



Alexandra Park Junior School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 105626
Local Authority Oldham
Inspection number 287281
Inspection dates 24–25 January 2007
Reporting inspector Brian Sharples HMI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Brook Lane
School category	Community		Oldham
Age range of pupils	7–11		Lancashire OL8 2BE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0161 7708321
Number on roll (school)	313	Fax number	0161 9113152
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Peter Widall
		Headteacher	Mrs I Barratt
Date of previous school inspection	26 November 2001		

Age group 7–11	Inspection dates 24–25 January 2007	Inspection number 287281
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Alexandra Park Junior is a larger than average sized school which takes its pupils from one local feeder infant school. The majority of pupils come from two local wards which have high levels of social and economic deprivation. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school is below national averages and they frequently have low levels of literacy. All of the pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds with the highest percentage being of Pakistani heritage. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need, is above the national average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

When entering the school there is at once a feeling of friendliness, warmth and a caring atmosphere. Pupils are cheerful, polite and enjoy being at the school. This attitude is evident around the school throughout the day. 'We like this school because there are lots of fun things to do' and 'I like the different activities and the teachers.' These comments from pupils sum up the feelings of so many other pupils around the school.

Less than two years ago the school was a concern for the local authority. Standards and achievement were exceptionally low. Since that time there has been enough improvement to say that this is now a satisfactory school which is continuing to improve. Around the same time the structure of the senior leadership team (SLT) was changed and new systems and ways of working have been introduced. In some cases it is too early to see an immediate impact, but the most noticeable have been the improvement in English and the overall rate of progress across the school. Overall standards remain below national averages in the three core subjects with the lowest performance in science. However, given the low levels of ability on entry to school, the pupils make satisfactory progress by the time they leave Year 6. This improvement is down to the drive by the senior leadership and hard work by the teachers.

The care, guidance and support that staff provide for pupils are good. Pupils feel safe and secure in the school knowing that any problems will be sorted out by a member of staff. Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Overall behaviour around the school and in lessons is good. Pupils are encouraged to lead healthy lives and the variety and quality of food available in the canteen is excellent. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good. Their involvement in the community and development of skills for future economic well-being are satisfactory. However, these are aspects which are underdeveloped and pupils would benefit from a wider range of opportunities and experiences in these areas.

The quality of teaching and learning across the school is satisfactory with some good features. Teachers are liked and respected by the pupils. The quality of lesson planning varies from good to satisfactory. Teachers are beginning to embed the features of assessment for learning into their lessons, but they are not yet fully in place. Not all teachers consistently plan for the varied needs of individuals or small groups of pupils. There is sometimes a tendency to assume that where setting takes place, then differentiation has been addressed. Teachers are setting targets for pupils, but this and the use of pupil or peer assessment has to be further developed. Teaching assistants and learning mentors are used well across the school to support those pupils with additional needs and learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. The senior leadership is introducing new initiatives and new ways of working and the school is undergoing a period of change for the better. However, not all the changes have yet been embedded or consolidated to impact fully on outcomes. The senior leaders have carried out a satisfactory review of the school which generally shows they know the school well. The governing body is carrying out its duties to a satisfactory standard and now

should sharpen its involvement in evaluation and development planning processes. Subject leaders are developing their roles, but the quality of their work is not yet of a consistently high standard across the school. Given the qualities and mix of personnel among the senior leadership and the developing nature of the school, the capacity to improve further is satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that standards and achievement in mathematics and science rise and consolidate the upward trend in English.
- Embed the principles of assessment for learning including differentiation, pupil self-assessment and individual target setting.
- Ensure there is wider involvement and participation in whole school self-evaluation and development planning processes.
- Further develop the learners' contribution to the community and how they prepare for future economic well-being.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils enter the school with levels of attainment that are well below national averages. They have low literacy skills, with weaknesses in writing, listening and speaking. The school works hard to raise standards during the time pupils are in school. In 2006, the progress made in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6 was satisfactory, but in science it was inadequate. Over the last three years the school has improved the rates of progress so that overall pupils now make satisfactory progress by the time they leave school.

Standards in English remain slightly below average, but have shown steady improvement over the last five years. This improvement is the result of implementing effective new strategies including talking partners, phonics classes and first steps oral language. The school's impact on mathematics has been slower and standards remain below national averages. Standards in science have been erratic since 2004, with a dramatic fall in standards in 2006. Overall standards are well below national averages.

Up to 2005 boys were underachieving; however, the school has introduced some effective strategies to address this area of concern. In 2006, results show that boys made better progress than girls and their attainment in mathematics and science was also better than the girls. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given good support and make satisfactory progress by the time they leave school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils are positive about their school and like being there. They appreciate the ways in which staff help them, particularly in improving behaviour and dealing with any incidents quickly. They say lessons are fun and they enjoy taking part in activities

outside of lessons. A flexible timetable has helped the children to access extra-curricular activities and accommodate their religious commitments as well. Most children work and play together harmoniously, but a small number still have difficulty in cooperating and understanding each other. However, the staff have many effective strategies in place to improve this, including a playground friends group and discussions during circle time.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They listen with interest to their teachers' strong, moral messages. Through their work in personal, social, health and citizenship education children become increasingly aware of themselves, others and the need for good relationships. The use of 'The Feelings Box' gives the children a chance to express their feelings or concerns about any aspect of school life. The school council gives pupils good experiences of working together for the benefit of the school community. For instance, they have been influential in introducing the playground friends system and are looking at ways to improve playtimes for all. Other examples of children contributing to society include a charitable project fundraising for the Pakistani Earthquake disaster. Children know how to make healthy choices and how to stay safe. Figures for the last two terms show that attendance is close to the national average. The school is working hard to raise the levels of attendance across the school. Extended holidays taken by pupils and their families is a major problem the school has to face.

Pupils' learning in respect of their contribution to the wider community and their development of economic well-being are satisfactory but require further development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Overall, the standard of teaching and learning is satisfactory with some good features. Pupils are generally interested in lessons, attentive, motivated to learn and their behaviour is good. There is some good practice where work is well planned, where teachers' expectations are high and where the individual needs of pupils are addressed. However, this pattern is not yet consistently embedded across the school.

The school is beginning to introduce the principles of assessment for learning but further work is needed, particularly in areas of individual setting of targets and pupil self-assessment. Equally, teachers' marking does not always give the pupils enough guidance on what they need to do to improve. There is a lack of consistency with regard to differentiation and planning for the needs of individual pupils. One danger is in teachers assuming that differentiation has been fully addressed where pupils are placed in set groups for core subjects.

The sharing of learning objectives in lessons is consistent across the school. However, given the low literacy levels of pupils, care should be taken to make sure that these are always fully understood by pupils.

Teaching assistants are used effectively in lessons to support pupils in their learning. Their linking to pupils on the brink of Level 5 is a positive strategy, whilst their support for pupils with additional needs or LDD is equally good. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively to support learning. Teachers are making good use of interactive whiteboards to enliven lessons and motivate pupils. Pupils are able to access computers in their classroom as well as having a weekly slot in the ICT room. Teachers will often use this opportunity to use the ICT to enhance learning in other subject areas.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The pupils' low levels of language acquisition have prompted the school to reshape the curriculum. The SLT has worked on developing a curriculum framework which provides a broad range of learning experiences and focuses on developing wider skills for life including creativity, problem-solving and verbal expression. This exercise was supported by the whole of the teaching staff who together developed a curriculum map linking subject areas across the curriculum. However, it is too early to judge the effectiveness of this change and its full impact on pupils' progress.

The inconsistent profile of standards attained in science has prompted the school to change radically the ways in which the subject is taught. The main focus is to give more emphasis to language within the subject and on problem-solving in order to improve results. The school has introduced useful strategies to improve speaking and listening, for example, talking partners and first steps in oral language. Training has taken place related to 'talk for learning' to further enhance this aspect of curriculum.

There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities which enhance the breadth of experiences for pupils, including various sports activities, computer club, steel band and drama club. Music enriches the experience of all pupils. As one pupil rightly said, 'Not all schools have a music teacher, but we have and she is really good.' The use of specialist visitors and visits into the local community also enrich pupils' learning, for example, in supporting work on the topics of Romans and Tudors.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school has established good provision to care for, support and guide pupils during their time at school. Procedures are starting to impact on the pupils' personal development and well-being. Strong procedures for child protection and risk assessment ensure that children are well safeguarded. The staff's strong teamwork, including the learning mentors and the support staff, ensures the ongoing welfare of each individual child. All children are well prepared for starting their junior school and make a smooth transfer into the secondary school. Teachers thoroughly analyse and assess each pupil's work and ability levels on entry into Year 3. Many pupils enter the school with low levels of literacy. The school is very responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable children. The dedication and hard work of the staff and a wide range of intervention and support strategies ensures that the vulnerable pupils are given a good level of

support and care. Staff frequently meet with staff from external agencies to plan additional support required and review progress. These meetings are sometimes conducted in the children's own homes, providing an invaluable link with parents. Parents are invited to comment in the home/school diaries and are encouraged to visit school to talk to staff about any concerns.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The SLT structure has gone through a period of significant change over the last 18 months, including the appointment of a second deputy headteacher and the inclusion of additional middle managers. This new SLT is doing a sound job of leading and managing the day-to-day running of the school and of introducing new working procedures. It has ensured that the main focus is on raising achievement and standards across the whole school. This has certainly been effective in raising the standards of achievement amongst boys and in raising standards in English. Some of the new systems and procedures have not yet had time to embed and impact fully on outcomes. The school development plan provides a clear picture of the priorities for moving the school forward with clear criteria for measuring success. However the plan lacks details about cost implications for delivering the priorities.

The school set itself very challenging attainment targets last year. The targets for the percentage of Level 4 or above in English were exceeded but were missed in mathematics. Monitoring and tracking progress by the SLT are good. There are regular reports to governors, termly and annual reviews with subject leaders and regular meetings of the SLT. The school has recently completed a whole school self-evaluation which shows that it knows where the main strengths and weaknesses lie. The main contributors to the self-evaluation were the SLT and staff. There was little input from other parties such as governors or parents. The role of middle managers is developing but is still variable across the school. They are monitoring the quality of provision and teaching in their subjects including lesson observations and work scrutiny. Subject action plans are produced for each subject but the quality is not yet consistent, for example in the use of success criteria. The quality of minutes for school meetings is also variable and they often lack clear points for action.

Performance management is in place for all teachers and the school is now working towards implementing a system for all teaching assistants and learning mentors. The SLT ensures that all safeguarding procedures are in place and followed correctly. Links with parents and the wider community are satisfactory and developing. Parents are reluctant to become fully involved in the school, but staff are working hard to address this issue. However, those responding to the parent questionnaire believe that the school is well led and managed.

The governing body has established sound procedures to ensure that its duties and responsibilities are adequately covered. Each governor is linked to a curriculum area and a year group and is beginning to take a more active part in the life of the school. There are aspects of governance which are not as strong as others, for example,

involvement in school self-evaluation or the production of the school development plan. Efforts on the part of the school leaders and managers have seen satisfactory progress in the school over the last 18 months and there is satisfactory capacity for further improvement.

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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
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?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ 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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
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	3
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

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. The inspectors really enjoyed the chance to talk with you about your work and to listen to what you think about your school. We have decided that Alexandra Park Junior is a satisfactory and improving school. We also found out that you, along with the teachers, parents and governors are all proud of the school and are working hard to see it become even better.

What we liked most about your school.

- The way that Mrs Barratt and her staff are keen to see standards of work improve even more and make sure that you all make good progress.
- Your good behaviour and polite manners around school.
- The interest that you show in lessons and the way you enjoy learning.
- The way that you feel safe around school and enjoy being there.
- The way that all the adults guide and care for you and want to see that you come to no harm. This helps create the caring feeling which is all around the school.
- The many different activities that you are able to take part in after school.

What we have asked your school to do now.

- We want the school to make sure that all bits of teaching are good all the time, especially in things like setting your targets and making sure all your needs are met.
- Some of you are not doing as well as you could. I want the school to help you do better in English, mathematics and science.
- The governors and subject leaders need to make sure that they are always watching how well the school is doing.
- The staff need to give you more chances and experiences to work in the area around school and help you prepare for life after Alexandra Park.

We hope you are pleased with the things we have said about your school and are proud of what you, your staff, governors and parents have achieved so far. We very much enjoyed our time with you.