

Gatcombe Park Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116204
Local Authority	Portsmouth
Inspection number	326345
Inspection dates	3 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Rob Crompton

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

Type of School	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	206
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Young
Headteacher	Mrs Carole Roberts
Date of previous school inspection	10 July 2006
School address	St Barbara Way Hilsea Portsmouth PO2 0UR
Telephone number	02392 694412
Fax number	02392 667134

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. The school was visited for one day. The inspectors investigated the following issues in detail:

- provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage
- pupils' achievement in Key Stage 2
- the quality of teaching and learning.

Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation, national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records, together with curriculum and planning documents. In addition, observations were made of the school at work, including dipping into some lessons. Interviews were held with some staff, pupils and governors. The parents' responses to the questionnaires were analysed. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Gatcombe Park Primary School is an average sized school. The majority of pupils have a White British heritage, with around 8% from Asian, African or mixed race families. No pupils are at an early stage of acquiring English. A below average proportion of pupils - one in ten - have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties. Others have behavioural or emotional problems, or speech, language and communication difficulties. The school provides for the Early Years Foundation Stage in a Reception class.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. The headteacher and deputy, with the strong support of governors, have led the school successfully through a period of instability, during which pupils in the lower junior classes were not making sufficient progress. Due to improvements in teaching, which is now good overall, pupils across the school are achieving well and reaching average standards. Successful initiatives have led to a marked increase in the proportion of Year 6 pupils reaching the higher levels in writing. Overall performance in writing remains the main issue to address however, as there is a wider gap than usual between the standards that Year 6 pupils reach in reading and those reached in writing. Pupils in Year 5 are making rapid progress and are set to achieve the challenging targets they have been set for the end of Year 6.

Teachers manage pupils well and plan a range of interesting work for pupils of different abilities. Consequently, pupils concentrate well and are keen to take part. They discuss their ideas sensibly in pairs, and express themselves clearly when answering questions. Teaching assistants provide good support for pupils with moderate and other learning difficulties, so that they make good progress towards their targets.

Teachers use interactive whiteboards well to add pace and impact to their lessons. Pupils have targets that help to focus their learning. However, not all pupils are clear about what their targets are. Marking, while satisfactory overall, does not consistently guide pupils in how they could improve their work, nor does it always relate to their individual targets.

The good curriculum contributes strongly to pupils' enjoyment of learning. It is imaginatively designed and enriched by trips to places of interest, and visitors such as musicians and artists. Teachers provide stimulating activities that fully involve pupils. Consequently, pupils develop very positive attitudes to learning and are very keen to participate. They talked enthusiastically, for example, about their independent research into the question 'Would you like to live in modern times or the Victorian era?' Pupils work hard at school and are justifiably proud of their 'learning journals', which include a wide range of work across the curriculum. Pupils use computers routinely to research topics and present their findings. For example, they searched the internet during the 'Southsea, then and now' topic, and created multimedia presentations. Strong links with a local secondary school specialising in technology provide good opportunities for pupils to develop confidence in the use of computer sensors to log changes in temperature, light and sound. Opportunities for pupils to practise and consolidate their writing skills across the curriculum have improved, but there is scope for this to be extended. Parents are very supportive, particularly noting how much their children enjoy school. One commented, 'The creative curriculum has proved very popular with my child, as she can choose her own way of learning.' Another said that her child did not like to miss school even when he was ill.

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good and they are particularly respectful towards each other. Attendance is broadly average, and there are very few pupils who have a poor attendance record. Behaviour is good in lessons and around the school; for example, at playtime older pupils readily mix and play with younger ones, and there is no sign that pupils feel anything other than very safe and happy. Pupils are well aware of safety issues when using the internet or mobile phones. Bullying and racist incidents are rare and there have been no recent exclusions. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to stay healthy, with even the youngest children aware of the benefits of healthy food, exercise and drinking water. Links with the community are good, with pupils involved in local events, collecting for charities and entertaining a local hospice. Pupils develop good key skills and are especially good at working together, which sets them up well for the next stage in their learning.

Pastoral care is very good in what parents describe as a 'friendly community'. Parents of pupils who need extra support for learning or medical reasons are particularly appreciative of the help they are given, which assists their children to make as good progress as their peers. The school makes good use of outside agencies where necessary and safeguarding procedures are robust. In response to parents' requests, pre-school and after-school care has been established. These are well run, and much enjoyed by up to 20 pupils each session. Academic support and guidance are good overall, with assessment used very well to track pupils and identify where extra help may be needed. However, opportunities to use this information when marking pupils' work are sometimes missed.

The headteacher and deputy have a real passion and desire to give the pupils the best possible education, and this is apparent in their attention to detail in monitoring the work of the school. They do not shirk from difficult decisions. A radical change in the structure of middle management has proved successful in distributing leadership roles. Self-evaluation is rigorous and accurate, and leads to well-informed development planning. Responsibilities are shared, and staff willingly take the lead in different areas, such as developing the curriculum or promoting progress in science.

The school has made good progress since its last inspection, with much better assessment and tracking. Subject leadership has been improved, and the impact of this is evident in more rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils. A dip in progress through Key Stage 2 has been addressed successfully. Standards have risen, especially those achieved by more-able pupils, due to a continuing whole-school focus on improving teachers' expertise. The governing body fulfils its responsibilities well, asking searching questions and visiting the school to find out about its work. Community cohesion is promoted satisfactorily, but governors have not yet audited this to identify areas for improvement. The school is well placed to improve under the strong leadership of the headteacher, deputy and senior staff.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children start school at levels that are broadly typical of their age, although their reading, writing and calculation skills are relatively low. Children settle very quickly when they start in the Reception class, which is something that many parents appreciate. They love coming to school, and tackle their tasks with great enjoyment and enthusiasm. One parent voiced the opinion of many by stating, 'There has not been a day when my child has not wanted to go to school.' The provision is good, because it is well managed and there is an effective balance between child-selected activities and ones that have more focused teaching. The well-planned curriculum ensures that a theme is threaded through what children learn. For example, in learning about France, the role-play area is the Louvre and outside there is a French café where a 'chef' will provide croissants and petit pain to those who say 's'il vous plaît!' There is a very strong focus on enhancing children's personal development from the beginning of their time in school. As a result, not only do children make good progress in most areas of learning, but their social and emotional skills are also very well developed, making them independent, confident and ready to learn when they move on to Year 1. Teaching is good, and there is a very strong and effective partnership between the teacher and the teaching assistant. This has a very positive impact on children's learning, as well as their social skills, because adults are such good role models.

The outside area has been developed recently and children are able to move freely and choose outdoor tasks. However, opportunities for physical development are limited, and children's progress in this area is constrained. There is scope to develop this area further by adding a canopy to allow easier all-weather access, and by providing a wider range of resources.

Children are well cared for, for example with staff being trained in paediatric first aid. Their progress is well recorded using a mix of examples of children's work and more formal assessments against targets.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards in writing so as to bring them closer to those in reading.
- Improve facilities in the Reception outdoor learning area to provide more opportunities for physical development.
- Ensure that marking is more consistent so that pupils are clear about what they need to do to improve.

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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?	2
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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are the children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

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	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
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	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.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

² IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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

Annex B

Letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection.

14 July 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Gatcombe Park Primary School, Portsmouth, PO2 0UR

Thank you very much for the very warm welcome you gave to my colleague and me when we visited your school. We really enjoyed our visit. We judge your school to be good, and there are many things about it that impressed us.

- You work hard and behave very well; we were pleased to see how older and younger children get on so well and look after one another.
- You are happy in school, and know that your school is a place where you feel confident and safe. We could see how much you have learned about how to keep healthy.
- You are making good progress overall and reaching broadly average standards.
- You are enjoying the 'creative curriculum' that teachers have introduced recently. It was great to see how proud you are of your learning journals, and how confident you are in researching topics using the internet.
- The teaching is good and your teachers track your progress very thoroughly.

One important reason for our visit to your school is to try to find things that could be done to improve - even good schools can get better. We have suggested that your teachers keep on helping you to improve in writing. Although teachers mark your work regularly, some of their comments could be more helpful about what you need to do to improve. Reception children enjoy playing and learning outside, and we agree with the teachers that a covered area and more equipment would provide a better range of things for them to explore.

We hope that you carry on doing as well as you can at school, and wish you all the best for the future.

Yours faithfully

Rob Crompton
Lead Inspector

