

Alexandra Park Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105626
Local Authority	Oldham
Inspection number	336533
Inspection dates	21–22 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Marie Cordey

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	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	313
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Peter Widall
Headteacher	Mrs I Barratt
Date of previous school inspection	4 January 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 14 lessons and held meetings with governors, staff, groups of pupils, parents and the school improvement partner. They observed the school's work and looked at documentation, including the school's self-evaluation evidence, the school improvement plan and internal and external monitoring of the school. They also analysed the 96 questionnaires returned by parents and those completed by pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- pupils' attainment and achievement, especially in writing, for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and boys to determine whether teaching and the curriculum are meeting each pupil's learning needs
- the extent to which pupils understand how well they are doing and how they can move their learning forward
- the effectiveness of leadership and its impact on capacity for school improvement to verify the school's capacity for continuous improvement
- the extent to which the school has been effective in broadening pupils' horizons and raising their aspirations.

Information about the school

The school is much larger than average. The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals is high. The vast majority of pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds and English is not their first language. A high percentage of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. There has been significant staffing turbulence in recent years but staffing is now more stable. The school has gained many awards including the Activemark for its sport provision and Healthy School status.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

This is a satisfactory school with good features. Pupils enjoy school life. Their improved attendance confirms this and there is now very little unauthorised absence. Pupils' comments include: 'I love this school because I have a lot of friends and the teachers are very kind' and 'This school is nice because they help us learn'. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good with particular strengths in their social and moral awareness. This helps the school to be a happy, harmonious community. Behaviour is good throughout the school. Pupils are very courteous and polite. The school gives good care, support and guidance to all its pupils, particularly those who have challenging circumstances or significant barriers to their learning.

Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress overall from their low starting points. This is because the school accurately targets where pupils need extra support to accelerate their progress. This is beginning to have an effect on raising overall standards, although attainment remains low. It is too soon to see the full impact, especially in English and on boys' writing in particular. The best progress is seen in upper Key Stage 2 where teaching quality is consistently good or better. In these lessons, close attention is paid to weaknesses in spelling, punctuation, grammar and handwriting. High expectations raise pupils' aspirations and involvement and result in them becoming more confident and motivated. Assessment is used not only to provide information to plan lessons geared to meeting pupils' needs but also to give them feedback so they can learn from their mistakes and improve their work. Progress tends to be slower in lower Key Stage 2 because these features are not as evident in teaching. Pupils are not as actively involved in their learning and their basic skills are less developed. This is why the quality of teaching is satisfactory overall.

The school is successfully directing its energies to raising standards, helped by the fact that staffing is now stable. Although action is yet to have full impact, improvement is now more rapid. The school's impatience to succeed means that it over-estimates some aspects of its self-evaluation. Most parents are positive about their child's education and typical comments include: 'I am very pleased with my child's progress' and 'My child is very happy'. The school works hard to involve parents although opportunities for them to be involved in major school decisions are limited. Leaders accurately identify the need to further increase the variety of ways that parents can be involved in their child's learning.' The care and welfare of pupils form a central part of the school's character and procedures to safeguard pupils are fully met. There has been satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection and improving attainment supports satisfactory capacity to improve further.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards, especially in English, and develop basic skills in spelling, punctuation, grammar and writing for boys in particular by:
 - raising the proportion of good and better teaching across the school
 - ensuring that teachers use assessment to plan lessons and give feedback to pupils so that pupils can look back at their work and learn from their mistakes.
- Increase the opportunities for pupils to work and learn independently by:
 - developing pupils' confidence
 - involving pupils more actively in their learning
 - raising pupils' aspirations and developing their skills for the future.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Although attainment is low, it is rising, especially in mathematics and science. In both subjects, lessons are carefully planned, teaching uses real life examples, and sharply focused activities mean that pupils have opportunities to apply their knowledge and so they learn well. Similarly, in science, sharply focussed activities mean that pupils have opportunities to apply their knowledge in investigations and so learn well. However, pupils' use of spelling, punctuation and grammar in their writing, especially boys', are weaknesses. Some effective practice is tackling this. For example in one lesson an exciting task which involved them working both independently and with others helped pupils to 'get under a character's skin', and by doing so improved their writing. Very helpful written guides assist pupils to plan and sequence their writing; in one lesson this involved pupils editing and correcting each other's work as well as their own. However these strategies have yet to have a full impact. Nevertheless, they are improving pupils' willingness to write. Pupils make good progress overall and exceed their challenging targets in all subjects, including speaking and listening and reading but not yet in writing. Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. Plentiful resources for break times mean that nearly all pupils are involved in physical activities; their favourites are skipping and football. They feel safe and are aware of potential dangers. The school takes steps to prevent bullying and pupils are confident that adults will help them if they have concerns. Pupils have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and praise school dinners. They revel in opportunities to take on responsibility and take great pride in wearing their badges. There are limited opportunities for pupils to work independently without close adult guidance. Their contribution to the school and wider community is satisfactory. The school council was closely involved in establishing the new playground but it has yet to have full impact on wider issues. Overall the skills pupils acquire prepare them satisfactorily for the future.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Good progress emerges from the effective interventions planned and implemented by the school's leaders over the last two years to improve standards and the good and better teaching in upper Key Stage 2. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. Strengths in Years 5 and 6 include work that is finely matched to pupils' needs, carefully targeted use of teaching assistants to support different groups of learners, good involvement of pupils so that they learn more quickly and assessment that helps pupils to make their work better. Where teaching is less effective, teachers tend to talk for too long and so pupils have less time to practise new skills. Opportunities are missed to note down what pupils understand and use this information to plan the next lesson so that pupils build on what they have learned. Marking is conscientious and often gives encouragement as well as useful points for improvement. However, pupils rarely make amendments to their work and so they tend to repeat mistakes. Interactive whiteboards are used effectively to present and explain information but their potential to aid learning is not maximised as they are not used as interactively as they should be.

The curriculum adequately meets the needs of pupils, including those who are most

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

vulnerable. The broad curriculum includes a strong focus on enrichment. This results in exciting visits and visitors as well as a wide range of after-school activities. In a show arranged to bring science to life pupils were agog at the demonstrations showing how centrifugal force is more powerful than the force of gravity. Pupils literally held their breath as some of their classmates swung a full cup of water round and round without spilling it until they let it stop. Provision for information and communication technology is improving and new computers and software are leading to better teaching and improvements in the presentation of pupils' work.

Pupils are all valued as individuals. Those with special educational needs make the most of their opportunities because of generally carefully planned support. The school works effectively with outside agencies, such as speech and language therapists and the educational welfare officer, to support individual needs and improve attendance.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders, teachers and governors share a drive to raise aspirations and improve standards. Pupils understand this too, saying, 'Our school is helping us to be clever.' More stable staffing, clear direction and better teaching are leading to improvements in pupils' attainment, although it is too early for the school's actions to have had full impact. Governors are active members of the school community and are increasingly challenging and focused on school improvement. Good partnerships, for example with the local authority and the local network of schools, are raising aspirations as well as making a positive contribution to improving pupils' personal and academic development. The school's satisfactory effectiveness in promoting equality of opportunity is based on a clear moral standpoint based on respect and value for all people as individuals. As a result, gaps in the attainment of different groups of pupils are narrowing, especially for pupils with special educational needs. Safeguarding procedures are rigorous. Promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory, stronger within the school and the local community than further afield.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
	3

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The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

The vast majority of parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire are happy with the school's provision and indicate that their children enjoy school. All parents agreed that the school keeps their child safe and helps their child to have a healthy lifestyle. There were a very small number of concerns about the progress of their children and how the school deals with unacceptable behaviour. Inspectors agree that these have been concerns in the past. The school's actions have led to improvements and pupils are now making good progress and their behaviour is also good.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Alexandra Park Junior School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 95 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 313 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	50	53	45	47	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	45	47	47	49	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	38	40	52	55	4	4	4	4
My child is making enough progress at this school	30	32	59	62	5	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	40	42	52	55	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	40	42	50	53	4	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	43	45	50	53	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	37	39	55	58	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	31	33	61	64	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	37	39	52	55	3	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	34	36	53	56	3	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	37	39	52	55	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	41	43	53	56	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



23 October 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Alexandra Park Junior School, Oldham, OL8 2BE

It was a delight to meet you all. The inspection team thoroughly enjoyed talking to you all and listened carefully to what you had to say. You told us how happy you are at school and your attendance is much improved. Well done! Yours is a satisfactory school and some parts of it are good. Like you, we were impressed by how much the school has improved, especially in your work and behaviour. You enjoy sports and competitions and are proud to hold the Activemark award. You couldn't wait to tell us about how pleased you were to hold so many positions of responsibility and the many ways you help and care for each other. I would like to add that you also care for visitors and looked after us very well. You make sure that older pupils look after the younger ones and I think that you are kind and thoughtful young people.

You are keen to learn especially when you get the chance to be active in your lessons. This helps you to produce satisfactory work in most subjects and achieve well. Your writing, especially the boys', has not improved as much as your other work and your teachers are working with you to make it better. You enjoy lessons most when you are given the chance to develop your own ideas and talk to each other about your learning. We have asked your teachers to give you more opportunities to do this. Some of you are not sure what you can do to make your work even better and so we have also asked your teachers to let you know about the different ways you can improve it. We would also like there to be more of the good and even better lessons you enjoy so much.

Your headteacher and all the staff are working very hard to make your school better. You can help by continuing to work hard too. I wish you every success for your future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Marie Cordey

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