

Parsons Down Infant School

Paynesdown Road, Thatcham, Berkshire RG19 3TE

Inspection dates

28–29 September 2016

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders have not been successful in improving ineffective teaching and increasing pupils' progress. The new executive headteacher is now driving improvements but this work is in the early stages.
- Teachers do not always have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve. This is particularly the case for the most able.
- Middle leaders do not have sufficient skills to improve their areas of responsibility. Recent training and development is helping them to be more effective but it is too soon to see the impact.
- Teaching is not yet good across the school. Sometimes new concepts and tasks are not explained clearly enough and misconceptions are not always tackled immediately.
- Teachers do not always build upon what pupils already know. Although they assess what pupils can do, they do not use this information to plan activities and tasks that meet the differing needs of the pupils. This is particularly the case for the most able pupils.
- Leaders have not set challenging targets for what pupils can achieve and held teachers to account for how well pupils do.
- Although children do well during their first year of school, they do not make enough progress in Years 1 and 2. This means that by the time they leave the school, they do not reach the standards of which they are capable.
- Changes to the governing body have strengthened their expertise and ability to challenge the school effectively. These changes are only just starting to bring about the necessary improvements.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils feel safe, secure and well cared for. They enjoy coming to school and have positive attitudes to their learning.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils are respectful, tolerant and kind to each other.
- Children in the early years make good progress as a result of the good teaching they receive. They become confident and independent learners.
- Disadvantaged pupils, including the most able, do as well as other pupils nationally because of the good support they receive.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teaching is consistently good or better through:
 - having high expectations of what pupils can achieve in lessons
 - providing clear explanations so pupils know what they need to do to be successful and quickly recognising and correcting pupils' mistakes
 - consistently using information about what pupils already know to plan activities and tasks that meet the differing needs of the pupils
 - providing the most able pupils with activities that extend their thinking and learning so that they can achieve what they are capable of.
- Improve progress and attainment so that:
 - pupils who are not yet working at the expected standards, or better, make rapid progress to catch up to where they should be
 - good progress made in the early years is built upon in Years 1 and 2
 - the proportion of pupils who reach better than expected standards is at least in line with national figures.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management through:
 - holding teachers to account for the progress of their pupils
 - setting challenging targets for what individual pupils can achieve in reading, writing and mathematics
 - holding middle leaders to account for improving learning in their areas of responsibility
 - continuing to develop the governing body's skills and understanding so that they can fully hold the school to account
 - ensuring subject-specific skills are taught effectively in religious education and computing.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, there have been numerous changes of senior leaders and governors, which have limited the school's ability to improve. As a result, teaching is not good and pupils do not achieve as well as they should.
- In a short space of time, the recently appointed executive headteacher has galvanised governors and staff so they are clear about what they need to do to improve the school. Her focus, determination and ambition have begun to drive improvements but there is some way to go for the school to be good. Parents recognise and appreciate the changes she is making. One parent commented, 'Our new executive headteacher has brought a new energy to the school.'
- Middle leaders do not have the necessary skills to improve teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility. They have very recently begun to develop their skills and there are plans for them to be held to account, but these are in the early stages.
- Leaders' checks on teaching have not been accurate enough to help teachers know what they need to do to improve. However, senior leaders are now providing the right feedback to enable teachers to become better. Leaders' use of stronger teachers to support colleagues is positive, but this work has only just begun so there is some way to go until teaching is good.
- Leaders' and teachers' expectations for what pupils can achieve have not been high enough. Because pupil progress targets have not been sufficiently challenging, teachers have not been held properly to account. This term, senior leaders met with staff to discuss the progress that pupils have made and to identify any who have fallen behind so that support can be provided. These targets are now closely linked to staff appraisals so that teachers can be held fully to account. However, it is too early to see the impact of these changes.
- The pupil premium is used effectively, as demonstrated by the good progress that disadvantaged pupils make. The funds are carefully targeted to provide a range of interventions which meet pupils' specific needs. The 'catch up' reading programme has been particularly successful, with some pupils making up to one year's progress during the three month programme.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is well developed. Pupils appreciate and value diversity and demonstrate respect for others. In assemblies and in class, pupils can discuss their ideas and reflect on what they are learning. For example, during assembly, pupils were discussing the importance of rules and why they should be fair for everybody.
- The promotion of British values is appropriate and the school makes effective links to its own core values of respect and tolerance. Pupils have the chance to experience values such as democracy when voting for school councillors.
- The current curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to develop their skills effectively in other subjects; for example, history and science. However, leaders have correctly identified that religious education and computing are not quite as developed as they need to be. A range of good-quality experiences appropriately enhances the curriculum for pupils, such as visits from the fire brigade or the local minister. There are a range of extra-curricular activities available such as sewing, sculpture and

singing. A night visit for the pupils and parents to the nearby nature reserve is an annual event that pupils, parents and staff look forward to and enjoy.

- physical education (PE) and sport funding is used effectively to help staff develop their PE skills while working alongside a specialist coach. Pupils also have increased opportunities to take part in sport, through additional clubs that run after school.

Governance of the school

- The governing body has recently been strengthened. Under the guidance of the new chair of the governing body, with the support from the local authority, several new, appropriately skilled, governors have been appointed. All governors know that pupils need to make more progress in reading, writing and mathematics and understand their role in making this happen. They recognise that they have more to learn to be able to hold leaders fully to account.
- The new governing body has taken the necessary action to ensure that the site is now safe for pupils. Improvements in other areas are only just beginning and governors realise there is much to do. Procedures for staff appraisal are now detailed and effective with a clear link between performance and pay.

Safeguarding

- Safeguarding arrangements are now effective. At the monitoring inspection in February this year, it was identified that the school site was not safe and that leaders had not taken action to remedy this. However, there have been a number of improvements, such as new gates and fencing, so the school is now a secure place for pupils to learn and play.
- As well as physical changes, leaders have reviewed all their procedures, including risk assessments and policies, to ensure that pupils are safe. Pupils' welfare is now a priority and leaders are effective in ensuring that the school keeps pupils safe.
- Procedures for the vetting of new staff are detailed and robust. Staff are well trained and procedures for recording concerns or incidents are clear and regularly monitored by senior staff and governors. All staff and governors receive appropriate annual training in child protection and safeguarding.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching over time in Year 1 and Year 2 has not been good enough. Lack of clarity in explanations, delays in correcting misconceptions and low expectations have meant that pupils have not made the progress of which they are capable. This is particularly the case for the most able pupils. Although more progress is now being made, work in pupils' books shows that this is inconsistent from class to class.
- Teachers' understanding of how well pupils are doing is not sharp enough. In some classes, pupils are given tasks that are too easy or repeat what they already know. This slows the progress that pupils make and does not challenge the most able pupils to deepen their learning. Recent improvements to teaching ensure that, because work is more closely planned to meet pupils' learning needs, they are more motivated to learn.
- The teaching of reading is not good enough. The school has a very structured approach to phonics and reading. While this approach has brought good results in phonics, reading skills are less well developed and the progress that pupils make in

reading is not good enough. The teaching of reading is under review, alongside the reading materials, which leaders correctly identify are particularly limited for the most able readers. The school is working hard to raise the profile of reading. Pupils like the book fayre and the 'caught reading' programme, where pupils are encouraged to take a picture of themselves reading in an unusual place.

- The teaching of writing is improving and in some classes is good. Opportunities for pupils to write are plentiful and pupils understand the need to edit their work to make it better. Teachers provide opportunities for pupils to write at length and their stamina is improving as a result. Opportunities are now being given to develop the skills of the most able writers by developing their use of vocabulary and the range of punctuation they use but this is not yet as good as it needs to be in all classes.
- Mathematics teaching requires improvement. Teachers set pupils tasks to solve simple word problems, but there are few opportunities to use numbers in unfamiliar contexts such as problem-solving. There are also not enough opportunities for pupils to develop their reasoning skills. This limits the progress of all pupils, but especially the most able. Early skills are built upon systematically so that pupils have a good understanding of number. Teachers ensure that pupils have a secure knowledge of addition, subtraction, division and multiplication.
- Pupils are working hard to improve their handwriting and presentation which has been a focus in the school and reflects the pride they take in their work.
- Marking is in line with the school's policy. Teachers provide useful feedback which helps pupils to improve their work.
- Teaching assistants provide effective support in lessons. They offer a balance between reassuring pupils and asking questions that will help them understand their work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school; this is reflected in attendance which is above the national average.
- Pupils have good attitudes to learning and, even when teaching does not meet their needs as well as it should, they behave well and always try their best.
- Pupils enjoy assemblies in which they learn how to make the right choices. One pupil said 'They make you think about right and wrong and what a good person might do.'
- Pupils undertake the limited responsibilities they are given well, such as being a class monitor or being a member of the school committee. Leaders' plans to provide pupils with additional opportunities to contribute to school life are positive and pupils are keen for this to happen.
- Pupils feel safe and secure at school and parents agree that the school provides a safe and caring environment. 'My friends and teachers are always there to help me,' was the comment from one pupil.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay healthy; including eating the right food and taking exercise. Pupils were much less sure about how to stay safe online and the school is taking steps to address this important area.

- Pupils have a good understanding about what constitutes bullying and know what to do if it happens to them. Some parents who responded to the online questionnaire were concerned about bullying, but the overwhelming feeling from pupils was that it is rare and teachers deal with it effectively.
- Pupils' welfare is given a high priority in the school. Pupils who struggle to cope with school are supported sensitively and effectively by adults, who provide necessary reassurance and academic support. Pupils have opportunities to share any concerns and this is very much appreciated by parents. One commented, 'The support they have offered my child is fantastic.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are well behaved in lessons, on the playground and when moving around the school. Pupils, parents and staff confirm that this is a feature of everyday life at Parsons Down Infant School.
- Pupils are polite and happy and have good attitudes to their work, enjoy learning and are proud of their school. They have a clear understanding of how the school's behaviour policy is applied. They know what will happen if they misbehave and like the fact that good behaviour is rewarded.
- Pupils form good relationships with their teachers and other adults. They show care for one another and when asked to discuss their work in lessons, do so with a good level of maturity. They treat one another with respect and kindness and mix very well on the playground.
- Pupils are developing independence in managing their behaviour. Pupils who demonstrate challenging behaviour are managed sensitively so the impact of their behaviour is minimised and other pupils' learning does not suffer as a result.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils do not achieve as well as they could. They join the school in Reception class with starting points that are broadly typical for their age. They make rapid progress in the early years and leave Reception above the expected standards. However, in Years 1 and 2 progress slows so by the time they leave Year 2, most pupils are working at the expected standard. Not enough pupils achieve above the expected standard.
- The proportion of children that reach a good level of development by the end of Reception is above the national average.
- In phonics, pupils develop good skills in the early years. Recent work to improve the teaching of phonics in Years 1 and 2 has ensured that these early skills are built upon systematically to improve reading fluency. Although pupils develop the basic decoding skills required to read words and sentences, they do not have enough opportunities to explore texts and deepen their understanding of what they have read. This means that as they move to more complex books, they are not able to explain why things happen.
- In writing, pupils have a good understanding of the basic structure of stories and they can organise their thoughts when writing a piece of information. Pupils are reaching the expected standard in writing but most-able pupils are not yet reaching better standards as they are not given enough opportunities to develop their vocabulary or use more variety in their punctuation.
- In mathematics, pupils have limited opportunities to apply their knowledge and develop

their problem-solving skills. Some most-able pupils do not have enough experience of applying their knowledge to less familiar situations and therefore cannot reach the standards of which they are capable.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making progress similar to other pupils nationally. This is due to the fact that support for these pupils is good. An example of this is the 'catch up' reading programme, which provides the extra practice and individual support they need to succeed.
- Disadvantaged pupils are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. They are now reaching the expected standards that all pupils are achieving nationally. The school has been successful in meeting the needs of the most able disadvantaged pupils. This is because these pupils have been successfully identified and targeted to ensure that they reach standards which are better than expected.

Early years provision

Good

- Children in Reception make good progress and achieve well as a result of good teaching. The secure and encouraging environment helps children settle in quickly and get off to a good start. Through home visits and useful transition processes, staff already have a good understanding of children's interests and strengths when they arrive.
- Planning is detailed and is based on a sound knowledge of how young children learn best. Activities are well thought out, balancing formal teaching of skills with exploring and discovering for themselves.
- Short, sharply focused sessions develop children's early reading skills and progressively build on what sounds they already know. These sessions are often followed up with a writing activity. During one observed session, children learned the sound of the letter 'K' then practised writing the letter in their book, after which they had to find a word that began with that letter. Most-able children were then encouraged to put the words into a sentence. 'I flew my kite on the weekend,' was one such example.
- Teachers provide good opportunities for children to develop their early number skills, including reinforcing counting at every opportunity and sorting blocks by colour, then counting to find the total. In one observed lesson, a child was placing cars in a row and another was counting them. A support assistant was then questioning and challenging the children – moving on their learning by asking what would be one more or one less?
- Teachers have high expectations of behaviour and reinforce these with well-rehearsed routines that help children understand how to behave, producing a secure environment for learning.
- Children benefit from a large, vibrant and exciting outside area to which they have plenty of access, where they develop their moving, handling and physical skills. Teachers recognise that this fantastic resource could be used more effectively to develop imaginative and thinking skills.
- The early years is effectively led and managed. Children achieve their best in a safe and caring environment. Children are encouraged to work together in groups to discover the answers to questions, developing not only a love of learning, but also reinforcing important social skills. Most children are well prepared for the move to Year 1.
- All early years staff are well qualified, ensuring that all the necessary welfare

requirements are met and that procedures for keeping children safe are effective. Parents were eager to comment on the standard of care and the welcome they receive when their children start. One parent commented, 'My daughter has only been at school for a few weeks, but she is so happy and secure, she really enjoys it.'

School details

Unique reference number	109875
Local authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	10019861

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 to 7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	216
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Georgina Perry
Executive Headteacher	Donna Shave
Telephone number	01635 862475
Website	www.pdp.w-berks.sch.uk
Email address	office.pdi@pdp.w-berks.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	9–10 September 2014

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- Parsons Down School is an average-sized infant school.
- It is part of the Parsons Down Partnership working closely with Parsons Down Junior school. Both schools share the executive headteacher.
- The executive headteacher was appointed in April 2016, taking up a full-time post in September 2016.
- Most pupils are from White British heritages. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below the national average.
- The proportions of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are below the national average.

- The school has an on-site breakfast club each morning and an after-school club each evening which are run by an independent provider.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed a range of lessons across the school, including six joint lesson observations with senior leaders.
- Discussions were held with senior leaders, members of staff, pupils, parents, members of the local governing body and representatives of the local authority.
- Inspectors examined a wide range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, attendance and behaviour, school improvement planning, assessment information, monitoring of teaching, minutes of the governing body, local authority reports and school policies.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils informally during the day and observed them during playtime, lunchtime and while moving about the school.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read from Year 1 and Year 2 and met formally with a group of pupils to discuss their learning, behaviour and safety. They looked at pupils' books, displays of pupils' work and the school's assessments of the progress made by pupils.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents through speaking to parents, together with analysing the 29 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View.

Inspection team

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