

Parkgate Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117162
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326541
Inspection dates	30 June –1 July 2009
Reporting inspector	David Wynford-Jones

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 (total)	215
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Richard Southern
Headteacher	Ms Rachel Preston
Date of previous school inspection	26 April 2006
School address	Southwold Road Watford Hertfordshire WD24 7DN
Telephone number	01923 243905
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Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is a similar size to most of its type. The majority of the pupils are of White British heritage. However, a third of the pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest group being of Pakistani origin. A larger-than-average proportion speaks English as an additional language. A few are at early stages of learning English. Overall, attainment on entry is average. Pupils come from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is below the national average as is the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Very few pupils join or leave the school at other than the usual times. The school holds the Activemark for sports and the Healthy School Award.

Watford Borough Playscheme (Parkgate), a summer-term programme runs on the school site for four weeks each summer and is subject to separate inspection arrangements.

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 an effective school. It provides a good education and good value for money. Relationships with parents are excellent. As a result, parents are highly supportive of the school. One wrote: 'I think the school is well led with great teachers. It is very friendly and welcoming.' Inspectors endorse this view.

Pupils make good progress in both their personal and academic development. They attain above-average standards because teaching is effective, the curriculum is good, as also is the level of care, guidance and support. This had been achieved as a result of the drive and dedication of the headteacher, the attention to detail and support of all staff and governors. The headteacher provides clear direction for the work of the school. She is focused on raising academic standards and helping pupils to prepare for living in today's society. Excellent links have been established with others to promote the pupils' well-being, for example, groups using the adjacent community centre, organisations within the local community and different religious groups.

Pupils' personal development and well-being is good. They enjoy school. They work hard in lessons and have an excellent understanding of healthy living. Their behaviour in lessons is good and at times exemplary. However, a small number of pupils do not always maintain this high standard at break times. The school is aware of this and has recently reviewed the behaviour policy. However, the measures by which it can be evaluated are not sufficiently precise. Changes are scheduled to be implemented at the start of the autumn term.

Pupils' achievement is good. From a starting point, broadly in line with the national average, pupils make good progress. In addition to developing their skills in reading, writing and mathematics, they are also effectively furthering their understanding and use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support their learning. However, pupils' progress in science is not as good. This is because pupils do not fully understand the complexities of undertaking investigative activities and many do not record their findings systematically. As a result, standards in science are similar to the national average. Standards in English are above average. In mathematics, a greater proportion of pupils attain the higher Level 5 than the national average.

Leadership and management at all levels are good. The quality of teaching and learning is monitored and evaluated, and good practice is increasingly being shared amongst staff. As a result, the quality of teaching, although variable, is good overall. Senior leaders analyse pupils' assessment information thoroughly and use the analysis effectively to target individuals and groups of pupils. As a result, all groups make good progress. Senior leaders have recently established curricular teams. They are reviewing the curriculum to ensure that stronger links are made between subjects. This is to help pupils to understand the relevance of their learning and the connections between subjects. Governors are supportive and provide a good level of challenge. They ensure that the school meets the latest requirements for safeguarding and that pupils are kept safe. They set high academic targets and monitor the work of the school and its finances carefully. The school has made good progress since its last inspection and has good capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and improve achievement by extending pupils' understanding of practical and investigative aspects of science.
- Improve pupils' behaviour at break times by implementing the current initiatives and by identifying clear criteria to measure success.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

In the 2008 national tests Year 6 pupils attained above-average standards in reading and writing. In mathematics and science standards were average. They made good progress in reading and writing. Overall, their achievement was good.

Current standards in Year 6 are above average in reading, writing, and mathematics. In science, standards are broadly in line with expectations. Standards in ICT are above expectations. Pupils are confident in using computers to help their learning. Review of other subjects indicates that pupils are attaining at least the expected levels with strengths in history, art and physical education.

The involvement of the school counsellor, the special educational needs team and those assisting pupils learning English as an additional language, ensure that these and other vulnerable pupils are fully integrated into the life of the school. The school's detailed analysis of the assessment records show that all groups of pupils made good progress based on their starting points and needs, including those needing extra help with their learning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Although attendance is no better than the national average, pupils enjoy learning, get on well together and respond well to adults. In lessons, behaviour is often exemplary; pupils consider the needs of others and can work both independently and in teams. At break times, the good atmosphere is supported by the efforts of pupils who are playleaders and mediators. They help to make the playground a safe and friendly place. Nevertheless, there is an element of boisterous, noisy behaviour that is in sharp contrast to the otherwise high standards. Incidents of bullying or racism are rare and pupils trust staff to sort out any concerns.

Pupils have an excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles, typified by their great enthusiasm for the physical and social activities on offer. The school's work in this area has been recognised by national awards. Pupils make a good contribution to the school, for example through their work on the school council and as playleaders. They work well in the local community in activities such as the 'Adopt a Granny' scheme and links with disabled adults. They have a growing appreciation of global issues, aided by links such as those with schools in Africa and India. However, their understanding of how people live in contrasting parts of Britain, such as rural or less multicultural areas, is more limited. Pupils' good academic skills and their strong personal development equip them well for the next stage of education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Relationships are good. Teachers and teaching assistants manage pupils' behaviour well in lessons. This ensures that pupils feel safe, develop their self-confidence and acquire a positive attitude to learning. Although most of the teaching is good, it varies from satisfactory to outstanding. The most effective lessons are characterised by meticulous planning which meets the varying needs of the pupils, clear learning objectives and high expectations. Extremely skilful questioning challenges and extends pupils' thinking. Effective use is made of 'talk partners' to enable pupils to develop their speaking and listening skills and offers them the opportunity to discuss ideas and to hypothesise. Good use is made of the able teaching assistants who provide valuable support, particularly for pupils who find learning difficult and those who are at the early stages of learning English. In contrast, where teaching is not as effective, expectations are not as high, the pace at times is a little slow and some pupils are not challenged. Lack of confidence in subject knowledge is a significant factor underlying this. Teachers are increasingly using the electronic whiteboards to bring an added stimulus and dimension to learning.

Marking has improved but still varies considerably in quality. In general, English work is marked more thoroughly than other subjects. There are inconsistencies in how far pupils are expected to acknowledge and respond to marking and to assess their own performance.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum ensures a good focus on basic skills, including in speaking and listening, literacy and mathematics. Staff have embarked on initiatives to develop further links between all subjects with the laudable aim of giving more effective coverage of the full range of the National Curriculum and opportunities for pupils to develop creatively, which have been few. Staff give a high priority to provision in personal, social, health and citizenship education and this has a good impact on pupils' overall development. The separate needs of all groups of pupils are considered and met well. This includes provision for those who find learning difficult, for any who are learning English for the first time and for more able pupils. Provision for those with particular gifts or talents has been a recent focus and continues to develop.

The required curriculum is enhanced very well by a wide range of themed events, school clubs, visits and visitors. These include residential trips, an impressive array of sports and cultural events, such as visits to places of worship. Specialist expertise is exploited wherever possible. Typical examples include sports coaches, Spanish teaching and the use of parental expertise. Parents have recently visited to talk about their jobs and to teach cookery from a range of ethnic traditions.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

While more can be done to promote more settled behaviour at break times and to improve attendance further, parents and pupils rightly value the good pastoral care that is a hallmark of the school. The school is particularly effective in looking after vulnerable pupils, especially those with specific learning, behavioural or health needs, as well as those new to the country.

Links are good with external agencies, to support pupils who need specialist help. These include a counsellor who is available to spend time with individuals, as appropriate. Arrangements are effective for pupils joining the school and for the transfer to secondary school. Of particular note are activities designed to help pupils in Year 6, such as a day spent working in this school but handling a secondary-style timetable and routines.

Good assessment systems mean that teachers are well placed to offer effective academic guidance. The vast majority of pupils know their targets in English and mathematics well. However, the setting of targets in science is variable between classes. As a result, not all pupils are involved as fully as they could be in developing their own learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The senior leadership team works together well and complements each other's strengths. They provide good support for staff new to the school and ensure that the school continues to move forward. The curriculum, teaching and learning, and assessment data are carefully monitored and accurately evaluated. The areas for development are listed in the detailed school improvement plan. However, there are too many action points. As a result, there is the potential for staff overload and uncertainty as to which initiatives have priority. In many cases the measures by which the success of an initiative can be evaluated are not sufficiently precise. Parental confidence in the school is strong and the school's contribution to community cohesion is good. There is a whole-school commitment to equality of opportunities. Governors are conscientious in fulfilling their responsibilities and are supportive. There are particular strengths in developing pupils' understanding of local issues and the school is committed to strengthening its wider links and the global aspects of its strategy.

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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?	2
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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

2 July 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Parkgate Junior School, Watford, WD24 7DN

Thank you very much for making us so welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed our visit and talking to you. You were all very polite. It is a pity that so many of the Year 6 pupils were away on the residential visit. We would have liked to have met them. However, we did look at their work and thought it was of a good standard.

We were very pleased to hear your thoughts about Parkgate Junior. You said that it is a friendly place and the teachers are nice. We agree with you. From what you have told us, we judge that you have an excellent understanding of healthy living. You know a lot about keeping safe and have a good knowledge of people from other cultures. Throughout the day, you demonstrated that you are keen to take responsibility and that you all get on together well. Playleaders and members of the school council: you do a great job. We were impressed by your good contribution to the school community. Well done.

Your behaviour in lessons was good. At times it could not have been better. It is a pity that a small number of you let the side down at break times by not behaving to this high standard. We know your teachers are aware of this and have planned ways to help you improve your behaviour. We think this is a very good idea and have asked them to make certain these plans are put into place by the start of next term.

Your school provides you with a good education. You make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. You are also developing well your skills in the use of ICT. The standards you reach in English and mathematics are above the national average. In science, the standards are average. To some extent, this is because you are not sufficiently confident in undertaking scientific investigations. We have asked your teachers to help you develop these skills. Your next step is to make certain that you progress as quickly in science as you do in other subjects.

Good luck for the future and thanks once again for being so friendly and polite.

With best wishes

David Wynford Jones

Lead inspector