

Alton Park Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114721
Local Authority	ESSEX
Inspection number	290010
Inspection dates	14–15 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Ruth Frith

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	459
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Bolton
Headteacher	Mr Steve Morgan
Date of previous school inspection	30 September 2002
School address	Alton Park Road Clacton-on-Sea Essex CO15 1DL
Telephone number	01255 424335
Fax number	012554 75923

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average sized junior school situated in the centre of a housing estate in the seaside town of Clacton-on-Sea. Most pupils live close to the school in an area of mixed private and social housing. The immediate catchment area of the school has higher levels of social and economic disadvantage than found nationally. Most, but not all, children enter school with standards that are below those expected for their age. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is well above average and 17 pupils have a statement of special educational need. Approximately 12% of pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds and a few speak English as an additional language. The school has 16 children who are in local authority (LA) care. A significant number of pupils leave or join the school part way through their junior school education.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school that does its best for every child. Staff work exceptionally well with a wide range of agencies to promote pupils' well-being. The school's ethos ensures that pupils from all backgrounds, and those with learning difficulties, are fully integrated and treated with respect. It is a happy place in which pupils flourish. Parents show by their comments that they are pleased with what the school offers, for example, 'Alton Park is an excellent school. My daughter can't wait to get to school every morning'. Good improvement since the last inspection, together with good leadership from the headteacher and the commitment of staff and governors, indicate that the school has good capacity to improve further.

Pupils achieve well and make good progress because teaching is good and pupils become happy and interested learners. Teachers' planning is good so learning builds systematically over time and the work is well matched to pupils' abilities. Staff are particularly successful at identifying those pupils who find learning difficult and providing effective specialist support so they, too, make good progress. However, there is a need to bring consistency to teachers' marking so that all pupils are clear about what they have achieved and know how to improve their work. Typically, standards by Year 6 are broadly average but can vary because of the high numbers of pupils with learning difficulties in some year groups. Pupils enjoy science because of the practical nature of many of the lessons and national test results are highest in this subject. However, many pupils find it difficult to improve their writing or spell correctly because they use a narrow range of vocabulary and their speech is not clear. Results in writing are the weakest. Fewer pupils than that usually seen gain the higher levels in English and mathematics and this affects the school's overall results.

Pupils' personal development is good. Staff have high expectations and the vast majority of pupils respond well to these. They develop good attitudes to work and play and make friends easily. They show consideration for others and for views and ways of living different from their own. The good curriculum is well planned and ensures that pupils learn how to stay safe and healthy as well as encouraging them to contribute well to the school and wider community. Lessons are interesting and pupils enjoy what they are doing. Consequently they behave well and many show pride in what they do. Attendance is broadly satisfactory. Pupils' care, guidance and support are also good. Their personal and social needs are exceptionally well met, which helps them prepare for the next stage of education.

Leadership and management are good and ensure the school provides good value for money. Staff have a good understanding of the school and their accurate and insightful self-evaluation helps them to identify what they do well and what needs to be done next. The school's judgements closely match the inspection findings and priorities for improvement are appropriate. Through their effective monitoring and work in committees, governors understand what needs to be done next to improve the quality of provision and raise standards further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards in writing and increase the number of pupils gaining the higher levels in English and mathematics.
- Improve the quality and consistency of marking so that pupils more clearly understand how they can improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

From below average starting points pupils achieve well. Following a four-year trend of rising standards and good progress, national test results in 2006 declined and the school did not reach its challenging targets. Standards in English and mathematics were below average and standards in science were average. Although these results were related, in part, to the abilities of that particular cohort, the school quickly acted to improve teaching and learning and pupils' progress. Consequently, standards in the current Year 6 are better than last year and progress across the school is good. The quality of pupils' singing and their sporting achievements are outstanding. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress because their needs are quickly and accurately identified and they receive excellent support. The standards they achieve are frequently above those usually seen for pupils of similar abilities. Pupils from minority ethnic groups and those with English as an additional language also achieve well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' attitudes to school are good. They are enthusiastic learners and fully contribute in lessons. They are happy at school, feel safe and are confident that staff will help them if they feel upset or worried. Attendance has improved as a result of the school's good procedures, but remains below the national average because of holidays taken in term time. Pupils are generally courteous and polite, give of their best and take pride in their achievements.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They grow in self-awareness and reflect readily upon their feelings and actions. Pupils encourage and support one another. They have a clear understanding of right and wrong and the vast majority behave well.

Pupils have an excellent knowledge of how to live healthy lifestyles and this is influencing what they do. Many are very keen to raise their fitness levels by taking part in a wide variety of physical activities. They develop a very good understanding of personal safety and learn to look after one another well. Pupils contribute fully. They give their views about school through surveys and are pleased that teachers make some changes following their suggestions. Through initiatives like the school council they enjoy taking responsibility. They are very successful when raising funds for charities. Pupils are building a good foundation for later life and their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Because relationships are very good, there is always a pleasant atmosphere in classrooms. High standards of behaviour are expected and almost all pupils respond well. Lessons begin briskly with teachers carefully explaining exactly what they want pupils to learn. Strengths in teaching include the detailed planning of work to match pupils' learning needs and the clever use of questioning to develop learning and sustain interest. However, sometimes the pace of lessons drops when pupils are working on individual tasks and when this happens they do not achieve as well as they could. Pupils are encouraged to cooperate with each other and find out things for themselves. The use of electronic whiteboards is beginning to have a positive impact on the quality of lessons. Teachers and teaching assistants are enthusiastic and work well together,

particularly in support of pupils who find learning difficult. Teachers give pupils targets to help them improve their work in English and mathematics but they do not always encourage pupils to evaluate their own learning. Although teachers mark pupils' work regularly, some comments do not provide enough specific guidance.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy the stimulating curriculum offered by the school. There is a clear emphasis on meaningful activities that link learning to life. Pupils talk enthusiastically about themed blocks of work and special events and their progress clearly benefits from this more intensive study. Subjects are increasingly linked so that what is learnt in one is practised and developed in another. However, more still needs to be done to improve pupils' writing. Personal, social and health education is very good. The curriculum is very clearly modified to take account of those who find learning difficult, and those with particular talents enjoy challenging additional tasks. A systematic and thorough approach is taken to developing a healthy school.

The curriculum is further enhanced and enriched by countless visits and visitors. From historical visits to science trails, from problem-solving to sketching, every pupil benefits from a very wide variety of activities. Out of school activities are excellent. An extensive range of popular high quality clubs includes countless sports and others such as a choir and gardening. The accommodation is well cared for and stimulates learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school meets all the current requirements for safeguarding its pupils. Risk assessments are carried out thoroughly. Child protection procedures are in place and the school recognises that support staff need to be updated on recent changes. Pastoral support is outstanding. The learning mentor and special education needs coordinator both play a vital role in supporting pupils, particularly the 'looked after children', and work very effectively with outside agencies. Pupils' needs are identified early and the school provides a good range of additional activities that enable pupils with learning disabilities to make good progress. This generates a positive climate for learning and contributes to good achievement and personal development. The recently introduced pupil targets in English and mathematics build on individuals' existing strengths and help them to know what they need to aim for.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The emphasis given to treating children as individuals and identifying and responding to their particular interests and needs is a well-established and consistent theme throughout the school. It is clear that pupils and staff enjoy being part of Alton Park and staff morale is high. The headteacher encourages everyone to take initiative and play their full part in developments. Subject leaders respond well to this and manage their areas very well. The headteacher and deputy headteacher constantly reinforce the school's ethos by their noticeable presence throughout the day, encouraging pupils and celebrating their work. There are good systems in place to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. These have helped the school to identify the changes required to meet the needs of an increasing number of pupils

with learning difficulties and disabilities, although they have not yet been as effective in raising standards in English and mathematics as the school had hoped. Governance is good. Parents' and children's views are actively sought and acted upon, when appropriate.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

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	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
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	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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

17 May 2007

Dear Children

Inspection of Alton Park Junior School, Clacton-on-Sea CO15 1DL

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we recently visited your school. We enjoyed talking to you about your work and were pleased to hear that you enjoy school. We agree with you and think that Alton Park is a good school. These are some of the things we liked best.

- You work hard and do well, particularly in science.
- You have an excellent understanding of how to live healthy lives and we were impressed by how many of you liked taking part in sporting activities.
- The staff enjoy teaching you and the teaching is good.
- You behave well, and when working and playing together you usually get on well.
- The activities you do and the things you study are interesting which helps to make lessons fun.
- Your school looks good and is well cared for.
- Staff look after you well and you feel safe in school.
- Many of you come to school regularly and arrive on time. Well done!

However, a number of you still need to remind those who look after you how important it is not to miss your lessons.

The school is continuing to improve because of the hard work of Mr Morgan and the staff and governors. We have agreed that teachers need to help you to reach even higher standards in English and mathematics, particularly writing, and also help those of you who find learning easy to do as well as you can. In addition, we are asking teachers to look at how they mark your work so that you have a good understanding of what you have done well and what you should do better.

We left your school confident that it will continue to improve and wish you all well in the future.

Ruth Frith Lead Inspector