



# Alton Infant School

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 115850  
**Local Authority** Hampshire  
**Inspection number** 290345  
**Inspection date** 23 November 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Bradley Simmons HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Infant	<b>School address</b>	Normandy Street
<b>School category</b>	Community		Alton
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4-7		GU34 1DH
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	0142083857
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	156	<b>Fax number</b>	0142084818
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Mr Alan Rixon
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Margaret Rees
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	20 May 2002		

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Alton Infant school admits up to 60 children each year. Unusually, boys outnumber girls at the school by three to two. Around 14% of pupils are entitled to a free school meal. The great majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The school's categorisation of pupils who may have learning difficulties is more widely encompassing than that generally found, and includes, for example, children about whom a concern has just been raised. As a result, almost four in ten pupils are deemed to have learning difficulties, a figure significantly higher than most schools. The school notes rightly that children's attainment when they start school varies from year to year from below to just below that normally expected for five year olds.

The school has suffered a long period of disruption since the last inspection, as the Victorian building in which it is now housed was extensively remodelled. The remodelled building has been back in use for just over a year.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

Alton Infant School gives the pupils in its care a sound start to their educational lives. There are important areas where the school knows its work should be more focused, primarily in ensuring that more children make better progress in the core subjects of reading, writing and mathematics. In contrast to this, there are areas in which this school excels. One parent wrote, 'All the children seem to enter and leave the school with smiles on their faces', and, without doubt, children's personal development and well-being and elements of the care, support and guidance provided for them are outstanding.

The school is aware that, at the moment, all children, but boys in particular, could make better progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Higher ability pupils too, do not make as much progress in writing and mathematics as they should. Standards in the core subjects have dropped over the past few years from significantly above national average to the point where, for the 2006 Year 2 cohort, they were below national average. Children over the past few years have made satisfactory, rather than good, progress in reading, writing and mathematics because, over the long term, children's learning needs in these areas have not been clearly diagnosed and acted upon rigorously.

Nevertheless, the school has good capacity to improve matters. The impact of teaching on children's progress over time has been satisfactory, but, during this inspection, examples of outstanding teaching were observed, and senior leaders provide good role models in the classroom. They are providing the school with clear direction to secure improvement; the school has already changed the way in which reading and spelling are taught with the aim of increasing children's progress, and is putting in place a range of strategies to improve teaching and learning in mathematics. Senior leaders acknowledge that school evaluation systems, although satisfactory, do not rigorously underpin improvement planning. Insufficient formal analysis is undertaken to track the performance of different groups of pupils and there are, for example, very few measurable targets within the school improvement plan that governors could use to judge the school's success or otherwise.

The school already has a good track record in focusing its attention on an area and improving it. Take, for example, the curriculum. During the inspection, pupils said how much they enjoyed the 'Trailblazer' sessions, introduced since the last inspection. These sessions provide excellent links between subjects and make learning enjoyable and meaningful. Promising plans were seen to deliver the wider curriculum in a similar themed manner, underpinned by National Curriculum programmes of study.

Behaviour at this school is exemplary. Pupils are polite, sociable with their classmates, and interested in talking to visitors. They feel safe at school, know that there is always someone to talk to if they are worried and have an excellent understanding about what it means to eat a healthy diet and keep fit. In class, pupils work well individually and in groups. All pupils seem to feel the same as the Year 2 pupil who commented: 'It's a fun school!'

## What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the achievement of all, but particularly boys in all core subjects, and higher ability pupils in writing and mathematics.
- Improve the rigour and regularity of assessment in reading, writing and mathematics so that it fully informs planning and improves the impact of teaching upon learning.
- Formalise school evaluation systems so they provide a tool for accountability and robustly underpin improvement.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 3

Overall standards have dropped over the past few years, slowly at first, but then more markedly in 2005 and 2006. Standards of children who left the school in 2005 were around the national average, but boys did less well girls. This group of children joined the school with very slightly lower abilities than those normally expected of five year olds, so their progress during their time at the school was satisfactory. Much the same story can be told of those Year 2 children who left in 2006 who also made satisfactory progress but from a lower starting point, so attaining standards at the end of Year 2 which were below national average. Again, however, boys did less well than girls, but this time the difference was more marked.

Children with learning difficulties or disabilities and those with statements of special need are making satisfactory progress. The school does not specifically track minority ethnic pupils over time, but observations during the inspection demonstrate that they are making progress in line with their peers.

The school has correctly identified that brighter pupils are not doing as well as they could be, particularly in mathematics, but also to a lesser extent in writing.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 1

The school's work in this area is outstanding. The excellent provision made for pupils' spiritual development was confirmed by a brief glimpse at the whole of Year 2, paused and reflecting at the end of their busy day, with a lighted candle to centre their thoughts. Children's moral, social and cultural development is similarly strong. Through visits to various places of worship, and a judiciously chosen range of resources within school, children are developing a growing understanding both of their own cultures and those of others who make up the plural society in which we live.

Attendance has risen and is now in line with national average. The children's enjoyment of school is seen in virtually every lesson and every playtime. Children have a very good awareness of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle; during an outdoor curriculum session for Reception, a child paused to explain that he was getting good exercise and then continued to run exuberantly with his friends, pulling a home made kite behind him. A moving letter from an elderly lady living in a care home, thanking children for

their visit and gifts, demonstrates children's outstanding contribution to the community in which they live.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

No teaching seen during the inspection was less than satisfactory and there were examples of outstanding lessons which children will remember all their lives. In those lessons, the teacher used a very effective range of questions to challenge pupils' thinking, she built very skilfully on pupils' misconceptions to clarify issues and provided highly interesting tasks in which children were fully absorbed, and understanding.

The school acknowledges, however, that, over the longer term, the impact of teaching on pupils' learning, particularly in the core subjects of reading, writing and mathematics has not been as strong. In these essential areas, children are making satisfactory rather than good progress. In recognition of this, the school has started to take a more brisk and structured approach to the teaching of phonics so that children call upon improved phonic knowledge when they read and write. In mathematics, the school has put a raft of strategies in place to improve the profile and teaching of mathematics. However, assessment systems are not yet diagnostic enough to pinpoint precisely the gaps in children's phonic and mathematical skills. This means that children are not consistently getting the educational diet they need as individuals to ensure they make good, rather than satisfactory progress, in these essential areas.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

The school is in the process of making bold changes to the wider curriculum in an attempt to make learning more meaningful and enjoyable. 'Trailblazer' sessions are a good example of the way in which teachers are beginning to link National Curriculum programmes of study through exciting topics. Within these innovative sessions, children have opportunities to 'discover, explore and care for the environment'.

The schools' challenge is to make the curriculum for reading, writing and mathematics, currently satisfactory, more relevant for individual children by sharpening assessment in these areas, so teachers are teaching just what children need to learn.

Visits to places such as a local pizza restaurant, to a Hindu temple and local Christian churches, and participation in events such as 'Alton in Bloom' combine to enrich the curriculum and secure children's enthusiasm for school.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 2**

Parents' appreciative comments in questionnaires and in conversation demonstrate that this area of the school's work is highly prized. Parents are correct to feel so

positive. The school's care and guidance in terms of children's social and emotional wellbeing is excellent. This starts in the months before children join the school when they attend the weekly 'Rainbow Group' with their parents. At these sessions, children play, interact and find out about school routines and expectations. Parents used words such as 'fantastic' and 'excellent' to describe this provision, noting that, when the time came to start in the Reception class, their children did so smoothly and with great enjoyment.

Notable also at this school is the provision of school meals which use organic meat and locally sourced produce where possible. These meals are delivered in an unrushed family atmosphere. The staff successfully use praise and rewards to encourage children to try new foods and to eat a balanced diet, and the school has seen an upswing in the numbers of children taking the hot meal.

Academic targets are discussed with parents and are appreciated by them, but at present, these are not based, for some children, upon a sufficiently accurate diagnosis of need.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

The school is led by a dedicated and experienced headteacher. Her leadership is much valued by staff, parents and children. She, together with her senior team, provide good role models for teachers. They have created a warm and encouraging environment in which children say they feel secure and happy. They know what needs to be done to ensure children make better progress in reading, writing and mathematics. However, school self-evaluation at present does not robustly underpin priorities for improvement. Although it clearly takes place, it lacks the formality and regularity to inform governors, staff and, indeed, senior leaders themselves.

Governors provide good support and satisfactory challenge. Their regular discussions surrounding the remodelled building helped to keep the project on track. The 'governor of the month' initiative, whereby individual governors observe and contribute to different aspects of school life, is valuable because it increases governors' understanding of what happens in classrooms. They have not to date received sufficiently detailed information on the performance of different groups of pupils to enable them to hold the school rigorously to account.

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## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
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

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

### The quality of provision

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3
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	3
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	3
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**

Thank you so much for the wonderful welcome you gave me when I came to see your school!

I told some of you that I would write to you all to tell you what I found out during my visit.

These are the things I liked about your school.

- Your headteacher and teachers work very hard to make sure you are very well looked after and that you behave really well.
- You are very polite, and everyone smiles!
- You feel safe at school and you really love being there.
- Some of your lessons are fantastic. In these lessons, you work really hard and listen to your teachers carefully, because you are so interested in what you are learning.
- You are very friendly and you look after each other. You share with each other and don't leave children out when you play.

You may be wondering if there is anything more your school can do for you. I think there is, so I have asked your teachers to make sure you learn more quickly and that some of you have harder work to do.

Thank you again for talking to me and answering my questions. Good luck in the future.

Bradley Simmons

Her Majesty's Inspector