

# Parsons Down Infant and Nursery School

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	109875
<b>Local Authority</b>	West Berkshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	317240
<b>Inspection dates</b>	13–14 November 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Wiola Hola HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Infant
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–7
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	183
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Rev Timothy Perkins
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Janice Schofield
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	5 December 2005
<b>School address</b>	Paynesdown Road Thatcham RG19 3TE
<b>Telephone number</b>	01635 862475
<b>Fax number</b>	01635 874558

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

## Description of the school

Parsons Down is an average sized infant school. Most pupils are of white British heritage. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic families is below average. A few pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The school has a lower than average proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities, but the proportion with a statement of educational needs is above the national average. Pupils are usually admitted to the school on a part-time basis in the term prior to their fifth birthday. When the school was last inspected in December 2005 it was found to be inadequate and in need of special measures.

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures. The school has improved since the inspection of December 2005 and is now providing a satisfactory education. Pupils make the progress that can be expected and reach standards that are broadly in line with national averages. The rise in standards, as demonstrated clearly in the test results at the end of Year 2 in 2007, shows the positive impact of improved provision.

Pupils' personal development is good. Pupils enjoy school, behave well, speak willingly and confidently about their work, and are caring and polite to each other, staff and visitors. The school has recently been awarded Healthy Schools Status and pupils are clear about why this was granted and the importance of leading healthy lives.

Children are now making an excellent start in the Foundation Stage. Last year, most reached the learning goals expected for their ages by the time they started Year 1. In Years 1 and 2, teaching and learning are satisfactory, with some good features in the way pupils are helped to understand their own progress, and in the well-ordered classrooms and daily routines that help to make pupils feel secure, well organised and ready to learn. Particularly impressive is the way in which teachers and teaching assistants work together to support pupils, and especially those who need that extra bit of help. The skilled teaching assistants add greatly to the school's effectiveness in many ways, in classrooms and beyond.

The curriculum is satisfactory with some strengths in enrichment activities such as clubs, trips, visits and visitors. Staff have embarked on the task of enhancing the curriculum to strengthen the content for 'Challenge, Creativity and Cross-curricular Links' because they rightly saw these as areas in need of development. Some elements of the initiative have already been introduced this term, with a fuller implementation planned for January 2008. The development of pupils' skills in information and communication technology (ICT) has some good elements but, overall, provision is still rather limited. The school works well to ensure pupils' safety and to support them personally. Over the last two years, the school's systems for keeping a check on pupils' academic progress have developed very well to a point that teachers can easily spot if anyone is getting left behind and swiftly put in some supplementary support where necessary. The headteacher keeps good records of pupils' attainment and analyses these well.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. A clear and appropriate direction for the future has been set. Governance is strong now. Governors keep the school thoroughly under review and play a vital part in setting a strategic direction for its further development. The teamwork of staff in the three constituent year teams is a strength. The extent to which staff discharge their specific posts of responsibility, in relation to subject leadership for example, is still rather variable. The school has now demonstrated its sound capacity to keep moving forward: this capacity was not, until recently, apparent or secure. Staff speak positively about their enthusiasm for further improvement and innovation. They add that they have been 'revitalised' since the arrival of some new members of staff this September who have brought a freshness of vision, questioned existing practice, and worked with the existing members to speed up the process of change and improvement.

## **Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage**

### **Grade: 1**

The vibrant, stimulating and extremely purposeful environment in the Foundation Stage provides outstanding opportunities for children's learning and personal development. Children start school with a broad range of skills but many have weaknesses, particularly in language and communication. They make good progress in all the areas of learning because activities are inviting, interesting and relevant. Excellent and challenging activities enable the children to learn well about the world around them and, at the same time, give them many chances to develop their number, spatial, speaking, and early reading and writing skills. In recent months, the new Foundation Stage building has been further enhanced by the creation of the wildlife garden that is much enjoyed by the children. Other external areas are also used extremely well to create a lively outdoor classroom. The new Foundation Stage team leader has built very well upon existing strengths to increase opportunities for children to make decisions about their activities and learn to plan and organise themselves efficiently. Children are extremely well supported by teachers, teaching assistants and volunteer parents. All adults guide children's learning and thinking sensitively by frequently asking questions that encourage them to explore ideas and build on their emerging skills. Teachers and assistants keep a very close check on each child's learning and progress, and are vigilant to ensure each one's happiness, well-being and good personal development.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Increase the proportion of good lessons; ensure that activities set match more closely the needs of individuals or groups, and increase pace where necessary.
- Ensure staff with specific subject responsibilities are all entirely clear about what is expected of them.
- Complete and implement the revisions to the curriculum to enhance opportunities for challenge, creativity and to make links between areas of learning.
- Improve the overall quality of provision and outcomes in ICT.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory, but which have areas of underperformance, will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

Throughout the school, pupils reach standards that are broadly average or ones that are expected for their ages. Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage. Standards in Years 1 and 2 have improved considerably from significantly below average at the time of the last inspection. In reading, writing and mathematics, results were above national averages in the 2007 end of Year 2 tests. The proportion of pupils achieving level 3 also increased, reflecting the whole school approach to providing appropriate challenge for more able pupils; there is still more to be done here, though. Current work shows that pupils are now making satisfactory progress in Years 1 and 2; some pupils make good progress. Pupils are on track to meet their appropriately challenging targets. Pupils' progress in developing their skills in ICT is, however, barely satisfactory. The school works well to ensure that pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities, and those who are at an early stage of learning English, are helped to make the same progress as their peers.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Attendance is above average. The good behaviour throughout the day makes for a calm atmosphere in lessons. Pupils know a lot about healthy lifestyles, and the annual visit of the 'Life Bus' helps them to learn important facts about their bodies and how to stay safe. Pupils have a good awareness of the need to contribute to the community. For example, following a talk about the Rag Doll Syndrome Charity, pupils were keen to raise funds. Members of the School Council take pride in their work. Pupils learn to appreciate and enjoy the wonders of life, and begin to understand how people from all different cultures live, celebrate and contribute to the community. Pupils make steady progress in developing the literacy and numeracy skills that they will require in their future lives but their skills and confidence in using ICT are relatively low. They frequently discuss their work in pairs and groups, thereby developing the ability to exchange ideas and work together productively.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 3

Relationships are very good and teachers create an atmosphere where pupils want to learn. Pupils receive good feedback on their work. They know what they need to do to improve because teachers make this clear. In each classroom, a display of targets sets out the progressive steps for pupils' learning. Teaching assistants provide very good support for individuals and different groups and make a significant contribution to pupils' learning. Lessons are well prepared and teachers generally set work that is well matched to pupils' level of ability. Some work, however, is rather mundane and does not provide sufficient challenge, particularly for more able pupils. Pupils are generally confident enough to work independently. In some lessons, however, the work set for pupils when they work without adults in groups is not at a level that enables them to work successfully unaided. Where pupils are actively involved, their learning moves on apace. This was seen during a Year 2 science lesson where pupils used batteries, bulbs and wires to find out how to insert a switch into a simple circuit. Teachers have acquired a good range of techniques for determining how well pupils have grasped new concepts. These techniques are generally used well but at times teaching does not establish clearly what pupils can already do comfortably so as to avoid unnecessary repetition of work.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 3

The curriculum is balanced, relevant and has strengths in the Foundation Stage where it is outstanding. For Years 1 and 2, the school is rightly seeking to develop further its cross-curricular approaches with increased creativity and challenge to engage pupils' interest. Given previously low standards in reading, writing and mathematics, the school has understandably been placing an emphasis on improving provision in these areas in the first instance, and has done so successfully. A guided reading programme, supported by newly purchased reading resources, has recently been introduced with a view to boosting pupils' progress in reading. The school broadens its curriculum very effectively through visits, visitors and clubs: pupils' enjoyment of these experiences is seen in the school's 'Celebration Books'. The school has worked to improve

provision for ICT through links with the Junior School and through a short-term loan of laptops from another school.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils are very well known and well cared for by staff. They are kept safe and very well supervised at break and lunchtimes. Pupils feel comfortable and confident in approaching an adult if they have a problem. The school has good links with outside agencies and a strong partnership with parents. Homework books provide a useful means of communication between home and school. Helpful leaflets provide parents with good information and guidance about how to support their children's learning at home.

New systems have been implemented to keep a check on pupils' progress. Although some aspects of these systems are still being developed, existing procedures are already proving useful in ensuring that pupils are achieving as they should and that extra support is provided when a boost is needed. Teachers give good advice to pupils about how to improve. They are encouraging pupils to assess their own work but not all pupils are able or confident in doing this. Plans are in hand to introduce more simplified versions of success criteria and simple records for pupils to complete, so as to raise their understanding of their own learning, and to increase their enjoyment and feelings of satisfaction.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

Leadership and management are satisfactory with some good features. The strengths are in teamwork, in governance, and in some specific areas such as the Foundation Stage. School self-evaluation is accurate and has given rise to a thorough school development plan. The plan is clear, focused on the right priorities and ambitious. It has started to be used and the school shows signs of moving forward with good pace, although the revisions to the curriculum have taken a little longer than expected in view of the staff changes this year. The new senior management team is working well with an increased impetus for improvement.

Staff feel motivated and see their way ahead to improving the school as a team and individually. This is a considerable improvement on the situation in the recent past. The school is in a position, now that provision for reading, writing and mathematics has been improved significantly, to move ahead with the next stages of development in other subject areas, some of which are relatively weak, most notably ICT. Systems for performance management and quality assurance are robust and support school improvement. In particular, the use of data about pupils' attainment is compiled and used well. This good use of data, and the setting of suitably challenging targets, is speeding up pupils' rates of progress. The effectiveness of subject leadership, however, is very variable. Job descriptions have not been sufficiently honed to ensure that those with subject responsibilities are fully aware of what is expected. Provision in the Foundation Stage has moved from strength to strength because of good leadership and management now and in the past.

Governance is good. Governors are very effective as critical friends of the school. They are knowledgeable, supportive, well organised, and have a keen understanding of their role in holding the school to account.

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## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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### Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

### Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

### The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

## Annex A

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

## Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

26 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Parsons Down Infant and Nursery School, Thatcham, RG19 3TE

Thank you for your welcome when inspectors visited your school. We enjoyed talking to you in lessons and at break times and looking at your work. You told us that you enjoy school. We saw how well you behave and that you work hard.

I have visited the school a few times and each time I see that it is getting better and better because teachers are making lessons more interesting and enjoyable. You are now learning as well as you should be. Test results for pupils in Year 2 have gone up.

The children in the Foundation Stage make an excellent start. They really enjoy their new wildlife garden. Teachers and helpers give them lots of wonderful activities to explore and learn from. In Years 1 and 2, you usually get the right sort of work but sometimes it is too hard or too easy. Teachers and other staff are always ready to help you when you need it. They make sure you stay safe and know about being healthy. You had some good news recently about getting the Healthy Schools Award. You use computers, but not a lot. You enjoy and benefit from having visitors in school, going on trips, and taking part in school clubs and activities.

There are some things the school should do to get even better. Some lessons are good and there should be more of them. You should have more chances to use computers. The school should arrange more activities that make you think really hard and use your imagination. Some teachers need more advice about how to lead their subjects.

The staff have all worked hard to improve the school and they are excited about the next steps in making things even better for you. I know that they and the governors will make sure that you all learn as much as you can. I hope that you will carry on working hard and enjoying school.

I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Wiola Hola HMI Her Majesty's Inspector