

Oakmere Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117371
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	358128
Inspection dates	29–30 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Philip Mann HMI

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	234
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Les Bullamore QPM
Headteacher	Mrs Julie Lilly
Date of previous school inspection	17 June 2008
School address	Chace Avenue Potters Bar, Hertfordshire EN6 5NP
Telephone number	01707 656963
Fax number	01707 646616
Email address	head@oakmere.herts.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
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M2 7LA

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 18 lessons and 13 teachers, either teaching whole classes or smaller groups of pupils. Brief meetings were held with a small number of parents and groups of pupils. Inspectors also held meetings with some governors, senior staff and subject leaders. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's self-evaluation form, school improvement planning, monitoring reports and various policies. Inspectors also analysed 83 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- The effectiveness of the school's initiatives to raise standards and increase rates of achievement for all groups of pupils.
- The impact of the school's procedures in improving pupils' attendance.
- The use of assessment information in teachers' planning to ensure activities fully match the needs of all pupils.
- The impact of recent changes to provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- The effectiveness of leaders and managers at all levels in driving school improvement.

Information about the school

The school is average in size and smaller than at the time of the previous inspection. The proportion of pupils who either leave or join the school partway through their primary school education is high. Most pupils come from a White British background. An average proportion come from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds, and the Traveller community is represented in the school. A small proportion of pupils are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average but the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is above average. The school has Artsmark and Healthy School accreditations. Before- and after-school provision is managed by the governing body.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The effectiveness of the school and its capacity to improve further are satisfactory. Strengthening leadership is providing a good foundation for school improvement and teamwork amongst the staff is a growing strength. Pupils' outcomes are steadily improving. Achievement is satisfactory but reflects the remaining inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, a legacy of previous underachievement and the impact of high levels of pupil mobility. Pupils' performance in English has steadily improved to broadly average levels. In mathematics and science, standards in the past have been too low. The most recent performance of pupils in Year 6 is much better and their attainment is now broadly at expected levels, but throughout the school pupils are still not provided with enough opportunities to consolidate their learning through relevant, practical activities and challenge them to extend their learning. As a result, in all three key subjects, not enough pupils are reaching the higher National Curriculum levels.

Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes towards learning in lessons, especially when teaching is imaginative and engaging. Attendance is still below the national average, but it has improved considerably as a result of much hard work by the school and pupils wanting to learn. Those pupils in need of extra support respond very well to specific guidance and help in their learning. Consequently, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. However, not all teaching is so effective and despite significant changes to staffing, the quality of pupils' learning remains variable across the school. Teachers work hard to plan activities to meet the differing needs of pupils, but lesson pace is sometimes too slow, they do not always use questioning well to assess pupils' learning and adjust ongoing lesson content, and sometimes low expectations mean that insufficient challenge for those who are more able holds back their progress. Also, in science the use of assessment data in teachers' planning lags behind the good developing practice seen in English and mathematics.

Good leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage have improved the quality of provision for these children. Furthermore, remodelling of the overall staffing structure in the school has facilitated more effective distributed leadership amongst middle managers. The development of an integrated and more vibrant curriculum that is beginning to meet the varied individual needs of pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 more closely is a result of this good initiative. Parents and carers are very positive about these curriculum developments. One commented, 'The first time they did topic was the first time my son had spoken about school in two years. For us as parents, it's fantastic!'

Pupils' personal and social development is good. Some pupils and their parents and carers feel that behaviour around the school is a concern, but inspectors saw good behaviour in lessons and around the school as a result of improved behaviour management strategies. An inclusive ethos and effective safeguarding procedures ensure pupils are effectively

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cared for. Pupils feel safe and secure, knowing who to go to if they have any concerns. Effective inter-agency partnerships ensure vulnerable pupils are monitored closely.

The school is a cohesive community. There are strong partnerships with the children's centre on site, parents and carers, and the local Traveller community. However, community cohesion is yet to be promoted effectively beyond the local area, within a national and international context. The governing body actively support the work of the school and good lines of communication keep them fully informed about developments, but despite the school's satisfactory overall awareness of its strengths and weaknesses the governing body are not yet fully involved in formally monitoring the school's work or contributing to improvement planning.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards in English, mathematics and science, by:
 - providing pupils in all year groups with regular opportunities to engage in real-life, practical calculation and problem-solving activities
 - ensuring that planned activities in each subject reflect a high level of challenging expectations
 - in science, making more effective use of assessment data to rapidly track and resolve potential underachievement.
- Further improve levels of pupil attendance by working closely with the families of the most persistent absentees, and seeking additional strategies to promote good attendance.
- Raise the quality of teaching so that the majority is consistently good or better by ensuring that teachers use:
 - time and resources effectively to ensure lessons move along at a good pace
 - focused questioning in lessons to assess pupils' ongoing learning and adapt planning accordingly
 - assessment information effectively to plan challenging learning opportunities for the more able pupils.
- Ensure that the governing body plays a greater role in the school's overall development by:
 - participating fully in the process of self-evaluation and review
 - establishing clear links between self-evaluation and planning for the future long-term development of the school.
- Promote community cohesion more effectively beyond the school and local community, so that pupils extend their awareness of the wider world.
- Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

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The lessons observed during the inspection reflected a satisfactory but variable quality of learning. A continued emphasis on the effective teaching of phonics across the school is reflected in pupils' improving literacy skills. Progress seen in mathematics and science is lower but a trend of improvement is now evident. It is better in Year 6 than lower down the school. For example, pupils in a Year 6 mathematics lesson successfully built on knowledge gained in Year 5 because of previously good teaching to quickly gather data to calculate mode, median and range before representing them in a graph. Such continuity in learning and ability to solve problems is yet to be fully established in Years 3 and 4 because of gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. Pupils who join the school partway through the year or in different year groups receive focused support to ensure that they make generally satisfactory progress. Overall targets are sufficiently challenging, but the expectations of what more able pupils can achieve in lessons are not high enough to raise standards further.

The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities benefits from effective, well-managed provision by the inclusion team and support staff. Other groups of pupils, such as those from Traveller communities and those who speak English as an additional language, make good and sometimes significant strides in their learning to narrow any gaps in attainment with their peers. Pupils are responding well to good provision for their moral and social development by demonstrating respect for adults in the school and a clear understanding of right and wrong. They work well in pairs and groups in class and demonstrate consideration for each other in their behaviour in the playground. Discussions with pupils and parents and carers indicate that modifications to the curriculum and the introduction of a new behaviour policy are making a difference to pupils' attitudes to learning, the way they behave and also how they work with each other. This is confirmed by comments from parents and carers such as, 'I have seen an improvement in the school related to behaviour.'

Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of how to keep fit and healthy. They respond well to opportunities to make a contribution to their school and local community. Pupils demonstrate appropriate levels of competence in basic skills and the use of computers in readiness for the next stage in their education and adult life.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. There are some clear strengths emerging at the end of each key stage, but the variation in quality from inadequate to good is undermining attempts to ensure that all pupils make consistently good progress in all lessons. In the best lessons, teachers use time, resources and activities well to ensure that pupils make good progress towards planned outcomes. Teaching assistants and small group work are used well to ensure that those in need of extra help make good progress. However, the needs of more able pupils are not always fully addressed in all lessons. This is because expectations are often too low and tasks lack sufficient challenge to move these pupils on in their learning. Furthermore, despite teachers using questions to check levels of pupils' understanding, few teachers are using these in a focused way to engage all pupils and challenge them to respond at their own level.

Appropriate assessment procedures ensure detailed information is collected about every pupil in English and mathematics. This is used well to monitor pupils' progress and target extra support. However, this good practice is yet to be repeated in science. Marking is developing well. The best examples provide pupils with clear guidance on what they need to do next to improve. Pupils respond well to this by writing back to the teacher about what they have done. This is yet to be an established practice throughout the school.

The curriculum is being developed well to provide a holistic and integrated approach to pupils' learning. Recent changes have already had a positive impact on pupils' attitudes,

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but not yet on their achievement. Despite limited practical opportunities in the key academic subjects, there are many opportunities for pupils to participate in extra activities beyond lessons, such as in music and sport. Before- and after-school provision effectively supports pupils' development. Care, guidance and support of pupils are key strengths, ensuring that all pupils are treated as individuals within the school community. Close attention is paid to the most vulnerable pupils, who rapidly grow in confidence and often make significant strides in their learning. Inspectors note that these features are valued greatly by both present and past parents and carers alike.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and deputy headteacher share a clear vision for the school's future development. Together they are working hard to address remaining weaknesses and the legacy of underachievement, set against a backdrop of high pupil mobility. Since the previous inspection they have succeeded in creating a potentially effective team around them. All have a shared purpose to raise standards within an inclusive school community, where pupils' wide-ranging needs and interests are increasingly well catered for without fear of discrimination. Self-evaluation is broadly accurate, based on the regular monitoring of teaching and other strategies used to monitor pupils' learning, but the outcomes have not yet been used fully to iron out inconsistencies in teaching and the governing body is not yet sufficiently involved in the process. Nonetheless, the overall effectiveness of the governing body is satisfactory, and robust safeguarding procedures are rigorously applied to ensure the safety and well-being of pupils. The school has carried out an audit of its school and local community, but has not yet gone far enough in implementing curricular initiatives to develop pupils' first-hand experiences of the diversity of cultures to be found in the modern United Kingdom and the wider world. The school is making good progress in developing provision further on the basis of the findings of the previous inspection. However, these developments are yet to be fully realised in good pupil achievement throughout the school. Taking all factors into account, the school provides satisfactory value for money.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Provision is good because of effective leadership and good teaching by staff within the Nursery and Reception classes. Children make good progress from starting points that are below the levels expected nationally to reach average levels in all areas of learning by the time they start in Year 1. This is a better attainment profile than noted at the previous inspection, and confirmation of the improving nature of provision within the Early Years Foundation Stage. Staff place a strong emphasis on the development of the children's communication skills and phonic development. There is good balance between adult-led activities and those initiated by the children to provide good opportunities for choice and play. Assessment is thorough. 'Learning Journeys' provide useful records of each child's development but are yet to be used fully to indicate what children might need to do next to improve further.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account: Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

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Views of parents and carers

The parents and carers of pupils at the school who responded to the questionnaire or spoke in person to inspectors expressed much satisfaction about the school. They are particularly impressed with how their children are excited about the changes being made to the curriculum. A small number of parents and carers have concerns about pupils' behaviour, especially in the playground. However, most commented that they are seeing improvements in behaviour this term following the introduction of a new behaviour management policy. Despite the consistently good behaviour observed during their visit, inspectors accept that a small amount of unsatisfactory behaviour occurs. However, they judge that this is dealt with effectively by school staff.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Oakmere Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 83 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 234 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	56	67	27	33	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	40	48	34	41	4	5	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	34	41	45	54	2	2	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	33	40	41	49	4	5	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	47	57	34	41	0	0	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	38	46	40	48	3	4	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	36	43	41	49	4	5	1	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	34	41	42	51	0	0	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	34	41	43	52	3	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	27	33	39	47	10	12	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	25	30	50	60	2	2	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	28	34	48	58	3	4	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	35	42	43	52	3	4	1	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



1 October 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Oakmere Primary School, Potters Bar, EN6 5NP

On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to thank you all for making us feel so welcome. We really enjoyed visiting your school and were so impressed with your good behaviour and the positive attitudes you display towards your learning. You clearly enjoy being at school and talking about the interesting things you are doing in lessons. Many of you said that you really like school. However, some of you find it difficult to attend regularly despite the efforts of the staff to encourage you to be at school as much as possible. The staff are going to continue to encourage you all to be at school so that you all make as much progress as possible.

We judged the school to be satisfactory, which means that it does some things well but also has some areas that should be better. Many of you are making good progress in your reading and writing and this is helping you to succeed in other subjects as well. Unfortunately some of you are not doing as well in mathematics and science because you are not given enough opportunity to practise calculations, undertake investigations and solve challenging problems that really make you think. This is something that the teachers are going to give you more opportunity to do. We saw several good lessons during the inspection and some really good support for those of you who need extra help in your learning. Some lessons are okay but sometimes they are not good enough because there is insufficient challenge for those of you who are capable of learning quickly. In future and with the help of your headteacher, the teachers will try to plan activities that enable all of you to learn well in all lessons.

Mrs Lilly is building a good team of staff around her and together they are starting to make a number of changes for the better about what you learn. Your parents also told us how pleased they are about these changes and we agree with them. The staff have created a happy school where all of you feel valued as individuals. In the future they are going to promote this sense of community beyond the school. The governors support what the staff are doing but in the future they are going to play a greater part in moving the school forwards. You can help too, by coming to school as much as you possibly can and really trying hard in all your subjects.

Yours sincerely

Philip Mann

Her Majesty's Inspector

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