

The Alton School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101033
Local Authority	Wandsworth
Inspection number	307570
Inspection dates	12–13 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Sue Rogers

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	191
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr P Carpenter
Headteacher	Mrs R Hudson
Date of previous school inspection	19 May 2003
School address	Danebury Avenue Roehampton London SW15 4PD
Telephone number	020 8876 8482
Fax number	020 8878 1513

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Alton School is an average sized primary school, which serves an urban area with an overall profile of deprivation that is greater than normal. This is evidenced by the fact that nearly three quarters of the pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school is unusual because so many of the pupils need support for additional learning needs of different kinds. Families move in and out of the area more frequently than is usual. This is also a diverse multicultural community and the number of pupils of minority ethnic origin is therefore much higher than the national average. Nearly half of the pupils require extra support with English when they arrive because English is not their first language. Additionally the percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is high. The school contains a unit for pupils who have moderate learning difficulties. This is known as the Resource Base. The headteacher has been in post since the beginning of September 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This school provides a satisfactory education and cares for its pupils well. Over the last few years changes in staff and difficulties in recruitment have resulted in some weak teaching. Consequently, standards have been well below national averages. The new headteacher is very clear about what needs to be done to improve the school. She has set about building a strong staff team. Its work is paying dividends as pupils are now making satisfactory progress. Parents recognise the staff's achievements and the very large majority are very happy with the school. One commented: 'The school has improved lots in the past year'.

Pupils get off to a satisfactory start in the Foundation Stage and continue to make satisfactory progress as they move through the school. Teaching has improved recently because the use of assessment information now means that teachers are better able to match work to pupils' abilities and ensure that they get the help they need. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, including those in the Resource Base unit, are very well supported and make good progress. Those pupils who need extra help with English also make good progress in withdrawal groups. The curriculum has improved since the last inspection and is now better balanced, but pupils are sometimes too passive because there are missed opportunities for them to talk and work together. These skills are very weak for most pupils when they enter the school and, although they make satisfactory progress with their ability to speak and interact confidently with others, this weakness continues to inhibit their learning. This is especially true of White British pupils, especially girls.

Teaching is improving rapidly, but it is inconsistent in different year groups because teachers new to the school this year are still being trained. Strong teachers have been placed in Key Stage 1 and they are successfully accelerating the progress made by the younger pupils. Progress is less even in Key Stage 2. Teaching here is good at times, but sometimes the pace of lessons is too slow. Although there is some good practice, there are inconsistencies in marking and feedback to pupils throughout the school. Academic guidance, although satisfactory, requires further improvement. Pupils have targets, but they do not always know what they are or understand them.

Pupils are well cared for and appreciate the good relationships they have with all staff. However, attendance remains well below the national average. The school recognises that it could do still more to encourage pupils to attend through incentives and target setting. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is satisfactory. Pupils are polite and most behave well in lessons, although there are pockets of challenging behaviour when pupils are not engaged enough in the lessons. Pupils do well in learning about health and safety. They take plenty of exercise, know what constitutes a healthy diet and say that incidents of bullying or racism are swiftly dealt with. Pupils are learning to make positive contributions to the community through the hard work of the school council. Their improving progress in basic skills and in information communication technology (ICT) means that they are satisfactorily prepared for the next stages in their education.

The new senior leadership team has a clear sense of direction and has already achieved significant recent improvements in teaching. It is well supported by a governing body that is also improving fast in its ability to monitor and challenge the school. Leaders make good use of the local authority and other nearby schools to support their initiatives. As a result, the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children enter the school with skills and knowledge that are more limited than would normally be expected. Their English skills are especially weak. They leave the Foundation Stage having made satisfactory progress, but below average in their English skills and in their personal development. They enjoy school because of good and very well organised facilities, and the range of interesting activities that they are given to do. For example, they were seen learning about stories by creating books and making puppets to retell what they had heard. They behave well and benefit from good relationships with the adults who work with them. These adults work hard at talking to the children, but they do not always give the children enough chances to speak. The children are over reliant on adults to help them explore and learn, because they are not always given enough information about how they might work on their own. Children are now making more rapid progress with reading and writing because the Foundation Stage leader is making good use of a new scheme for teaching letter sounds.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and enhance personal development by improving pupils' speaking and independent and collaborative working skills.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that it is consistently good.
- Improve attendance.

A small proportion of the 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

Standards in the school are very low. Senior leaders are determined that the pupils will do better and have set very challenging targets for future test results. These are underpinned by the increasingly effective use of assessment and tracking systems. Consequently, leaders can follow the progress of each pupil individually.

Weaknesses in the subjects tested have been identified correctly, and actions to improve teaching are well planned. A focus on the better use of key vocabulary and punctuation is already beginning to improve progress in writing and reading. Mathematics leaders know that there are weaknesses in mental calculation and in problem solving and work on this is in hand. Last year science results were worse than those in English and mathematics. The school has already taken effective steps to remedy this and is rightly beginning by tackling assessment procedures, as progress in this subject is not currently tracked.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils are encouraged to respect and care for each other and relationships at all levels are good. Pupils feel confident that there is an adult to turn to if they have problems. Behaviour in the school has improved since the last inspection and most parents are happy to confirm this. The school recognises that a small number of pupils continue to present challenging behaviour and it is therefore reviewing its procedures, to ensure consistency of approach.

Attendance figures are depressed by a minority of White British pupils who attend less regularly than others. The school has been hampered in its recent work to encourage attendance by the long-term absence of the school attendance officer. The School Council's suggestions have led to improvements and the provision of equipment at break and lunchtimes. However, the school improvement plan correctly highlights the need for greater participation of pupils in responsible roles.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

There are still a few inadequate lessons in Key Stage 2 that contribute to the uneven progress made. The school is targeting these weaknesses effectively. Senior leaders know that the pace of some lessons is too slow and this makes pupils restless and more likely to misbehave. Opportunities for speaking, such as working with 'talking partners', although effective in some lessons, are inconsistent throughout the school. Leaders have already improved teaching, and the vast majority of lessons are well planned, with clear match of work to the ability of the pupils. Additional teachers and support staff, both in and out of the unit, are very well deployed to support pupils who are struggling to keep up, or have emotional or physical needs. The school is currently focusing on the way in which teachers make clear their expectations for what pupils need to do to succeed. This is better in some classes than in others.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Curriculum balance has improved since the last inspection. The school has trialled some initiatives designed to improve learning and boost thinking, and is now determining the best way in which to integrate these into other lessons. Teachers recognise that more links between subjects will help give pupils time to consolidate their basic skills, as well as practising speaking and developing thinking. The pupils have access to good ICT facilities in their computer suite, but there are missed opportunities for pupils to practise ICT skills in other lessons. Pupils are well prepared for life in a multi cultural society. For example, they make regular visits to places of religious worship and participate in international days, which celebrate music, drama and art from other countries.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school makes good use of staff, local authority agencies and excellent resources to provide very good care for its pupils. A physiotherapy room, a speech and language room, a 'sensory room' and the Resource Base are just part of the facilities on offer. Children speak positively of their experiences in the Base and are frequently integrated successfully into mainstream lessons. Parents are appreciative of the integration of the resource base and of the use of the base staff to support other pupils within the school. The learning mentor is very effective in making sure that pupils new to the schools settle down quickly and have a 'buddy' to look after them and make sure they understand what to do. Support staff are active in engaging pupils in purposeful lunchtime activities, such as practising ball skills.

Individual academic guidance for pupils is still being developed. Pupils with individual action plans do well because of good support, but they are not yet involved enough in evaluating

their own targets. Marking across the school is inconsistent, as is pupils' knowledge about what they need to do next to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The new head has done well to rise to the challenges of this school so quickly. She is building an effective senior leadership team that already has a good grasp of what needs to be done. Analysis of new systems for tracking pupils' progress is helping leaders to pinpoint areas for development, but they know their tracking needs further refinement. For example, there is not yet any analysis of the progress made by the many pupils who enter the school after the Reception class, to check that induction procedures work. School improvement planning is very effective and is well monitored by leaders and governors. The monitoring of teaching is also done regularly, but it is less rigorous than it should be in ensuring that weaknesses are followed up as swiftly as possible.

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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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
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	2

Personal development and well-being

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

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

27 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Alton School, London, SW15 4PD

Thank you for the welcome you gave us when we visited your school this week. We enjoyed talking to you and we were very pleased to see how well you all look after each other.

We think that your school is a satisfactory school. This means that some things are good and some things could be better. We think that you make satisfactory progress in your lessons. All the staff work well together to make sure that lessons are not too hard and not too easy. They also make sure that you get extra help if you need it. Sometimes lessons are a little too slow and some teachers mark work in more detail than others. You do very well in learning about health and safety and the cultures of other countries. You are also very well cared for.

We have asked your teachers to improve your school by doing the following:

- Plan more chances for you to talk and work together to make you more confident in speaking.
- Make sure that all teachers teach good lessons and mark in the same way.

We would also like you to try to make sure that you all come to school as often as possible, so that you do not miss any of your education.

Best wishes

Sue Rogers Lead inspector