

Parsons Down Infant School

Paynesdown Road, Thatcham, Berkshire RG19 3TE

Inspection dates

15–16 January 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Under the strong leadership of the executive headteacher, leaders have improved achievement and created a 'can-do' culture for pupils across the school. Staff work well as a team and are motivated to make this school the best that it can be.
- The current interim headteacher provides strong leadership. She is robust, rigorous and relentless in her drive to improve the school. She is determined that every pupil has the best opportunity to succeed, and is passionate about providing good education and care for all.
- The senior team shares the headteacher's ambition for the pupils in the school. Staff new to leadership roles are currently developing their skills to ensure that their work makes a real difference to pupils' learning. Leaders do not make full use of available expertise across the partnership with the adjoining junior school.
- Governors have supported the school well during a period of change. Not all governors challenge leaders sufficiently well about the progress that pupils are making in their learning.
- Leadership of the early years is strong. Children in the Reception classes receive a good start to their education because the rich environment and high standards of care support them to make good progress.
- Teaching across the school is good because of the decisive and effective action taken by senior leaders. As a consequence, outcomes for all groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are improving. Results in 2018 are stronger than in the last two years.
- Some teaching is not routinely challenging enough for all pupils. This means that some pupils could make even better progress than they do.
- Some teachers do not assess pupils' work with sufficient accuracy to identify pupils' strengths and weaknesses. As a result, some lessons do not build upon and deepen pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills well enough.
- Pupils feel safe in school. The school's safeguarding systems are meticulous and regularly checked on by governors.
- Pupils work and play together regardless of their age, gender or background. They behave well in class and around school. They enjoy their leadership opportunities and know that their views will be listened to.
- Parents are very positive about the school. They agree that their children receive a good standard of education and are well cared for.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management, by:
 - making sure that leaders and governors ensure that teachers' assessments of pupils' work are consistently accurate and are checked and challenged regularly
 - ensuring that the good work established by senior leaders since the last inspection is further developed and sustained, so that leaders at all levels make a greater difference in continuing to improve the quality of teaching and learning
 - making greater use of expertise across the partnership.
- Strengthen the consistency of teaching, learning and assessment in key stage 1 by making sure that:
 - teachers match learning tasks more precisely to pupils' needs, especially those who are most able, so that all pupils make strong progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The school has seen many changes in leadership and staff in the last three years. The current interim headteacher moved from her post of deputy headteacher of the partnership school to take up her temporary position just a week and a half before the inspection.
- Significant improvements have been made to the school since the last inspection. This is because senior leaders have had a relentless focus on all pupils' success and have secured high levels of confidence of the whole school community. Staff morale is high. One member of staff wrote: 'In our school there is a shared responsibility and everyone's opinions are considered and valued.'
- Leaders make effective use of additional funding. They work very closely with parents to ensure that individual pupils are well supported to make good progress. Pupils are monitored very closely. Staff have a clear understanding of the pupils' barriers to learning and provide high-quality support to help these pupils to catch up.
- The special educational needs coordinator has a good understanding of how well pupils with SEND learn. She has worked effectively with parents to ensure that good support plans are in place.
- Not all subject leaders currently in post make a strong enough contribution to improving teaching. However, in some areas subject leadership is very effective, for example, in phonics (letters and the sounds they represent), where the leader is clear about what impact she is having on improving teaching and how this is helping pupils to catch up with their learning.
- Leaders have developed an exciting and engaging curriculum which offers a positive breadth of experience for pupils across the school. A range of activities helps to keep pupils engaged and active. There is an emphasis on healthy living, whether through playtime games, dancing, or taking part in yoga at the after-school club. Pupils would appreciate the re-introduction of additional after-school activities, particularly sporting opportunities.
- Close working relationships with the junior school help to develop the broad curriculum. The opportunities to extend the work that has already begun are not yet established to enable best practice to be fully shared across both schools.
- The curriculum supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. For example, in religious education pupils learn about different religious celebrations and share their thoughts on the different foods eaten at the celebrations.
- Leaders do not yet ensure that the progressive development of pupils' skills in all subjects of the curriculum is clearly identified.
- Leaders ensure that they prepare pupils for life in modern Britain well by linking the school's values to everyday experiences. For example, pupils understand that it is fair for each of them to have a vote to decide upon the pupils who represent them on the school council.

- The school is very inclusive. Staff are strongly committed to equality of opportunity, fostering good relationships and discouraging discrimination. During the inspection, pupils in Year 2 were seen learning about fairness and discrimination by considering the story of Rosa Parks. The exercise was brought to life by the teacher, who made clever use of jelly babies to ensure that the learning was well understood.

Governance of the school

- Governors are supportive of the school and committed to its improvement. They have been very active in successfully managing recent changes to staffing.
- Governors have the necessary skills for their roles, but do not have a full and clear understanding of the school's performance information. They receive regular progress reports from leaders, but do not always ask the right questions about the progress different groups are making. Consequently, their challenge and support for leaders lacks a sharp enough focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- Finances are very well planned and managed. Governors carefully monitor the spending of extra funding, such as the pupil premium, and are clear about the difference the funding is making to pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school has a strong safeguarding culture which places pupils at the heart of its work. Leaders care passionately about the welfare of every pupil and do everything to ensure that pupils are safe, both in and out of school.
- Leaders ensure that all staff receive regular and appropriate training that reflects recent developments in making sure that pupils are kept safe.
- All staff who completed the Ofsted staff questionnaire, and the overwhelming majority of parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, said that pupils are safe in school. Systems to keep pupils safe are appropriate and well managed. The school has seven staff trained as designated leads on safeguarding. The family support workers have a good knowledge of all the parents and families that they work with, and keep detailed records of work carried out with other agencies.
- Pupils learn to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet, and talk confidently about the steps they need to take to stay safe when working online.
- Governors are diligent in overseeing safeguarding. They ensure that the school carefully checks all staff and adults who are recruited to the school and they make regular checks on ensuring that the single central record is properly maintained.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching has improved and is now good. Leaders have introduced a range of new approaches to teaching, which are starting to provide greater consistency. As a result, pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and are now making good progress across a range of subjects.

- The raised expectations in pupils' progress are confirmed in pupils' work in books, visits to classrooms, discussions with pupils, and the school's own checks of the quality of teaching over time.
- Teachers plan learning experiences that engage pupils very positively in lessons. However, some teachers are not sufficiently accurate in assessing the skills and knowledge they should be teaching and so do not always set work for pupils that will extend their thinking and learning.
- Work in pupils' books and on display is well presented, and pupils are proud to share this with visitors. Teachers' feedback to pupils about their work accurately reflects the school's marking policy.
- Education support assistants work well to support individual pupils and small groups of pupils. They work closely with teachers and adopt a similar, positive approach in their interactions with pupils.
- Teachers successfully foster an enjoyment of reading and use a range of texts to develop pupils' reading and writing skills. During the inspection Year 2 pupils were seen confidently discussing how to improve their writing and, using accurate technical language as well as deep descriptive language, achieved successful improvements.
- Pupils take pride in their work and are very keen to talk about it. They are committed to working hard. One pupil explained that if someone is distracting you, 'you just put your blinkers on and keep working'.
- Pupils work cooperatively, and teachers provide lots of opportunities for them to collaborate and share ideas. Pupils are very flexible learners and this reflects their self-confidence.
- Teachers follow the school's policy of checking pupils' progress during the lesson, which helps to support the strong pace of learning. Pupils really appreciate that an adult will respond to their work quickly, so they can move on or receive additional help.
- Homework is well planned and supports pupils' progress and the development of their independent learning skills. Pupils enjoy the range of homework activities, and parents appreciate the guidance they receive from teachers about how best to help their children. For example, parents say that staff greeting parents and pupils in the mornings wearing a headband with 'the sound of the day' on it encouraged them to engage in questions and discussions about phonics. Parents took the opportunity to spot the daily sound and learned to use it correctly.
- Pupils like to be challenged in their lessons. However, the level of challenge in some classes is not sufficiently high, particularly in mathematics. In some lessons there is too much focus on straightforward calculation and not enough on pupils having to think mathematically to work out how to solve problems.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.

- Pupils are proud of their school and enjoy learning. They are confident and self-assured learners.
- Pupils are encouraged to be independent and resilient thinkers and are not afraid to ask if they do not understand something.
- Pupils feel safe in school, and their parents agree that the school is attentive to pupils' welfare.
- Pupils talk keenly about the school's values of challenge, enjoyment, pride, respect and safety. They are very focused on earning 'learning gems' by practising these values. For example, one pupil showed perseverance when faced with a challenge, explaining that, 'Sometimes our learning is very hard and tricky, but I keep on trying.'
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe in a wide range of situations. Pupils speak very eloquently about the steps they should take to stay safe online.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are extremely polite and respectful. Relationships between each other and staff are strong and trusting.
- All staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and support them well in achieving good standards. For a small minority of pupils who find this more of a challenge, teachers employ good strategies to make sure that any poor behaviour does not get in the way of learning. Teachers are well supported in this by the family support workers.
- The lunchtime nurture group provides a very calm and positive space where vulnerable pupils can come to eat their lunch. Pupils enjoy the experience, while developing a wide range of social and conversational skills.
- Attendance has improved since the last inspection because pupils enjoy school and particularly enjoy learning. There are still too many pupils who are persistently absent, although numbers are decreasing. Attendance is monitored closely as the school wants every pupil to be safe in school and learning.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Since the previous inspection, outcomes for pupils at the end of key stage 1 have been improving.
- In 2018, the number of pupils achieving age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics was in line with national figures, and pupils' achievement in reaching the higher standards had accelerated.
- Outcomes for current pupils have improved on previous years, and many pupils are making stronger progress, particularly in reading and mathematics. Current Year 2 pupils, including those with SEND, and those in receipt of pupil premium, are making much stronger progress in reading, writing and mathematics. This is preparing them well for their next school.

- The achievement of pupils with SEND, and those in receipt of pupil premium, is improving because of the high-quality support and care they receive. This is helping them to catch up with other pupils nationally.
- Following the disappointing outcomes in the phonics screening check in 2017, leaders have reviewed how phonics is taught in school. The skill and commitment of the phonics lead resulted in significantly better outcomes for pupils at the end of Year 1 in 2018. However, the proportions of pupils achieving the expected standard at the end of Year 2 remained below the national average. Current Year 2 pupils are making good progress in phonics, and the targeted support they are receiving is helping them to catch up.
- The work in pupils' books, in a range of subjects, shows that pupils are making good progress since the start of the academic year. However, some teachers do not ensure that pupils are sufficiently challenged to reach the higher standards that they are capable of achieving.

Early years provision

Good

- Children get a positive start to their education in the early years because they are taught effectively by well-trained staff. Activities are carefully planned to meet children's needs and stimulate their interest. Leaders are ambitious for all children to achieve well and be happy. Parents value the support their children receive.
- Most children enter the Reception Year with skills that are lower than is typical for their age. However, because of the strong use of assessment, leaders ensure that children's specific and individual needs are identified early. Consequently, children make good progress through the early years, so that they are very well prepared for key stage 1.
- The early years team has a very secure understanding of the curriculum and they know each child as an individual. Teaching over time is very strong and is reflected in the rapid gains that all groups of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and pupils with SEND, make in their learning.
- A strength of the curriculum is the outdoor play and activities which are well planned by leaders to ensure that children have a seamless approach to their learning. On 'wellie Wednesday', for example, children used brooms and large brushes to mix paints for their 'volcanoes'. They cooperated well and waited patiently for their turn.
- Children are actively engaged in creative activities that support the development of their communication and language skills. For example, in the outdoor theatre space, children were designing tickets and selling them for the comedy show that they performed for an excited audience. Others were building their 'volcanoes' according to the designs that they had created and the facts they had learned. One boy shared his design and was able accurately to explain each section, using his handwritten labels.
- The teaching of phonics is strong. Children quickly learn the basic skills of reading. They can apply the sounds they have learned when spelling words as they write.
- All welfare requirements are met, and the children are well cared for. They are happy and safe in school.

School details

Unique reference number	109875
Local authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	10058128

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	4 to 7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	160
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Georgina Perry
Acting Headteacher	Mrs Catherine Bull
Telephone number	01635 862475
Website	www.pdp.w-berks.sch.uk
Email address	office.pdi@pdp.w-berks.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	28–29 September 2016

Information about this school

- Parsons Down School is a smaller-than-average-sized infant school.
- The school is part of a federation with the neighbouring junior school.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND, and disadvantaged pupils, is lower than that found nationally.
- The school has undergone a significant number of staff changes in the last three years. The most recent executive headteacher took up post just prior to the last inspection and left the school in December 2018. The current interim headteacher took up her post in January 2019.
- Governors are currently advertising for a permanent headteacher.
- The school offers before- and after-school provision at the 'twilight club'.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed lessons across the school and in a range of subjects. Some observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher.
- Inspectors looked at the school’s website, and one inspector checked the single central record.
- Inspectors worked in partnership with the headteacher to analyse the school’s own assessment information for current pupils. The inspectors looked at pupils’ outcomes, the school’s evaluation of its own performance, its development plan, and the monitoring and evaluation records for teaching. Behaviour and attendance records and information relating to safeguarding were also checked.
- Inspectors also gathered information about the curriculum from pupils’ work on display, and by looking in pupils’ books with subject leaders.
- Inspectors spent time in the playground before school and at playtime, to talk informally to pupils and parents.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read and spoke to parents.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, subject leaders, the special educational needs coordinator and the early years team. An inspector met the headteacher to consider safeguarding, attendance and welfare.
- Two inspectors met with five members of the governing body, including the chair, and one inspector met with the local authority’s representative.
- There were no responses from pupils to Ofsted’s online questionnaire.
- A group of pupils discussed their opinions about school and their learning with an inspector. Inspectors also spoke informally with pupils as they moved around the school.
- Inspectors took account of 19 responses to Ofsted’s online staff questionnaire. They also considered 23 responses to Ofsted’s online parent survey, Parent View. Parents submitted 11 written responses, all of which were positive. The inspectors also had discussions with 20 parents before school.

Inspection team

Sarah Varnom, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Alison Ashcroft

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