

Parsons Down Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109923
Local Authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	288534
Inspection dates	6–7 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Peter Sudworth

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	297
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Jonathan Taylor
Headteacher	Mrs Petrina Winsor
Date of previous school inspection	11 March 2002
School address	Herons Way Thatcham RG19 3SR
Telephone number	01635 866700
Fax number	01635 874499

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Pupils come from a wide range of social backgrounds. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is below the national average. Most children transfer from the nearby infant school at age seven. Most pupils are White British with a small number from minority ethnic groups. The percentage of pupils leaving or joining the school at other than the normal times is much lower than that usually found. A higher percentage of pupils than nationally have learning difficulties and disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Parsons Down Junior School is a satisfactory and improving school which is emerging from a particularly difficult period. An unavoidable yet high number of staff changes over a lengthy period, difficulties in recruitment, a serious financial position and major building works have hindered the school's development significantly. The headteacher has worked collaboratively with staff and governors and the school is pulling round. The overall situation is now more stable and financial problems have been resolved. The headteacher's robust yet sensitive leadership has won the hearts of staff and pupils and obtained the good support of parents and the re-constituted governing body. One member of staff commented 'she has worked wonders'.

There is now a secure platform for change and shown in Year 6 pupils' above average results in national tests in 2006. However, there is not yet a consistency of good achievement because the frequent staff changes have affected year groups differently. This has led to inconsistent progress across the school. Currently, pupils are achieving satisfactorily overall and reaching broadly average standards. The school is rooting out pockets of underachievement and tackling them. This effort has been more successful in English than in mathematics because swifter action has been taken to address standards and teachers' confidence is higher in teaching English than it is in mathematics. Inconsistencies still remain in pupils' progress in mathematics across the school. Significant improvements are being made in English, particularly in reading and shown in pupils' continuing good progress in it.

Most parents are very supportive of the school. Understandably a few express a concern that staff changes have affected their children's progress adversely. The majority are happy. Typical of most, one parent comments: 'My child enjoys school very much. This is evident from her growing confidence and happy smile.' Parents appreciate the good levels of care, guidance and support which support the good atmosphere in the school and pupils' feelings of security.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall but it is at its best in Year 6 where pupils' progress accelerates. Teachers set a good atmosphere for learning and, as a result, pupils behave well. Most pupils enjoy school as demonstrated by their above average attendance and attentiveness in lessons. They are growing up with a good awareness of how to remain safe and lead healthy lives. Their personal development and well-being are good. Pupils make a good contribution to the school community with a genuine concern for others both in school and beyond.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The prolonged staffing difficulties have hindered the sustained impact that some subject leaders have been able to make. Staff recognise that the satisfactory curriculum needs updating to make it even more enjoyable for the pupils. Several factors indicate that the school has a good capacity to build on the satisfactory progress made since the last inspection. These include the headteacher's outstanding leadership, the good work of the governing body, the effective leadership structures now in place and not least the staff's determination to improve provision further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards further in mathematics by ensuring that pupils in Years 3 and 4 make good progress.
- Improve the overall quality of teaching.
- Develop the role of subject leaders in monitoring provision and improving standards.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next Section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Attainment on entry varies but is currently below average because, although most pupils broadly meet expectations, few have attained the higher level. Overall standards are broadly average and pupils achieve satisfactorily. However, all groups of pupils are achieving well in English because of the strength in reading. Exceptionally in 2006, results in English were above average in national tests with a higher percentage than nationally reaching the higher level. This was due to the skilled leadership in the subject, advice taken and focused effort to improve attainment. The same consistency is not yet seen in mathematics. Overall, more able pupils do not yet make the good progress in mathematics that they do in English. This is because pupils in Years 3 and 4, including able pupils, do not yet achieve well enough in mathematics.

The current Year 6 group has suffered adversely from changes of staff and has a higher percentage of pupils with learning difficulties. They continue to achieve well in English particularly in reading because of the good organisation of reading activities and the resources available. They are achieving satisfactorily in other aspects of work. The few pupils who have English as an additional language are making good progress in learning English. This means that they can participate more fully in lessons and so make progress in their other subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school and attendance is above average. They are friendly, confident and respect the feelings of others, evident in the way they raise money for various charities. They co-operate effectively with other pupils in group tasks and also work successfully on their own. They take pride in their written work. Pupils behave well both in lessons and around the school. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They are responsive to opportunities for reflection in collective worship. They eat healthy snacks at break-times and say that school meals are much healthier now. 'We only have chips on Fridays and they do not have salt on them.' Pupils participate enthusiastically in after-school opportunities.

Pupils take responsibilities seriously. Although the school council is still developing as an organisation, other pupils feel that its members are 'people you can trust to represent the views of children'. Pupils' commitment to their work, good teamwork and their improving achievements prepare them effectively for the next stage of education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Overall teaching and learning are satisfactory but the quality is inconsistent across the year groups. Teaching is stronger in English than in mathematics and is more consistently good in Year 6. The fictitious 'news' that the government was to close a farm, recently visited by Year 6 pupils, successfully and purposefully aroused them to write persuasive letters to reverse the 'decision'. Teachers manage pupils well. They generally match work effectively to pupils'

different capabilities with good use of teaching assistants for small groups of pupils with specific learning needs. Questioning is often good but in some classes less confident pupils are not drawn into the lesson enough. Marking is a significant strength in most classes and often helpful to pupils' progress. Generally teachers share the focus of learning with pupils successfully. However, pupils do not understand how well they have managed the learning because the criteria for success are not made sufficiently clear nor given enough attention.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Sufficient time is devoted to each subject. The initiative to teach Spanish adds breadth. The good emphasis on physical education, including after-school sport, encourages pupils' healthy living. Pupils' personal, social and health education is planned thoughtfully incorporating effective use of professionals, such as the police and school nurse. Consequently, pupils understand safe and healthy living. Some good use of visits injects interest to learning, for example, when older pupils undertook river studies. Good provision is made for pupils with learning difficulties and at an early stage of learning English so that they make similar rates of progress to other pupils. The curriculum is, however, still developing. The school is aware of the need to refresh it, for example by making better links between subjects and adding greater excitement to it to increase pupils' enjoyment further. For example, there is not yet enough provision for pupils to apply their skills in mathematics to real life settings. The building up of skills in practical subjects is not yet sufficiently refined.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral care is a real strength. Child protection and health and safety procedures are very clear, well understood and practised. Any pupils at risk are identified quickly and supported effectively. As a result, pupils feel safe and secure. The school has supportive links with parents and good communication with them. Good attention to pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those new to English, including the involvement of outside agencies, supports their understanding of work effectively.

Procedures to track pupils' progress across the school are being used with increasing effectiveness to identify pupils who are not making expected progress in their work. Additionally, specific targets for ability groups in mathematics and English assist pupils to understand what they need to remember when they are working and how they can improve. These learning targets are used well in English and support their developing skills. They are less useful in mathematics because they are not always phrased appropriately for children's understanding.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

While the overall picture of leadership and management is satisfactory the headteacher's outstanding leadership and the good work of the governing body are significant strengths and have helped to re-establish the school. Financial resources are now used well for the benefit of pupils. Temporary changes to subject leadership have hindered the development of some subjects and regular evaluation of provision. The school's new team arrangements for managing subjects are thoughtfully considered but are too recent to have had any significant effect.

The headteacher works very well with others to foster a common vision and a commitment to raising standards. This was instrumental in the successful results in 2006. The school rightly recognises that there is a need for more consistency in results and in the quality of teaching across the school so that pupils' achievements are more even and consistent from year to year. Regular monitoring by the headteacher and deputy headteacher are beginning to raise the quality of teaching further as a step towards this.

School self-evaluation is satisfactory. It is good at a whole school level and is used to identify accurately the key areas for improvement within the school development plan. It is less well developed at subject level, although a good example has been set in the leadership of English with a consequent improvement in reading.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

20 June 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Parsons Down Junior School, Thatcham, RG19 3SR

We enjoyed our visit to your school. We know that your school has had a difficult time in recent years with many changes of staff and new building work which have unsettled the school in its development. We hope that your school is entering a more settled time. Your school is being very well led by your headteacher and there are clear signs of improvement. It has been difficult for the school to obtain consistency in the leadership of different subjects because of the staff changes. Now that the situation is settling down, we have asked that there is better oversight of different subjects to improve the quality of learning for you so that you do even better.

We were impressed with your good behaviour and your enjoyment of work in lessons. Year 6 pupils spoke enthusiastically of the work that they did on their working farm visit. The staff take very good care of you. We were impressed with the range of opportunities after school for different sports and your success in these. You are very thoughtful of others and you raise lots of money for good causes. You are growing up well as young people. You are making sure that you know how to look after yourselves to live safe and healthy lives. You enjoy school responsibilities and carry these out successfully. Your personal development is good.

We think that the school provides a satisfactory curriculum for you. The staff now feel that it is time to have another look at it to make learning even more enjoyable for you. We agree with this. Overall, you achieve satisfactorily and reach broadly average standards. You achieve well in reading and many of you reach standards that are higher than might be expected for your age in this aspect of English. Your progress in mathematics is satisfactory but some do not do as well as others. We have asked the school to make sure that you make more consistent progress in this subject from year to year across the school. Teaching and learning in the school are satisfactory with some that is good particularly in Year 6 but also elsewhere in the school. We think that the school should now try and improve teaching still further so that your lessons are even more interesting.

We wish you well for the future and trust that you will continue to work hard to achieve your ambitions.

Peter Sudworth

Lead Inspector