

Parsons Down Junior School

Herons Way, Thatcham, Berkshire RG19 3SR

Inspection dates

6–7 June 2017

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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The executive headteacher has brought clarity of vision and firmness of purpose to the school following a period of turbulence. She has rightly focused on a small number of priorities which she has driven through with determination.
- The executive headteacher, ably supported by the head of school, has acted decisively to secure consistently strong teaching and good outcomes for pupils.
- Leaders and teachers are ambitious for their pupils and have high expectations of them. Pupils thrive in the supportive and nurturing climate that leaders have created.
- Subject leaders make accurate checks on the quality of teaching and on pupils' rates of progress.
- Teachers plan interesting and challenging activities that capture pupils' imagination and encourage them to try their hardest.
- Teachers ask pupils probing questions that require them to prove and explain their answers.
- Leaders make effective use of additional funds to support the learning and progress of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, these pupils make strong progress from their starting points.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They wear their uniforms smartly. They are polite and welcoming to visitors and they talk about their work with pride.
- Pupils love coming to school, as shown by their overall above-average rates of attendance. Leaders are taking effective action to improve the attendance of a small number of pupils who are frequently absent.
- Leaders promote British values consistently well. Pupils learn to understand and be tolerant of those whose cultures and beliefs are different to their own.
- Leaders make good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The broad and balanced curriculum and a wide range of trips and clubs enrich pupils' understanding of themselves and of the world around them.
- Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They provide strong challenge to leaders and ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective.
- Leaders are aware that some pupils, mainly boys with low prior attainment and a small number of the most able pupils, do not make rapid enough progress. This is because teaching does not always meet their needs.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all pupils achieve as well as they can relative to their starting points, in particular by diminishing differences in rates of progress between boys and girls.
- Ensure that teachers plan learning that provides appropriate challenge for all pupils, including the most able and boys who have low prior attainment.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since her appointment in September 2016, the executive headteacher has taken decisive action to secure rapid improvement in all areas of the school's work. Following a period of significant turbulence, she has brought clarity of vision and a renewed sense of purpose to the whole school community. She has rightly focused on a small number of priorities that she pursues with determination.
- The executive headteacher has quickly won the trust and confidence of staff and parents. Replying to Ofsted's online survey, one staff member wrote, 'Our executive headteacher has moved mountains and encourages us all to do the same, with support and direction.' Similarly, a parent who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, wrote, 'I am impressed with the headteacher and the leadership and policies she has implemented this year.'
- There has been a high turnover of teachers in recent years. On her arrival, the executive headteacher, ably supported by the head of school, acted decisively to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. She did not shy away from making difficult decisions in order to make the necessary changes. As a result, the quality of teaching is now good, staffing is stable and the school has a full complement of teachers for next year. Teachers benefit from high-quality training which is well matched to their needs. As a result, they feel well supported and their morale is high.
- Subject leaders have a secure understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the areas for which they are responsible. They make rigorous checks on how well individuals and groups of pupils are doing, and they ensure that teaching meets pupils' needs. They take sensible steps to ensure that teachers' assessment of pupils' progress is accurate. Leaders intervene swiftly to prevent any underachievement. Consequently, most pupils make strong progress in English, mathematics and a range of subjects, including science and humanities.
- The curriculum now provides greater breadth, balance and challenge than at the time of the previous inspection. Leaders have ensured that pupils study all the subjects that make up the national curriculum. This wide and varied curriculum prepares pupils well for transition to secondary school.
- Leaders have skilfully woven opportunities for pupils to reflect on British values into the curriculum and a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils learn about democracy and the rule of law through the very active school council and by participating in mock elections. Pupils discuss contemporary social issues and learn about other cultures and beliefs. As a result, pupils speak and write about the society they live in with considerable insight, and are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. In subjects such as English, history and religious education, pupils develop a sense of empathy and reflect on what matters to them. For example, a lively display at the entrance to the school highlights pupils' hopes for the future of the planet. In other displays of work, pupils write about books they have read, reflect on the impact of recent terrorist attacks and consider the feelings of refugees in war-torn parts of the world.
- The special educational needs coordinator provides particularly effective leadership.

Since her appointment in April 2016, she has transformed the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. She has made skilful use of additional funding provided by the government to ensure that pupils' needs are identified accurately and that they receive timely support. In addition, she checks that all interventions have the desired impact, and changes them promptly if necessary.

- Leaders make astute use of the pupil premium grant to help remove barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders have high expectations for the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, and they are relentless in making sure that additional funding supports rapid improvements in disadvantaged pupils' progress and in their social and emotional well-being.
- Leaders have wisely decided to dedicate additional sports funding to building the capacity of staff in the school to teach high-quality physical education. The enthusiastic leader for physical education leads an effective programme of staff training.
- Leaders are well aware that there is still work to do. They have rightly identified that boys, in particular those with low prior attainment, do not do as well as girls. In addition, because of a legacy of weak teaching when they were in Years 3 and 4, a small number of the most able pupils in the upper years of the school are currently not on track to meet their targets. Leaders and teachers are taking effective action to address both areas of underachievement.

Governance of the school

- The current governing body was formed in January 2016, following the departure of the previous chair of the governing body and executive headteacher. Since then, governors have provided wise and effective strategic leadership to the school.
- Governors are highly ambitious for the school and they have a keen understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. They do not take what leaders tell them at face value, but take care to gather first-hand evidence from their own regular visits to the school. They also take account of local authority advisers' reports, which they value, to double-check leaders' evaluations. The governor with responsibility for safeguarding makes termly checks on vetting arrangements for staff and volunteers. She also meets with staff and pupils to ensure that the school's safeguarding policy is implemented in full.
- Governors set rigorous targets for the executive headteacher and offer robust challenge to ensure good progress for all pupils, including the most able, those who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. They also check that the performance management of staff provides appropriate support and challenge.
- Governors are effective stewards of the school's finances. They work with the executive headteacher to agree spending priorities for additional funding for disadvantaged pupils, and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. They are rigorous in tracking the impact of this expenditure.
- Governors are keenly aware of their responsibilities and take advantage of all training opportunities available to them, including those provided by the local authority. They take particular care to ensure that their knowledge of safeguarding is up to date. For example, they have completed online training on topics such as the 'Prevent' duty and domestic abuse.

Safeguarding

- There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. The executive headteacher has overseen the development of a warm and nurturing climate in which pupils' well-being and welfare have a very high priority.
- Appropriate pre-recruitment checks on staff and volunteers are carried out with exemplary thoroughness. All staff have completed up-to-date training, including on the 'Prevent' duty and issues such as child sexual exploitation. There is no complacency about safeguarding among staff. Teachers and other staff are ever-vigilant to any changes in behaviour that could suggest a pupil is in need of help or at risk of harm, and they know how to refer any concerns they have to leaders.
- The four designated safeguarding leads have completed all training relevant to their roles and are diligent in carrying out their responsibilities. They follow up all referrals made to them, and keep detailed and accurate records of all child protection matters. Safeguarding leads involve social services promptly, if appropriate. Leaders 'go the extra mile' to ensure that pupils get the support they need. For example, when a concern arose just before the summer holidays, leaders were tenacious in ensuring that the right help was in place for the family concerned.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers use their detailed knowledge of pupils' needs to set learning challenges that arouse pupils' curiosity and extend their skills and understanding. Pupils relish grappling with new ideas. For example, Year 3 pupils were engrossed in an activity on onomatopoeia based on their reading of 'The iron man'.
- Teachers follow the school's assessment policy consistently. They use their expert subject knowledge to spot and correct pupils' misconceptions promptly. Pupils value the feedback they receive. One said, 'It was useful getting it wrong because we had to think again.'
- Teachers probe and deepen pupils' understanding through well-targeted questions that encourage pupils to think for themselves. This is particularly apparent in the skilful interventions made by teaching assistants to support the learning of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Teachers understand that they are accountable for the progress that their pupils make, and leave no stone unturned in their efforts to ensure good outcomes for all. A member of staff who responded to Ofsted's online staff survey wrote, 'It's a fantastic school to work in, where both staff and children share a love of learning and the desire to achieve.'
- Teaching rightly focuses on the development of pupils' reasoning skills. For example, in mathematics when pupils answer a question, teachers require them to prove it and explain it. Teachers are also careful to build pupils' resilience and ability to work in teams. Pupils know that before asking their teacher for help, they must first try to work it out for themselves, then ask another pupil.
- Pupils pay attention in lessons and work as hard as they can. They are keen to do well

and get down to their learning cheerfully. Little learning time is lost because pupils follow well-established routines. Pupils are polite to their teachers and respectful of each other's contributions to discussions. Pupils' ability to express their ideas verbally is exceptionally strong because of the high-quality discussions that their teachers and other adults have with them. As a result, pupils make strong progress in their learning in a range of subjects.

- In English, and in other subjects too, teachers encourage pupils to think and act like writers. Pupils take immense pride in editing and redrafting their work. As a result, pupils produce fluent stories, poems and argument pieces that contain accurate spelling and grammar as well as a rich vocabulary. In addition, pupils' writing is thoughtful and reflective. For example, pupils write with sensitivity about challenging topics such as mental health, migration and extremism. In mathematics, pupils use mathematical terminology accurately and teachers ensure that the curriculum provides regular practice in a range of mathematical topics and skills.
- Teachers 'go the extra mile' to enrich their pupils' experience. Pupils in Year 3 spoke with genuine awe and wonder about a visit to Stonehenge as part of their work in history. They marvelled at the scale of the stone circle and the challenges of building it. Homework is set consistently and pupils appreciate its value to their learning.
- Reports to parents are informative, and parents have the opportunity to meet their child's teacher formally twice a year. There is also helpful information on the school's website about the curriculum followed in each class. Most parents value the communication that they have with the school. However, a small number of parents felt that they would like more information about how well their children are doing.
- Outcomes over time demonstrate that teaching is consistently strong in all subjects and in all year groups. Where there is minor variability, leaders provide timely and effective support to teachers.
- Occasionally, the level of challenge in lessons is not sufficiently well matched to the needs of a small number of boys in each year group. As a result, they make less progress than girls. Equally, some of the most able pupils, particularly in Years 5 and 6, are not stretched enough. Teachers are aware of this, and are working with leaders to ensure that all pupils are given challenging work to do.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils understand and are tolerant of individuals and groups who are different to themselves. Pupils know about online, racist and homophobic bullying. They know that all forms of bullying are wrong and know that they should tell teachers if they or a friend is a victim. Pupils say that bullying occasionally takes place in the school, but that teachers deal with it well. A small number of parents expressed concern about bullying, but most of those who did so acknowledged that the school had resolved the issue well.
- Pupils have plentiful opportunities to learn to be good citizens. Leaders take pupils' views seriously and invite them to make a genuine contribution to school improvement

through the active school council. Pupils were excited about the school's mock general election and gained immense enjoyment and learning from making posters and speeches in support of their chosen parties.

- The school makes very good provision for pupils' physical and emotional well-being. Leaders cater particularly well for those pupils who are vulnerable. For example, an art therapist gives effective support to a small number of pupils who have social and emotional difficulties.
- Pupils feel safe in school, and teachers take every care to support pupils' well-being and welfare. Pupils have been taught how to keep themselves safe, including when they are using the internet.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils conduct themselves well in lessons and around the school. They are polite and welcoming to visitors. Pupils of all ages play well together in the playground, where older pupils look out for their younger schoolmates. Pupils care for the fabric of the building well, and keep the site free of litter.
- Pupils know, understand and agree with the school's approach to managing behaviour. They think that the yellow and red cards for poor behaviour are effective and they like the merits and 'gems' they receive for good effort and conduct.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to their learning. They take pride in their work. They enjoy talking about what they have learned and how their work has improved. A small number of low-prior-attaining boys make less progress than they should because they do not always pay enough attention in lessons.
- Pupils love coming to school and their rates of attendance are above the national average for primary schools. Leaders promote regular attendance by, for example, presenting a cup to the class with the lowest rates of absence each week. A very small number of pupils who are disadvantaged, or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, do not attend school regularly enough. Leaders are keenly aware of this. A family support worker has built effective relationships with the families of these pupils. As a result, their attendance is starting to improve.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Published outcomes for 2016 show that pupils' progress overall was broadly average in reading and mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils also made progress similar to that made by other pupils nationally. The progress of middle- and high-prior-attaining pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities was in line with national averages.
- Overall, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics was above average. For low- and middle-prior-attaining disadvantaged pupils, attainment was below the national average. However, the most able disadvantaged pupils attained in line with all other pupils nationally. The proportion of pupils achieving higher scores in their reading and mathematics tests was above the national average and in the case of reading,

significantly above average.

- The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in spelling and grammar at the end of Year 6 was similar to the national average. However, in science a smaller proportion than that seen nationally reached the expected standard.
- Current pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. In reading, pupils do particularly well because they demonstrate good understanding of the challenging books that they read. Pupils write at length on different topics and in a variety of styles. They know how to edit and correct their own work. As a result, their writing is vivid, with good control of spelling and grammar. In mathematics, pupils achieve well because they have regular practice in calculation, reasoning and the application of skills.
- Pupils are doing well in a range of other subjects too. Their progress in religious education and history is strong because they learn about and debate topics that enthuse and excite them. Following last year's disappointing outcomes in science, leaders have revised the curriculum. As a result, pupils can now clearly demonstrate their understanding of scientific concepts and that they have a secure grasp of scientific skills. In physical education, pupils make rapid progress because they are motivated by the activities that they are given to do and they know how to assess their own performance.
- Current attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is stronger for pupils in Years 3 and 4 than it is for those in Years 5 and 6. This is because a legacy of weak teaching has led to some gaps in the knowledge, skills and understanding of older pupils in the school.
- Pupil premium funding is used wisely to remove barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils. Consequently, these pupils have made very strong progress in all year groups since September, and they are rapidly catching up with other pupils. Similarly, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are doing well because of the skilful support and sensitive interventions they receive to address their learning, social and emotional needs.
- The majority of the school's most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, make strong progress because the work that they are given stretches and challenges them. The school's own assessment information reveals that the most able pupils in most year groups have made rapid progress since September in reading, writing and mathematics. However, leaders have correctly identified that some of the most able pupils in the upper years are not currently on track to meet their targets. They are taking effective action to address this.
- The school promotes reading extremely well. The library is well stocked, bright and welcoming. Teachers check that all pupils read at home at least four nights a week, and pupils have many opportunities to read for pleasure in school. They read with fluency, expression and enjoyment. Weaker readers read aloud with confidence, using their phonics skills well to sound out unfamiliar words. In lessons, pupils read challenging books and extracts, and demonstrate good levels of understanding. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have made significant gains in their reading and spelling ages over the last year.
- Girls make faster progress and attain better than boys across the school. Leaders recognise that boys need to make faster rates of progress to catch up. This is

particularly the case for boys who have low prior attainment. Leaders have credible plans to ensure that boys make the necessary progress.

- Pupils are prepared well for secondary school because overall outcomes in English, mathematics and a wide range of subjects are good.

School details

Unique reference number	109923
Local authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	10032887

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community School
Age range of pupils	7 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	303
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Georgina Perry
Executive Headteacher	Donna Shave
Telephone number	01635 866700
Website	www.pdp.w-berks.sch.uk
Email address	office.pdj@pdp.w-berks.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	23–24 April 2015

Information about this school

- Parsons Down Junior School is a larger-than-average-sized junior school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is lower than that found nationally.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is around the national average.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The school is part of a federation with the neighbouring infant school.
- The previous executive headteacher and chair of the governing body left the school in December 2015. The then vice-chair took over as chair of the governing body and an interim executive headteacher supported the head of school for two days a week during the spring term of 2016. The current executive headteacher was appointed in April 2016. She supported the head of school for one day a week for the summer term and took up the full-time post in September 2016.

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school meets the floor standards which set out the government's minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited all classes, in some cases jointly with a member of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors held a variety of meetings with senior and middle leaders to explore aspects of the school's work.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of the governing body and four other members of the governing body.
- The lead inspector also met with the joint principal adviser for West Berkshire local authority.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils to discuss their views about school. They also spoke to pupils at break and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents by analysing 59 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 54 free-text responses.
- The views of staff were taken into account by analysing 13 responses to the staff survey and by talking to a group of staff.
- An inspector listened to two groups of pupils read.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation, assessment information, the school development plan and minutes of meetings of the governing body.
- Inspectors reviewed pupils' learning over time in their workbooks.
- Safeguarding procedures at the school were also reviewed.

Inspection team

Gary Holden, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Eileen Northey	Ofsted Inspector
Karen Metcalfe	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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