

Parsons Down Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109923
Local Authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	337396
Inspection dates	14–15 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Paul Canham

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 of pupils on the school roll	253
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jonathan Taylor
Headteacher	Petrina Winsor
Date of previous school inspection	7 June 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors spent almost a third of their time in school looking at learning. They visited 21 lessons and observed 14 teachers. The inspectors also held meetings with governors, staff and a group of pupils, and talked with pupils in lessons. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including assessment and attendance information, lesson plans, safeguarding arrangements, school development planning, governing body minutes and pupils' work. Inspectors also scrutinised the 70 questionnaires received from parents, as well as those from staff and a sample of pupils.

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

- the extent to which higher expectations of academic performance and the revised curriculum are tackling variation in learning and raising attainment, particularly for the most able pupils
- how successfully the recently formed leadership team and governing body are influencing the rate of pupil progress and lifting performance
- how successfully the school promotes community cohesion in this country and beyond.

Information about the school

Almost all the pupils are from families of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average.

Among its awards, the school has National Healthy School status, the Activemark and the Geography Quality Mark.

There is after-school care provision within the school, but this is not managed by the governors and was not inspected.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school. A particular strength is the outstanding care and support that places a high priority on enhancing pupils' self-esteem and developing their confidence. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. One parent's comments sum up the views of many: 'I am proud that my son attends Parsons Down and I know that he will continue to do well.'

Resourceful and innovative leadership at the very top has been the key factor in setting high expectations and spearheading improvement since the last inspection. These features are reflected in the commitment shown by staff and governors, who work with determination to gain the best provision and outcomes for all pupils and their families. Governors and school leaders have a clear vision informed by their accurate evaluation of where the school is now and of the improvements needed. Consequently, the school is well placed to move forward.

Pupils start school with below-average attainment. Improvements are such that attainment levels for the majority of pupils have been lifted by Year 6 to average. Strengths in English reflect the good opportunities pupils have to write with empathy and for different purposes. The school's strong focus on the development of basic skills as soon as pupils join the school serves as a firm foundation for their good, and sometimes very good, progress through the school.

The school knows that the quality of teaching and learning is at the hub of improved performance. The drive for high quality teaching is evident in the continual review of classroom practice based upon close monitoring and support. Comprehensive assessment procedures underpin the successful teaching, which captures pupils' interests and motivates them with engaging activities. Consequently, pupils are progressing well in lessons that, typically, are lively and well paced. Closely tailored support ensures that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress in line with their peers. In a few lessons, however, introductions are rather long and more able pupils are not stretched early enough.

Pupils' good personal outcomes can be seen in their thoughtful behaviour, interest and enjoyment of learning. They have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and keeping safe. Popular clubs and after-school activities provide pupils with good opportunities to develop their confidence as well as creative and performance skills. They are very tolerant, but have limited knowledge of people's backgrounds and communities in other parts of this country and around the world. Some opportunities for developing this facet of community cohesion are missed in subject planning and when linking learning together across different parts of the curriculum.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that, in all parts of the lesson, teaching includes:
 - challenging tasks pitched at the right level, particularly for the more able
 - well-paced activities.
- Extend the strategy for community cohesion by
 - creating more opportunities for pupils to appreciate and value people from communities nationally and globally
 - ensuring that these are included in planning when linking subjects.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

There are clear signs that the school's determined efforts and targeted support are making a substantial difference, resulting in pupils' good progress in both academic work and personal development. Pupils' enjoyment of learning, as seen in their enthusiasm and involvement in English, mathematics and Spanish, is characteristic of lessons and indicates the good pace of learning across the school. Pupils work well in small groups and independently of the teacher. They take great pride in writing thoughtfully and creatively, and when solving problems in mathematics.

Pupils join the school with particular weaknesses in English and especially in writing. By the end of Year 6, the performance in English outstrips both mathematics and science. This is largely due to the significant proportion of pupils reaching the higher Level 5. The school exceeded its challenging but realistic targets for English and mathematics in 2009, indicating pupils' good, and sometimes very good, progress. The development of pupils' learning skills early in the key stage, including carrying out independent research and problem solving in mathematics, provides a platform for rapid progress in Years 5 and 6. There are no significant differences between the achievement of different groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Pupils say they like coming to school and these positive attitudes are reflected in the above-average attendance. Pupils report no bullying or intimidation and show a good understanding of personal safety. Pupils also show much enjoyment of sporting activities, an appreciation of singing during assemblies and empathy when considering those people less fortunate than themselves. Pupils' considerate behaviour is a key feature in their learning. They are kindly towards each other and are aware of dangers in and out of school. Pupils are polite and courteous, and willingly take on responsibilities to help the school run smoothly. The school council provides good opportunities for pupils to represent the views of others. Giving support to others is integral to the role of monitors and young leaders, for example.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
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	2
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	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Effective classroom management, good relationships and incisive questioning that probes pupils' understanding are key strengths of teaching in the school. Pupils are often given opportunities to think about their work and reflect on the answers. Topics, such as those that encourage problem solving and imaginative writing, successfully capture pupils' interest and hold their attention. Consequently, pupils willingly become interested and involved in their learning. Assessment information is often used well to identify appropriate levels of approach. Pupils know their targets and they are happy that they can ask for help when they need it. Marking is supportive and usually tells pupils what they need to do to improve.

The wide range of informative and attractive displays gives an insight into a broad curriculum that adds richness to learning. It is underpinned by the effective use of information and communication technology (ICT), which enhances learning and gives pupils access to a range of resources. The curriculum successfully links different subjects to help build pupils' confidence and reinforce their use of basic skills in different subjects such as history and geography. Nevertheless, the curriculum is being reviewed and the school is aware of the need to lift aspects of pupils' English, mathematics and scientific skills. To overcome weaknesses in science, for example, the school is giving pupils more first-hand experience in problem solving through practical work. Pupils' experiences are enriched by many trips locally and beyond, and by a strong programme of personal, social and health education.

The exceptional support for pupils' personal development and pastoral care is recognised and much valued by parents and carers. 'We have been delighted with the

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provision and support given to our children,' one parent commented, 'the school has helped our children to grow and become confident and happy learners.' Attention to pupils' health and well-being is reflected, not just in opportunities for physical activity, but also in the provision of healthy school meals. Individualised programmes of support are drawn up for vulnerable pupils, covering a range of personal and learning needs. Individual achievement is effectively managed through comprehensive and rigorous tracking of attainment and progress. Evaluations lead to focused intervention, which skilfully reinforces pupils' literacy skills while building their confidence.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The determination and resolve of the headteacher have proved to be key components in the school's rapid improvement. With strong support from governors and staff, the headteacher has established a school that is committed to developing each pupil's self-esteem and raising standards. The recently formed leadership team has helped to embed systems and establish challenging targets set for all aspects of the school's work. The school promotes equality and tackles any form of discrimination exceptionally well. As a result, pupils make good, or very good, progress and attainment is improving. Staff and governors have a clear and accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The committed staff feel well supported. They have consistently high expectations of where they want their pupils to be by the end of each year.

Governors work closely with the school and readily challenge the effectiveness of its developments. Their strategic involvement ensures that policies are systematically reviewed and resources are targeted closely at educational need. Attention to pupils' safety is integral to the school's work and safeguarding procedures are firmly established. Local services and agencies are used well to enhance the well-being of vulnerable pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Community cohesion is strongly promoted within the school and in the local area. Links and partnerships with other schools nearby and outside agencies are extensive and show a deep understanding of local needs and challenges. However, the school's own documentation indicates that it must do more to help pupils understand about people's backgrounds and communities in other parts of the United Kingdom and beyond. Parents and carers are given good opportunities to present their views on the school, and benefit from regular newsletters and access to the school's website.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
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	2

Views of parents and carers

Almost all questionnaires were positive, and many of the written comments expressed considerable satisfaction with the school. These included remarks about their children's enjoyment of school, the effectiveness of management, the commitment of staff and the caring environment.

A very small minority of parents and carers recorded reservations over several issues, including the way the school deals with suggestions or concerns and the support for their child's learning. These reservations were not reflected in the very large majority of comments and the inspection found no evidence to support them.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Parsons Down 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 70 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 253 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	28	40	37	53	4	6	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	40	57	27	39	1	1	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	30	43	32	46	4	6	3	4
My child is making enough progress at this school	27	39	37	53	6	9	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	29	41	41	59	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	23	33	42	60	5	7	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	23	33	42	60	4	6	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)	27	39	36	51	3	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	29	41	35	50	5	7	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	23	33	39	56	7	10	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	24	34	35	50	7	10	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	36	51	32	46	1	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	33	47	31	44	4	6	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.



16 January 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Parsons Down Junior School, Thatcham RG19 3SR

We very much enjoyed our visit to your school and thank you for making us feel so welcome. This letter is to tell you about some of the things we found while we were with you. Yours is a good school and an outstanding feature is the care and support it gives you. You told us it is also a school where you want to be, make lots of friends, and enjoy taking part in the many interesting and exciting activities. Just about all your parents are happy with the school. You behave well and get on with each other very well.

Here are some important things about your school.

- You make good progress in lessons.
- You feel safe and secure in school and enjoy your work.
- Those in charge of the school are making improvements that are helping you to make even faster progress.
- All staff take exceptionally good care of you, and make sure that you know what to do to keep safe.
- You have a good understanding of what makes for a healthy lifestyle and healthy eating.

We have asked your school to make things even better by:

- making sure that teaching always challenges those of you who learn quickly
- helping you to understand more about people's backgrounds and communities in other parts of this country and the world.

You can help by trying your hardest with the challenges you are given. We wish each one of you every success in your future education and hope that you continue to enjoy learning as much as you do now.

Yours sincerely

Paul Canham

Lead inspector

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