of good conduct is popular with the pupils and has raised and clarified the school's expectations. Sanctions are a series of warnings with increasingly serious repercussions, starting with the name of the miscreant being noted and ending with a referral to the headteacher. Pupils whose behaviour is unsatisfactory are placed on report in order that their conduct can be monitored. Parents are kept informed in a suitable manner. The school's draft behaviour and discipline policy is proving effective. There have been no exclusions, either fixed-term or permanent, for the last year.

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20. In all classes the majority of the pupils apply themselves to their work with enthusiasm and most produce at least acceptable quantities of work by the end of the lesson. This is not always the case with some of the older pupils. Most of the pupils collaborate productively with their peers but the pupils' capacity to work independently is less well developed and there are too few opportunities for them to do this. Relationships between pupils, and between pupils and teachers, are generally good. The adults in the school present good role models.
21. Attendance for the school year so far is 95.48 per cent, which is above the national figure. Unauthorised absence is low. Punctuality is good.
22. Provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of the pupils is satisfactory and the pupils' development in these areas is sound and at times good. However, a small number of the oldest pupils display unsatisfactory social and moral development at times. Assemblies cultivate a sense of community and introduce pupils to a range of music, in addition to contributing well to their spiritual and moral development. They contain moments of appropriate and well-observed reflection and meet statutory requirements. In lessons pupils have opportunities to exercise responsibility as monitors. The school council has met successfully for the last term and a half and there are suitable plans to increase the pupils' involvement in the running of the school. Extracurricular activities, visits and residential opportunities enhance provision.

The quality of education

23. The quality of teaching is satisfactory and sometimes good. In all 21 lessons the quality of teaching was satisfactory or better, including eight where it was good and two where it was very good. In all the lessons the planning was sound. Resources were well used, and the expectations of the quantity and quality of the work were reasonably high. In the best lessons the strengths of the teaching included good subject knowledge, productive relationships and a lively teaching style which encouraged pupils to think hard. In some of the lessons that were nonetheless satisfactory overall, the main weaknesses were insecure subject knowledge, a slow pace and an inability to catch and hold the attention of some of the pupils.
24. Teaching assistants gave at least satisfactory and sometimes good support to the individuals and groups with whom they worked. The specialist teacher who supports the pupils who have English as an additional language gave very good help to the pupils, enabling them to undertake the same work as the rest of the class and to contribute to the concluding plenary session.
25. The marking of the pupils' work was up-to-date and helpful. The practice of requiring the pupils to initial the teacher's comments after reading them is good, but it did not prevent some pupils from avoiding correcting their spelling mistakes. Many teachers wrote substantial comments on the pupils' work, often containing a well-judged mixture of encouragement and suggestions for improvement. Targets were printed in the pupils' books, but too few teachers and pupils referred to them. Homework is set regularly for all the pupils and is used effectively to enhance learning; for example, spellings in a Year 3 class, were suitably matched to the pupils' different abilities.
26. The assessment system is new but reliable; a comprehensive database of information about the pupils' progress is being compiled. Since the start of this school year termly
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assessment information has been collected on all the pupils. The findings have been shared with the pupils and targets set. The school's analysis of this information shows that the vast majority of the pupils have made at least the expected progress. The assessment and tracking system is to be further refined so that information will be gathered twice before the pupils all sit end-of-year tests. A tracking system from another LEA has been adopted and has the potential to strengthen the school's existing and satisfactory system.

27. The curriculum is dominated by literacy and numeracy. This was a deliberate decision given the findings of the inspection that made the school subject to special measures and the need to fill rapidly the gaps in the pupils' knowledge. The national strategies for literacy and numeracy and their accompanying remedial provision have been well used. Insufficient links are made between subject areas, there are too few opportunities for independent learning; however, there are suitable plans to broaden the curriculum by addressing key skills through different subjects and, for example, teaching literacy through the content of geography. These plans should enrich a curriculum which nonetheless meets the requirement for breadth and balance. The provision for those pupils who have special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language is good. Specialist part-time teachers and additional adults are deployed effectively to support these pupils.

28. The school environment has improved significantly. Corridors and stairwells are bright, with lively displays celebrating the pupils' successes. The communal areas are well used to promote learning; although some classrooms are rather cramped, accommodation is generally well used. Resources have been improved recently but they are still scarce in some areas, for example fiction and poetry. Stocks of dictionaries and thesauruses are good in individual classrooms and the recently acquired sets of books for guided reading are well matched to the interests and ability of the pupils.

29. The pupils are well cared for and supported and this is leading the pupils to show the same concern for others. The links with parents and the community are now good; parents appreciate the support and guidance the school provides. The parents are increasingly positive about the recent changes within the school and the headteacher in particular.

Leadership and management

30. The headteacher and his deputy lead and manage the school well. They have demonstrated considerable energy and determination to improve the school.

31. The LEA removed delegated powers immediately after the inspection in February 2003. A strategic management group, which took over some of the governors' duties, secured the permanent appointment of the headteacher and introduced procedures for financial accountability. Delegated powers were returned to the governing body in April 2004, ahead of schedule. The governance of the school is satisfactory.

32. The headteacher is a good strategic manager. He has given autonomy to key staff with specific responsibilities, requiring them to be accountable, and helping them to develop both the organisational and strategic aspects of their work. This has sharpened the professionalism of senior and middle managers. As a result, an effective and hard-working senior leadership team has been established.

33. Subject co-ordinators have a clear understanding of their roles; the most effective lead their areas of responsibility with confidence and authority. Almost all of the staff joined

the school in the last year and they have become a hard-working team; they have created a school that is substantially stronger than before. Staff morale is good and the team is rightly pleased with the progress the school has made in recent terms and optimistic about the school's future.

34. The school's routines, policies and practices are well documented and implemented consistently. Roles and responsibilities, including those for monitoring and reporting, are clearly defined. Rigorous monitoring, evaluation and support by senior leaders, governors and the LEA have helped the school move forward. Financial management and developmental planning are good. The financial concerns noted in the report that made the school subject to special measures have been eliminated. A budget surplus has made possible the purchase of interactive whiteboard technology to enhance the quality of teaching.

35. The LEA has provided good support for all of the initiatives detailed in the school's action plan. The LEA's officers were at the core of the strategic management group that brought transparency to the school's financial affairs; they are to remain part of the enlarged governing body for the foreseeable future. An appropriately structured plan to monitor and support the school over the next academic year is in place.

Implementation of the action plan

36. The inspection report of February 2003 required the school to address ten key issues. These principally related to: raising standards; improving governance; securing effective leadership and management; providing a curriculum according to national requirements; and improving communication with parents. Overall, reasonable progress has been made, and good progress has been made on matters related to leadership and governance.

37. Training for the staff has been targeted well and the quality of teaching has improved considerably. The rapid development of a reliable assessment database has provided the focus for significant improvements in standards. The implementation of the national literacy and numeracy strategies has been particularly beneficial and, with much support from the LEA, a good programme has been implemented for monitoring classroom practice and providing advice.

38. The school's curriculum is now based on national requirements, and there are schemes of work for all subjects. Provision for those pupils who have special educational needs is much improved and follows the national Code of Practice.

39. The leadership and management of the school are good. The work of the subject co-ordinators has developed and is satisfactory, and the school has suitable plans to delegate more responsibility to them. The work of the strategic management group was particularly effective.

40. Routines and the organisation of classrooms are thorough. Although the legacy of previously poor progress remains apparent in Years 5 and 6, these pupils are making satisfactory progress and the great majority are interested in their work, keen to succeed and well behaved. As a consequence of the school's efforts, the pupils' standards of attainment have risen significantly.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

The school was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in February 2003. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in October 2003 and February 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of February 2003.

In May 2004, two HMI returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Twenty-one lessons or parts of lessons, two assemblies and three registration sessions were inspected. The pupils were observed at break and lunch times and samples of their work were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior staff and a representative of the LEA, and informal discussions were held with other staff and pupils. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was also taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of February 2003 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.

Notes

