

Alton Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115850
Local Authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	338669
Inspection dates	16–17 September 2009
Reporting inspector	Liz Kounnou

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	135
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Tim Neal
Headteacher	Mrs Ann Foulkes
Date of previous school inspection	3 November 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 21 lessons or small teaching groups, and had discussions with children, governors and staff. They observed the school's work and looked at the school's data, monitoring records, governors' minutes and reports, and a survey of children's views. Procedures for keeping pupils safe were examined. Fifty-five parental questionnaires were returned and scrutinised by the inspection team, who also spoke to some parents.

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

- How effectively the school has improved achievement for boys in the core subjects since the last inspection.
- How well teaching and assessment ensure that higher-attaining pupils are challenged appropriately in all subjects.
- How well school leaders evaluate the school's effectiveness and plan for improvement.

Information about the school

The school is smaller than average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is slightly higher than average. The school serves a community that has an average proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds; a very small minority are learning to speak English as an additional language. The number of pupils entitled to receive free school meals is also broadly average. School staff provide a breakfast club each morning.

A new headteacher was appointed in April 2009.

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

Pupils thoroughly enjoy attending this good school, and are proud of their involvement in making decisions. One member of the school's Eco-team carefully explained how she had chosen and ordered a 'really nice' scooter rack for the school. Pupils' behaviour is excellent because they are trusted to do things for themselves. In Years 1 and 2, each child has a work-chart that they use to select and record the work they complete over the week. This gives them a real sense of responsibility for their own learning. They have an excellent awareness of how to keep themselves safe. This highly supportive school excels in ensuring that new arrivals settle in quickly and happily. Many parents comment about the fantastic support the new Reception children have received this year. Pupils make an excellent contribution to the community for their age, are especially keen to work on the school's allotment and work industriously to raise money for good causes.

Standards are rising quickly as a result of much higher expectations in lessons and good teaching. In the Early Years Foundation Stage the proportion of children reaching expected levels for their age more than doubled last year. Since the last inspection outcomes for boys have improved so that most do as well as the girls now. There is still room to improve provision for the most able pupils, especially in subjects other than literacy and numeracy. Lessons in the afternoon are not consistently as challenging as the English and mathematics lessons taught in the mornings. Typically in these lessons planning is not sufficiently detailed and pupils could have more opportunities to use their literacy and numeracy skills. There are notable exceptions, such as the exciting teaching of science skills in Year 1.

School leaders know the two most important priorities for the school are:

- to improve the systems for checking how well the school is doing, and
- record the most important strengths and areas for development in a clear and concise way for governors and staff.

As a result, the school has already taken steps to introduce more rigorous monitoring systems and to record the outcomes of their evaluations. This is work in progress for the current school development cycle and, although not complete, the school has made good progress towards developing a culture of rigorous self-evaluation. Despite the satisfactory formal procedures the school has demonstrated good capacity to improve, as seen by the significant improvements in standards achieved at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, and by improvements in standards in Key Stage 1.

Excellent partnerships, particularly with other schools, make a very good contribution to enhancing pupils' learning. For example, well-established links with the junior school

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provide pupils with access to much better sports resources than are available on the school's small site. School staff make the most of the site and it is very well kept. Classrooms are attractive and well organised to provide an interesting environment for the pupils. The Year 2 Gardening Club enhances the grounds particularly well; pupils who have just moved into these classes can't wait to get started.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve systems for checking how well the school is doing by:
- implementing a cycle of activities to provide key information about pupils' outcomes in all areas, and the quality of provision, and by ensuring that there is a clear timetable for this
- recording the school's evaluations of the quality of outcomes and provision in a simple format, and providing termly reports for governors and staff.
- Over the current academic year, raise standards in the non-core subjects, especially for the most able, by:
- ensuring that planning makes clear how pupils of all abilities will increase their skills in lessons across the curriculum
- ensuring that pupils have regular opportunities to use and apply their skills in all lessons
- ensuring that pupils have more opportunities to talk about their learning in lessons
- ensuring that pupils have a wide range of opportunities to make decisions about how to improve their work.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

In many lessons observed, pupils were learning at a good pace, and sometimes their progress was excellent. Their behaviour was exemplary most of the time and they showed a great deal of interest in their work and progress. In Year 1, for example, pupils were trying out all different kinds of activities, answering questions they had set for themselves, to find out more about the human body. Boys in Year 2 talked enthusiastically about information and communication technology programmes such as 'Shark Pool', one of the activities they can select on their work-chart. Standards are beginning to rise after a period of great variation year on year. Across the school, pupils take care when presenting their work and try to do their best most of the time. In one mathematics lesson, pupils learning to speak English as an additional language made good progress because the support provided in small groups ensured they fully understood the language used.

Pupils with special needs are well catered for and some sought out inspectors to talk about their work. The most able pupils are doing well now in reading and writing. Nonetheless, they do not always reach the same high levels in other subjects, mainly because:

A newly introduced system of teaching phonic skills has made a significant difference to pupils' attainment in both reading and writing. The choice of books for reading is

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particularly beneficial for the boys, who relish some of the titles on offer and the range of non-fiction texts available. One boy was completely absorbed in a book about jellyfish that he had chosen for himself. Pupils' well-developed independent learning skills enhance their learning in all subjects.

Pupils are less confident in talking about how people from other cultures live, in Great Britain and around the world. This aspect of the curriculum does not match the otherwise very good provision for social and moral development.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Exemplary lesson planning in English underpins the good rate of improvement in standards. Assessment information is used diligently, in both English and mathematics, to plan the next steps for learning. Pupils are aware of what they need to do to improve their work and are fully involved in assessing their own progress, especially in Year 1. Pupils in Year 2 are keen to explain the system they followed in Year 1, of sticking stars on their target sheets to indicate their success. At this early stage in Year 2 they are not as confident in explaining how the targets will work in this year group. Teaching

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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assistants make a valuable contribution to learning. There is a lively buzz in most lessons and a real sense of determination to work hard and please the adults. Excellent relationships exist in all classes after just a couple of weeks. The pace of learning matches the quality of planning, and is typically better in English and mathematics than in other subjects, where teachers' expectations are not as high.

The curriculum is good. An attractive and well-resourced outdoor environment is used at every opportunity to provide added motivation for pupils all through the school. Good links across subjects and the impact of the work completed through the national award play a strong part in pupils' healthy lifestyles. Pupils learn to design and make healthy pizzas in design and technology, after learning in science about a healthy balanced diet. Well-designed topics capture pupils' imagination and provide a mix of active and thoughtful learning. Pupils say they like them because they 'get to learn new things'. The level of independence expected is what makes the curriculum so successful in developing pupils' personal skills. Nonetheless, pupils do not always have enough opportunities to make a contribution in whole class or small group sessions. In some lessons only a few pupils have the opportunity to talk and put forward their ideas.

The school rightly prides itself on the good care and support provided. Parents make many positive comments about the quality of care for their children. For example, 'This is a school where every child really does matter.'

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	2

How effective are leadership and management?

There exists a strong and shared expectation that every child will experience a memorable and happy education. This characterises the whole-school ethos. The school is a cheerful place for both children and staff, and most parents are infected by the positive atmosphere. One described the school as, 'An inclusive, friendly, supportive, creative and welcoming school which is very child centred.' Leaders at all levels work diligently to ensure that this ethos is reflected in the curriculum and through the quality of teaching and learning. A culture of more rigorous evaluation is making a difference to the outcomes achieved, but this is not yet embedded in all areas of the school's work. Governors are very supportive but have not consistently challenged school leaders to explain the quality of all aspects of their work. Currently, they need more information about how well the school is doing to help them improve their roles.

Despite this, governors have clear information about how well all the different groups of

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pupils are doing in comparison to those in other schools. School leaders keep a close check on the achievement of all different groups. The audit that was completed to find out how well the school is promoting community cohesion revealed many strengths in linking with the local community. At present there could be more opportunities for pupils to learn about cultures further afield.

The school's safeguarding arrangements meet requirements well, and the diligence with which the headteacher supports children and families in liaising with outside agencies is exemplary.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
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	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

A really attractive environment is provided for the youngest children, both indoors and outside. The whole area is packed with vibrant displays and resources to tempt children. There is an atmosphere of fun and high expectations for all. This is underpinned by extremely sensitive staff who are alive to the needs of all their charges. As a result, the children thrive. Almost all activities are characterised by high expectations, including tidying up. Children with huge grins on their faces worked speedily and sensibly to put away one set of equipment ready for the next session, while the theme tune to Hawaii 5-0 played in the background. They easily achieved the challenge of finishing before the music stopped. It is hard to believe that most have been in school for less than a week. Improvement in the standards reached at the end of Reception last year was brought about by introducing some important changes to the curriculum, in particular for developing children's communication, language and literacy skills. This work raised

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expectations and dramatically improved achievement, which is now good. Detailed planning provides a range of challenging activities to promote children's development across all areas of the curriculum. Leaders are rightly introducing methods to keep a close check on the effectiveness of provision for the new children, who have started school with broadly average levels of attainment. This is higher than has been the case in previous years.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

All the parents responding to the questionnaire indicated that they are pleased with the school. They mainly commented on the friendly welcoming atmosphere, and all were pleased that their children were happy at school. They praised staff for their hard work. A number of parents of children who have just started in Reception were delighted with the arrangements for helping them and their children to have a positive start to school. Inspectors fully endorse these views. A very small minority would like to have better communication about how well their children are doing in relation to others in the same age band, and the way that phonics is taught. A very few thought more able children could be stretched further. The school is already well underway with its plan to raise attainment for the most able. Inspectors believe more detailed information about attainment and the curriculum may be helpful for all parents.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Alton Infant 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 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 55 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 135 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	45	82	10	18	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	47	85	8	14	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	31	56	21	38	0	0	1	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	26	47	24	43	3	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	36	65	16	29	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	31	56	21	38	2	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	41	74	13	24	1	2	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)	35	64	18	33	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	31	56	20	36	1	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	27	49	21	38	1	2	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	27	49	23	41	0	0	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	36	65	16	29	1	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	39	71	16	29	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.



18 September 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Alton Infant School, Alton GU34 1DH

Thank you for making us so welcome and for helping us when we inspected your school. You told us that you enjoyed school and we could see that you do. You behave extremely well in lessons and all around the school. We were most impressed with the way that you organise things and make decisions for yourselves. The Gardening Club is very popular and helps make the school look good. You make an excellent contribution to the school and the local community and know very well how to keep yourselves safe. All the staff and governors work hard to make sure that you are looked after exceptionally well all through the day. Children in Reception have settled into school really quickly because they had the chance to go to Rainbow Club. Your parents were very pleased with the club. You are lucky to go to a good school where you have a lot of fun.

You are doing better in your work because the headteacher, staff and governors have made some changes to make your lessons more successful for you. They are working hard to make it better still. We have asked them to work at two things in particular:

- Make sure that the most able children have some harder work to do in the afternoons.
- Check how well everyone in the school is doing even more carefully.

You could help by making comments on your work to show the teachers if the work made you think hard, if it was too easy for you, or too difficult.

Yours faithfully

Liz Kounnou

Lead Inspector

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