

Alexandra Park Junior School

Brook Lane, Oldham, Greater Manchester OL8 2BE

Inspection dates

15–16 November 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders and governors have not sustained the good quality of education seen in the previous inspection. Pupils do not make consistently good progress in school and standards have dropped, so that in 2017, national test results showed that progress was in the bottom 20% of schools nationally.
- Assessment strategies are not yet effective in identifying the gaps in pupils' learning. Not all teachers check that tasks are challenging enough and matched to pupils' ability.
- Leaders have not ensured that the quality of teaching across the school has been consistently good enough to enable pupils to make the progress of which they are capable. As a result, pupils have gaps in their skills in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Teachers' expectations are not high enough across the school. As a result, pupils are not challenged to always aim to produce their best work and neatest presentation.
- Teachers do not provide pupils with enough opportunities to practise and develop their skills in English and mathematics in other areas of the curriculum.
- Too many pupils take extended time away from school. This fragments their education and makes it very hard for them to keep up with their reading, writing and mathematics.
- The quality of governance over time has been inconsistent. Governors have not ensured that they publish the statutorily required information on the school website.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders and governors now have a clear focus on what needs attention to improve the school. The new leadership team is beginning to secure improvements in the quality of teaching across the school.
- Recent improvements, particularly in the teaching of mathematics, have accelerated the rates of progress of most pupils currently in the school.
- Pupils take on responsibilities in a range of roles, representing their classmates and helping other people. This prepares them well to take a full role as future citizens.
- Behaviour is good at the school. Pupils are confident and self-assured. They say that they feel safe in school and know that staff will always help them if they have a problem.
- The pastoral team works effectively to create a secure and welcoming learning environment.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - refining assessment systems to track all pupils accurately from their starting points, so that any gaps in learning can be quickly identified and addressed
 - eradicating any remaining inconsistencies in the quality of teaching across the school
 - ensuring that the governing body fulfils its statutory responsibility to publish information on the school website.
- Improve the quality of teaching across the school and so accelerate the rates of progress made by pupils by:
 - using assessment information to plan interesting and challenging learning activities that match pupils' needs and abilities
 - ensuring that teachers have high expectations of the quality and presentation of pupils' work
 - building on pupils' prior learning and filling in any gaps in their reading, writing and mathematical skills
 - providing pupils with meaningful opportunities to use and apply their reading, writing and mathematical skills across all areas of the curriculum.
- Continue to work closely with parents to further reduce the number of pupils who take extended breaks from school, so that they benefit from the opportunities the school offers.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leadership and management over time have not been strong enough to prevent a decline in the quality of education at Alexandra Park Junior School. Inconsistent teaching and assessment have impacted on pupils' outcomes. Consequently, many pupils have not made the progress they should, and too few have been fully prepared for secondary school.
- The school is currently in a period of transition. There have been a lot of staff changes and the new leadership team has only been in post since the beginning of September 2017. In a relatively short space of time, leaders have carried out an audit to ensure that they are focusing on the correct priorities. They are tackling weaknesses with enthusiasm and tenacity.
- The new school leaders have brought about changes to teaching methods through whole-school training. This is beginning to lead to greater consistency in teaching, as shown in pupils' books, and has improved staff morale. Nonetheless, leaders recognise that there is a journey ahead to ensure that current teaching makes up for historic weaknesses and enables pupils to make up for gaps in their learning.
- Leaders and governors also know that results have not been good enough over time. They are optimistic about the speed at which change has happened, particularly in mathematics, but realise that there is still more work to do. There is now a focus to raise the profile of reading. Pupils are becoming enthused about reading; however, this has yet to bring much change in their wider reading habits.
- Leaders' actions to improve attendance have led to a reduction in absence, and attendance is currently higher than the national average for primary schools. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils is also now improving. Many pupils now attend school every day. However, actions to reduce the number of pupils who take extended holidays have not been fully effective. Despite leaders' efforts, there has been a year-on-year increase in the number of pupils who take extended holidays to their home countries, and this time away from school has a negative impact on pupils' achievement.
- Leaders are developing the use of an assessment information management system. They have ensured that teachers' assessments are accurate. Leaders now use assessment information to keep a closer check on the progress of groups to provide help where it is most needed. However, teachers are not yet using the information effectively enough to ensure consistent pupil progress.
- Leaders and governors ensure that staff have plenty of opportunity to take part in professional development in order to improve teaching and to accelerate pupils' progress. They have established systems to ensure that this learning is shared effectively across the school. For example, in English, work has been done to develop strategies for using practical activities to improve pupils' vocabulary and communication skills.
- Professional development for middle leaders has helped them to identify the key areas that will make a difference in their subjects and develop well-thought-out action plans.

These include, for example, activities to improve pupils' knowledge of multiplication tables, such as regular in-class challenges, year-group wall displays, online charts, high-priority celebration awards through assembly and leaders' monitoring of the impact of these activities on learning.

- Leaders have redeveloped the curriculum so that it provides more effective coverage in a way that engages pupils. Year-group teams work together to plan work under headings as diverse as 'megacities' and 'fair trade'. Teachers are also beginning to weave in pupils' reading, writing and mathematical skills more effectively across the curriculum. They also look for opportunities to further develop pupils' skills by running extra-curricular clubs, such as the art club.
- Leaders have created a positive school culture. The staff promote equality and do not tolerate any prejudiced behaviour, handling any incidents rapidly and firmly. Clear expectations from assemblies and lessons are reinforced by displays around the school. Consequently, pupils from different backgrounds, cultures and religions integrate well and show respect for each other.
- Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. Pupils are able to meet representatives of different faiths and visit places of worship. They work with a range of artists, sportsmen and women, musicians and writers who visit the school, providing exciting activities and stimulating learning. There are opportunities for pupils to experience democracy in practice through the school council. They take part in events to find out about the roots of British history and culture through visits to museums, such as Bury Transport Museum. Class discussions enable pupils to explore their own understanding of what is meant by citizenship and British values, developing their own moral code.
- Additional funding to support the needs of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is used effectively. Pupils benefit from intensive, specialist support from teachers and other staff, as well as external professional support when needed. As a result, they become more confident learners, become more secure through the support they have experienced, and consequently make progress with their learning. The school's own pupil progress information shows that current pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are now progressing particularly well in mathematics.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively to support the pastoral and language needs of pupils. It has funded additional staff to support pupils' acquisition of language. They work with pupils and families, supporting pupils' social development and communication. Other work funded through the pupil premium grant includes supporting pupils' social and emotional needs, for example through liaison with support organisations and by providing focused activities for groups of pupils to make them more prepared for learning.
- Leaders use the physical education and sport funding effectively to improve pupils' engagement in a wide range of physical activities and to promote healthy lifestyles. Specialist sport support staff provide professional development for teachers and lead sessions for pupils to take part in. A team of pupils acts as sports leaders and has a high profile in organising activities. There is a high level of attendance at the very popular clubs. Pupils are keen to represent their school and school teams have won several tournaments in sports such as netball, basketball and handball.

Governance of the school

- Governors, working with leaders and managers, have not been effective enough in preventing the decline in the quality of education since the previous inspection. They have challenged, but not solved, the reasons why pupils have not made the progress they should have.
- Governors are aware that the school does not meet the requirements for publication of information on its website. Technical issues have recently been resolved and plans are in place for a new website to soon be available. Information which should be on the website is available on request from the school until this happens.
- Governors are committed to the improvement of the school. They audit the skills of the members of the board annually, taking part in relevant training which helps them to understand the information shared by school leaders, for instance about the effective management of school finances.
- Governors visit the school regularly, meet pupils and take part in the life of the school. They have close links with teaching staff, who report to them directly over the course of the year. Governors know the school, understand its issues and are beginning to challenge leaders more effectively. They have a clear vision for the future and are determined to improve the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders, staff and governors are trained regularly in safeguarding. They receive updates when appropriate and work together effectively to look after the pupils and provide them with the support needed. They have also been trained and are vigilant to protect pupils from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.
- Members of the pastoral team work closely with the leadership team. Concerns over pupils' welfare are dealt with rapidly and thoroughly documented. Staff build positive relationships with families. When necessary, they help with external issues that affect the welfare of a child, such as support when making a housing application. This typifies the school's effective work with other agencies to ensure that vulnerable pupils are identified and supported.
- The school site is secure. Careful checks are made on the suitability of staff, volunteers and contractors. The single central record is compliant.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has not been good over time. Consequently, too many pupils have not made the progress of which they are capable based on their starting points and abilities. Inconsistencies in the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics have led to low standards and differences in pupils' basic skills. There is an inconsistency in teachers' expectations, which is evident in pupils' books. For example, in some classes, pupils' work is well presented but this is not the same in others.

- Leaders are beginning to tackle weaknesses in teaching. Pupils' books and the evidence gathered from visiting classrooms during the inspection show that there is an improving picture. Some teachers use quick 'pre-tests' to group pupils for classroom activities and provide activities at a range of different levels of challenge for pupils to choose from. They ask pupils to reflect on their own learning using a 'learning line' to record progress during a lesson or topic. Many teachers use activities which encourage pupils to collaborate, discussing their ideas before they write things down. Good questioning by staff helps many pupils to develop their reasoning skills. This is beginning to plug the gaps in pupils' learning. Leaders and teachers recognise that there is still further for them to go to catch up.
- Reading is a high priority. Pupils who struggle to read are given focused support with reading skills, as appropriate for their stage of development, in small groups. The teaching of reading is improving. Teachers generate an enthusiasm for books. There are lively wall displays and a good range of interesting books available in all classrooms. Pupils are beginning to read more readily when they are in school. They create book reviews in a wide range of novel ways. However, few pupils read widely outside school.
- Whole-school training on developing writing has led to teachers being more confident in how they are teaching. Limited vocabulary and poor grammar hinder some pupils who are in the early stages of learning English, but many teachers are now beginning to engage pupils in the creative use of language more effectively. Pupils are learning to edit their work, with some workbooks showing the development of extended, complex pieces of writing as a result. This is beginning to have an impact on the progress that many pupils are now making with their writing. However, it is not yet consistent across the school.
- The teaching of mathematics is improving strongly. Key mathematical skills, such as learning multiplication tables, are promoted well. Teachers share calculation strategies with parents so that they can use the same methods at home to support their children. Teachers use 'two-minute challenges' to focus on key mathematical ideas. They provide support and interventions to pupils who need extra help. For instance, teachers have noticed that some girls lack confidence with their mathematics and so take care to involve them in activities where they can be successful and build their confidence.
- Teachers have identified that, conversely, some boys lack confidence in their English tasks. They have devised activities to make reading and writing more accessible and enjoyable for boys. For example, Year 4 pupils have been working on a 'battle speech' to be delivered by a 'general', using persuasive, emotive language, while building in the use of grammar and punctuation from earlier learning. This is capturing boys' interest and means that they are more willing to put pen to paper.
- Teachers are starting to promote pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across subjects other than English and mathematics. Although this approach is not fully embedded, the new curriculum is encouraging more cross-curricular writing. Mathematical skills are also built into topic work, such as the use of graphs, charts and Venn diagrams in geography and science, but there is still scope for further development of this aspect of the curriculum.
- Historically, teaching did not engage pupils effectively with their learning and left pupils with weaknesses in their basic skills. Changes that leaders have made, including the

new curriculum and an appropriate emphasis on teaching basic skills and knowledge, are having a positive impact. Teachers now plan lessons that give pupils more time to develop ideas, to practise skills and to review what they are learning. Recent changes mean that pupils find learning more interesting, saying, for instance, 'Our teacher has planned lots of new things in English. We didn't use to like English, now we do.'

- Nearly all pupils speak English as an additional language. Pupils who are in the early stages of learning to speak English are given additional support to develop their fluency, confidence and independence. Teachers use a range of classroom activities to encourage pupils to practise their use of English, such as activities which explore the meaning of vocabulary in texts and others where pupils must talk to each other about their understanding of a topic before beginning to write about it.
- Parents are encouraged to find out more about the writing that pupils are doing in class through events such as 'Come and see my writing'. Pupils invite their parents into class to sit with them while they explain what they have done, what they have learned and what they can do better now.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Nearly all pupils speak English as an additional language. The school has a range of support measures for them and for their families, including interpreters and interventions to help develop their fluency, confidence and independence.
- Most pupils are confident and self-assured. They are keen to talk with visitors, to show them their work and to tell them what it is like at their school. Similarly, most parents have no concerns about the personal development, behaviour and welfare of children at the school.
- The outdoor environment is safe and well maintained. Breaktimes and lunchtimes are staggered to reduce the number of pupils using the small, well-equipped playground areas at the same time. Pupils enjoy their time outside and play together harmoniously.
- Pupils are encouraged to develop leadership skills. The head boy and head girl lead the Children's Leadership Team (school council), which is formed following class elections with representatives from all classes. The eco council takes responsibility for aspects of the school environment. Pupils learn about the importance of health and safety, learning to carry out inspections and preparing and presenting a report to the governors. They are quick to learn to notice and report matters they see around the school to staff. Sports leaders help to organise activities.
- All pupils wear their uniform with pride. Those pupils awarded sweatshirts in different colours, which signify their various responsibilities, are bursting with pride to explain their significance.
- A caring culture is at the heart of this school. There is an emphasis on inclusivity, respect and tolerance and an awareness of British values. One pupil was keen to explain that 'everyone is treated equally'. Pupils say that there is no racism, and that

everybody respects each other and there is no name-calling. They say that bullying is very rare, but that if something were to happen, there is always someone to sort out problems.

- The pastoral team has active links with local professionals and networks. It provides individual support and arranges workshops when appropriate as part of the personal, social and health education curriculum, such as on road safety, anti-bullying and stranger danger. Pupils confirm that they feel safe and that 'the adults look after us'. They understand matters linked to e-safety and can explain what to do if they have a problem when using the internet.
- All Year 6 pupils take a first-aid course. A defibrillator is located at the school office. Pupils were taught alongside teachers how to use it.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Most pupils conduct themselves well. Their conduct around the building and out on the playgrounds is good. Any minor issues are dealt with consistently by staff. As a result, pupils know what to do and when to do it. There are no mixed messages.
- Most pupils are quick to respond to the direction of staff, so little learning time is lost. Routines are well embedded. For instance, pupils are prompt at lining up to return to class after breaktime. The environment of the school is calm and orderly.
- Members of staff lead activities with pupils during break- and lunchtime, for instance in playing cricket. The staff say that purposeful play adds to good behaviour.
- Pupils say that behaviour is generally good. If people fall out, it is 'soon sorted out' and everyone gets on well together. Most pupils say that they enjoy school, that teachers help them to do their best and that the behaviour of other pupils in lessons and around the school is good most of the time.
- Overall, pupils' attendance is now in line with the national average. There has been an improvement in the attendance of disadvantaged pupils because the pastoral team is relentless in following up the reasons for absence, while also offering support to families when it is needed. However, although most pupils attend school regularly, there has been a rise in the number of pupils taking family holidays during term time. Some of these holidays are extended, leading to a considerable amount of learning time being lost.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- In 2017, attainment in key stage 2 reading, writing and mathematics for all pupils was in the bottom 20% of schools nationally for a second year.
- In the past two years, information from national assessments has revealed that pupils' progress from their key stage 1 starting points has been too low. The 2017 data shows some green shoots of improvement over the previous year. For instance, pupils made better progress in writing and mathematics than in previous years, although progress figures were still below average. Pupils' progress in reading was not good enough and

placed the school in the bottom 10% of schools nationally.

- Weak progress across key stage 2 has done too little to help pupils to catch up from their relatively low starting points on entry into Year 3. Consequently, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics in 2017 was low. Not enough pupils were well prepared to make a speedy start in their chosen secondary school.
- There are some mitigating reasons to explain the poor outcomes data. In 2017, all pupils taking the key stage 2 assessments spoke English as an additional language. Some of these pupils were in the early stages of learning the language. The proportion of pupils who enter and leave the school mid-way through the year, plus the increasing number who take extended leave, have a negative impact on school data. Nonetheless, as school leaders recognise, outcomes are not good enough.
- Despite the gloomy picture of results overall, there were some brighter spots for some groups of pupils in some subjects. For example, the most able pupils attained well in all subjects in comparison with national averages. Key stage 2 science outcomes were good, particularly for the most able and middle-ability pupils, for whom results are above national averages.
- Key stage 2 results in 2017 also showed big improvements over the 2016 results for the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, particularly in writing and mathematics. The progress of disadvantaged pupils in writing was broadly in line with the national average. The school's own information shows that, in some year groups, disadvantaged pupils currently in the school are making better progress than other pupils, particularly in mathematics.
- The school's own information and a review of work seen in books show that there are clear, ongoing improvements in overall outcomes, although there is still some variability in the progress pupils make from their different starting points. This reflects the inconsistency in teaching in the recent past, which has left gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills. Older pupils still have a considerable journey to make to reach the levels expected for their age by the time they leave Year 6.
- Nevertheless, recent improvements are beginning to make a difference. Since the beginning of September, pupils' progress is improving quickly. Pupils are making stronger progress, especially in mathematics. This indicates that the development of mathematics teaching since September is beginning to have a positive impact.
- Across the school, progress in reading and writing is still inconsistent. The school's own information shows that there has been stronger progress in writing in some year groups than others. Most pupils' books are well presented, with pupils taking a pride in their work, but some pupils struggle with their handwriting and so their presentation suffers. In reading, pupils have big gaps to overcome and the recent changes have not yet had enough time to show a significant impact.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are monitored by their class teachers and support staff. The school works with other agencies where necessary to provide tailored support for their needs. Reviews of progress are made, with adjustments to support packages as appropriate. The support that they receive helps pupils to make good progress, particularly in mathematics.
- The achievement of disadvantaged pupils improved from 2016 to 2017 in reading,

writing and mathematics. The difference in their outcomes compared with those of other pupils nationally is reducing, particularly in writing and the English grammar, punctuation and spelling test, although this group was still well below the national averages for all pupils in reading and mathematics. In science, disadvantaged pupils achieved key stage 2 results that were in line with the national average for all pupils.

School details

Unique reference number	105626
Local authority	Oldham
Inspection number	10037762

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	357
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Widall
Headteacher	Jennifer Seabright
Telephone number	0161 770 8321
Website	Not available
Email address	info@alexandrapark.oldham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	30 January 2013

Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of specified information on its website. Owing to technical problems, it currently does not have a website. All statutory information is available on request from the school.
- The school is larger than the average-sized junior school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is above average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors spoke with parents as they brought their children to school. They reviewed the text comments of eight parents made through the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View.
- Inspectors took into account the comments of 25 members of staff made through the online questionnaire for staff, and 31 responses made by pupils through the online questionnaire for pupils.
- Inspectors visited lessons and reviewed pupils' books. Meetings were held with the headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team. They also met with members of the governing board, middle leaders and a selection of other staff.
- The lead inspector spoke to the school improvement partner by telephone.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read, met with pupils formally to consider their views, and talked with them informally at other points during the inspection.
- A wide range of the school's own documentation and information was considered, including the school's information on safeguarding.

Inspection team

Linda Griffiths, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Doreen Davenport	Ofsted Inspector
Julie Bather	Ofsted Inspector

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