



Parsons Down Infant School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109875
LEA West Berkshire LEA
Inspection number 278300
Inspection dates 5 December 2005 to 6 December 2005
Reporting inspector Charalambos Loizou AI

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

Type of school	Infant	School address	Paynesdown Road
School category	Community		Thatcham
Age range of pupils	4 to 7		RG19 3TE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01635 862475
Number on roll	228	Fax number	01635 874558
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Rev Timothy Perkins
Date of previous inspection	10 January 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Janice Schofield

Age group 4 to 7	Inspection dates 5 December 2005 - 6 December 2005	Inspection number 278300
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Parsons Down is an average size infant school. Nearly all the pupils are from white British backgrounds. While the majority of children who join the reception classes in January, either full-time or part-time, attend the school's nursery classes in the autumn term, the children who start reception in the autumn term have not had any experience in the school's nursery class. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is very low compared with most schools. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is lower than in most schools but the proportion of pupils with a statement of special need is above average. The pupils' attainment when they start school, at around the age of four, varies from year to year but is broadly in line with the standards expected.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

Although the school feels that it offers a good quality of education inspectors disagree. Standards are too low and pupils are not achieving as well as they should. Teaching and learning are inadequate. The quality and provision in the Foundation Stage is inconsistent between the nursery and the reception class and is inadequate overall. The curriculum in the nursery is effective but the children's progress is slower in reception because teaching is weaker. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties is good. However, for the large majority of pupils, teaching and assessment are inadequate because these do not tackle underachievement, particularly by more able pupils and in writing where standards are too low. Inadequate leadership has led to unsatisfactory improvement since the last inspection because standards are not rising quickly enough. The school does not have the capacity to improve because approaches to planning for school improvement are haphazard and self-evaluation is weak. The school provides unsatisfactory value for money. Thus, in accordance with Section 14 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What the school should do to improve further

* Strengthen the teaching to raise standards, particularly for more able pupils, in writing and in the reception class.* Improve leadership and sharpen school improvement planning so that it focuses on raising attainment and the achievements of the pupils.* Improve assessment and target setting so that work is better matched to the needs and abilities of the pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

The overall performance of the pupils is inadequate. The pupils start school, at around the age of four, with attainment which is broadly in line with that expected for their age. They make unsatisfactory progress because standards are below average by the end of Year 2. In the Foundation Stage the picture is mixed but achievement is inadequate overall. The children in the nursery make good progress in all areas of learning including early literacy skills. In reception, progress is unsatisfactory. Progress in language and communication skills is not being accelerated or reinforced through activities appropriate to young children such as practical activities and play. In the rest of the school, more able pupils are not achieving as well as they can as too few are attaining the higher levels in national tests in reading, mathematics and writing. Although there was some improvement in the 2005 national tests compared with the previous year, this has not been sufficient. The school is aware that standards in writing are well below average and achievement is unsatisfactory. Since the last inspection standards in information and communication technology (ICT) have improved to

satisfactory levels but pupils do not use their ICT skills enough in other subjects. The pupils with learning difficulties, including those with statements of special educational need, achieve well because they are supported effectively and their progress towards their personal targets is monitored closely.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupil's personal development and well being are satisfactory. Most are happy, enthusiastic learners who enjoy school and have good attitudes to their work. Relationships are good and pupils share resources well. Attendance is average, but punctuality is unsatisfactory for a very small minority. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural developments are satisfactory. They have an appropriate sense of right and wrong, understand school and class rules and are eager to work cooperatively. The school is using assemblies and circle-time to promote a thoughtful appreciation of others. Pupils are encouraged to help less fortunate children through charity collections. Currently pupils are helping children overseas by donating pens, pencils and crayoning books. Pupils are beginning to understand about making good healthy eating choices and how to stay safe and healthy. However, the development of pupils' economic well-being is insufficient, because basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics are under-developed.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory overall. The long term effect of the teaching on pupils' learning is inadequate and leads to significant underachievement by the majority of pupils. Although many pupils enjoy lessons because teachers work hard to motivate them tasks are not always sufficiently challenging. Learning objectives, although shared with the pupils, are often too vague or so broad that lessons lack focus. The school is aware that the teaching of writing is a particular weakness. Tasks are not well matched to the pupils' abilities. For example, more able pupils are not being stretched when writing independently so do not attain higher levels. The lack of challenge results in pupils finishing tasks early. In lessons and when withdrawn for special help by teaching assistants, the pupils with learning difficulties are well supported and their progress is monitored well. However the school recognises that, for the large majority of pupils, assessment is unsatisfactory and more rigorous systems, especially for writing, need to be put in place. Teachers praise the pupils' efforts in their marking and feedback but learning targets are not clear enough. Marking does not make it clear to the pupils how best to improve their work. Targets, particularly those for writing, are not broken down into manageable steps so the pupils are unsure about the next stages in their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

In Years 1 and 2 the school provides a curriculum with reasonable breadth and balance. Sex, relationships and drugs education are taught through the science curriculum. There is a good emphasis on ensuring that pupils understand the importance of staying safe and healthy and a range of visits and visitors enhance pupils' learning. However, in relation to literacy and numeracy, much of what is offered is inadequately matched to the learners' needs and aspirations. Thus taken overall, the curriculum is inadequate. In the Foundation Stage the curriculum is unsatisfactory. The range of activities for exploratory and independent play is too narrow in the reception class. Too few opportunities are planned to develop communication skills through play. By contrast, there is a well-balanced curriculum in the nursery, including a good range of activities for indoor and outdoor education. There is an effective programme for the teaching of phonics throughout the school which is helping to raise standards in reading. However, books are not being used sufficiently to promote in pupils a love of literature. The school has recognised the need to provide more links across the curriculum to raise standards in writing and ICT. In lessons, the use of the inter-active whiteboard is enabling teachers to illustrate new concepts effectively, but this is in the early stages.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Provision for care, support and guidance is satisfactory. The care and welfare of pupils is good and is central to the school's ethos. Parents are supportive and express positive views about care and welfare arrangements. There is a good programme of personal and social education and healthy eating and lifestyle choices are consistently reinforced. Pupils feel valued and secure and some said, 'We like school because we do fun things and play with our friends'. However, there are not enough opportunities for the pupils to suggest ideas that can be acted on. Governors undertake risk assessments regularly and thorough procedures are in place for child protection and health and safety. There are good links with outside agencies. The provision for special educational needs is good, including appropriate setting of pupil's individual learning targets. There is a good parental partnership for these pupils, and this enhances their learning opportunities. However, for other pupils, the school is not monitoring their academic progress adequately enough. The school has recognised this weakness and has started to develop more rigorous assessment systems, especially in writing.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Leadership and management are inadequate. There are some strengths in the way the staff manage provision for special educational needs and the care and welfare of the pupils. However, leadership lacks direction and focus. Self-evaluation is inaccurate. There is a lack of rigour in measuring performance and identifying priorities. School

development planning is not robust enough to identify what it is about the teachers' and pupils' performance that need to be addressed most. There are too many priorities in the development plan so that the key features of underachievement by pupils are not being addressed quickly enough. Governors provide satisfactory support and ensure that statutory requirements are fully met. They ensure that resources are deployed effectively, particularly for pupils with learning difficulties. There are good arrangements in place for governors to link with subject co-ordinators, although governors do not always hold the school to account for the standards it achieves. The headteacher and staff have forged good links with parents and the community. However, the school's track record in dealing with the issues left in the last inspection and with underachievement demonstrates that there is insufficient capacity to improve.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	4	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	4	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	No	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	4	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	4	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	4	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	4	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	No
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	No
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for helping the inspectors. We enjoyed talking to many of you. This letter is to tell you what we have found out about your school.

We are happy to see that you are well behaved, try hard in lessons and play happily together in the playground. You and your parents like the school because the staff look after you and care about you to make sure you are safe and happy. Some of you need extra help and the teachers and teaching assistants do this well.

However, we think that your teachers could help you to achieve more, so we have decided that your school needs some 'special measures'. This means that other inspectors will be making regular visits to see how you are getting on. We have asked Mrs Schofield to make sure that: * every lesson gives each of you work that is not too hard or too easy, but 'just right' to make you think hard and learn new things* you each have proper targets so that you know what you are aiming to learn next* the exciting activities and good learning that happen in the nursery continue throughout the school. We are sure that if these things happen your school will quickly start to improve.