

Cherry Oak School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	103626
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	376939
Inspection dates	9–10 May 2012
Lead inspector	Sue Aldridge

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	52
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Catherine Robinson
Headteacher	Justine Sims (Executive Head)
Date of previous school inspection	20 January 2009
School address	60 Frederick Road Selly Oak Birmingham B29 6PB
Telephone number	0121 4642037
Fax number	0121 4645219
Email address	j.sims@victoria.bham.sch.uk

Age group	3–11
Inspection date(s)	9–10 May 2012
Inspection number	376939



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2012



Introduction

Inspection team

Sue Aldridge

Additional Inspector

Kate Robertson

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with one day's notice. Inspectors visited 11 lessons and observed five teachers, as well as teaching assistants leading sessions or listening to pupils read. All lesson observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders. Meetings were held with senior leaders, staff, governors and the school council. Inspectors observed the school's work, examined data on pupils' progress, and scrutinised assessment and other records, pupils' work, selected policies, and the responses to 39 parental questionnaires and questionnaires completed by staff and pupils.

Information about the school

The school provides for pupils from a wide area in South Birmingham. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Almost half of pupils have speech, language and communication difficulties. Since the last inspection, the school has admitted an increasing proportion of pupils with autism, who now account for over a third of all pupils. About one in five pupils has challenging behaviour. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is high. Although pupils are mainly of White British heritage, almost half are from minority ethnic groups.

Following the last inspection there was a period of turbulence when the school was without a substantive headteacher for four terms. Since September 2010, the school has been in a hard federation with another nearby special school, Victoria Specialist Arts College. The two schools share an executive headteacher, who started in January 2011, and a governing body.

In March 2011, the school was awarded the Quality Mark for the fourth time.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- Cherry Oak is a good school. Its overall effectiveness is not yet outstanding because, although there is an increasing proportion of outstanding teaching, there is not yet enough to make all pupils’ progress outstanding. Subject leaders do not carry out the full range of activities needed to identify precisely what needs to be improved in their subjects.
- Good teaching of a rich, well-adapted curriculum enables pupils to make good progress from their low starting points; they achieve well. Although attainment remains low by Year 6, this is because of the complexity of pupils’ learning difficulties. Excellent staff skills in signing support well those pupils who rely on this method of communication. Classroom staff work well as a team, and teaching assistants make a strong contribution to pupils’ learning, although not all are equally skilled in teaching pupils to use letter sounds to help them read.
- Behaviour and safety are outstanding. The school’s behaviour management system is used consistently well by all staff, who are highly skilled in supporting pupils with challenging behaviour. As a result, these pupils make outstanding progress in improving their behaviour. Pupils feel exceptionally safe and parents are fully confident about children’s safety in school.
- The skilled executive headteacher and proactive governing body provide strong leadership. Performance management arrangements include all staff. Subject leaders observe teaching and check planning, but do not yet use data to evaluate the effectiveness of provision in their subjects. Parental satisfaction with the school is very strong. The federation has brought benefits to pupils and staff. Pupils’ learning and social experiences have increased though collaboration with Victoria; staff share and extend their professional knowledge and skills by working with those from their federated school. Significant improvements since January 2011 show that the school has a strong capacity for further improvement.

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

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by ensuring that all classroom staff:
 - are trained in the teaching of phonics
 - regularly and frequently make pupils aware of what they need to do to improve
 - listen carefully to what pupils say, pick up on misunderstandings and intervene to clarify these.

- Extend the roles of subject leaders to include:
 - regular monitoring of day-to-day records to ensure that these are consistently helpful in identifying the next steps in learning
 - the use of data to evaluate the effectiveness of the provision in their subjects in each class.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

In a high return of completed parental questionnaires, parents and carers were unanimous that their children are making good progress. Several wrote of significant gains in communication, confidence and social skills. A typical comment was, 'I've seen a massive improvement and I'm so pleased with her and the school.' The inspection findings confirm that boys and girls of different ages, abilities and disabilities make good progress and achieve well.

Staff successfully engage pupils in learning activities because pupils respond well to the high expectations conveyed in reminders about 'good sitting, looking and listening'. Pupils with challenging behaviour are not easy to identify, because instances of non-compliance are rare compared to when they first joined the school. They need only occasional prompts, or reminders of the consequences should they repeat behaviour such as interrupting or seeking attention unnecessarily.

Pupils enjoy their lessons. Children with autism in the Early Years Foundation Stage thoroughly enjoyed a session in which they learned to take turns, make choices and interact with other children. They made excellent progress towards their individual communication targets during the session because they were highly motivated by the activity, finding out 'What's in the box?' and choosing songs and appealing resources to explore. Most remained focused for a very good length of time given their ages and needs; a couple who became distracted were swiftly engaged in a different, related and relevant activity, elsewhere.

Progress in communication is good. Pupils learn to use a good range of strategies appropriate to their needs and are well supported by the skilled guidance of a speech and language therapist. Those who use signing benefit greatly from the excellent

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

signing skills of staff. Workshops for parents to learn to sign are valued highly by them. A few pupils have good understanding of signs but are reluctant to sign to communicate with others. The improvement plan identifies the need to extend the use of methods that involve exchanging pictures and symbols in order to communicate. Pupils make good progress in reading and numeracy, although their attainment by Years 2 and 6 remains low. They have positive attitudes to reading and enjoy taking their books and word cards home and reading to family members.

Quality of teaching

Staff know pupils thoroughly as individuals, and use their knowledge very well to construct plans for managing difficult behaviour. They readily give praise and encouragement, which adds to pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Successes are celebrated at the end of each day in an assembly, and pupils are proud to receive recognition in the form of stickers, certificates or 'cherries on the tree'. However, although pupils all have individual targets, staff do not consistently remind pupils of what they need to do to achieve them.

Accurate assessment is used well to plan programmes and lessons. In most lessons, planning identifies individual outcomes for each pupil. Tasks challenge pupils of all abilities and staff work hard to make sure that pupils are engaged and participating throughout. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, good-quality records, comprising dated photographic evidence and clear annotations, build up over time to provide good evidence of progress. Similar photographic records are compiled for older pupils, but day-to-day records of how well pupils have done in each lesson are not always helpful as indicators of the next steps in learning. Although subject leaders have checked planning and observed teachers, they have not yet scrutinised records to check on their quality.

Phonics are taught across the school, integrated into literacy sessions. Teachers have been trained in the teaching of phonics, but not all teaching assistants have been. As a result, not all teaching assistants are equally skilled in helping pupils to decode words that they do not immediately recognise, which slows some pupils' progress. Numeracy is integrated well into registration and other sessions.

Staff make effective use of a variety of methods and resources to meet individuals' needs. For instance, they use objects, pictures and symbols to make timetables that pupils understand. They also question pupils effectively, to check their understanding and to encourage them to think more deeply about topics. Occasionally, though, they do not listen carefully enough to what pupils say and so misunderstandings are not immediately clarified.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. The school's outstanding success in modifying the behaviour, and the emotional and social adjustment of those who exhibit challenging behaviour, is evident through

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

records, case studies and observations of these pupils learning calmly in class. There is little trace of previously persistent anti-social behaviour such as spitting, violent outbursts, or withdrawn behaviour. In some instances, such behaviour has resulted in exclusions from other schools, yet there have been no exclusions at Cherry Oak in the last three years. It is rare for learning to be disrupted, or for pupils to be taken out of lessons to prevent this from happening. Attendance, which has been low, is now average. This is because there has been rapid improvement as a result of actions taken by the school, including involvement of a family support worker, shared across the two federated schools.

Staff rarely miss an opportunity to encourage self-esteem, good behaviour and friendships. As a result, pupils are confident, polite, welcoming and well mannered. They are keen to communicate with visitors, and older pupils identify several friends they have made at school.

Parents and carers are confident that there is no bullying of any type in the school. The school's records confirm this. Similarly, pupils who completed questionnaires or spoke to inspectors were unanimous about feeling safe. Inspectors noted that pupils are at ease in school, and show no fear or anxiety when those with challenging behaviour occasionally react adversely. Supervision at playtimes is excellent, allowing for small groups to play together quietly and others to enjoy a vigorous team game such as basketball. The organisation of the playground into discrete fenced areas allows for the safe play of all groups. Pupils learn well about how to keep safe at school and in the community. Visitors, such as those from the fire service, bring learning about safety to life, and pupils learn from an early age how to minimise risks to themselves. They contribute very well to school life by taking responsibilities. These range from tidying resources away in the Early Years Foundation Stage to acting as playground helpers and planning activities, such as an Olympic Sports day as members of the school council. Older pupils have joined peers from Victoria and helped to carry out an audit of the school's premises as part of the school's accessibility planning.

Leadership and management

The executive headteacher and governing body have successfully established a federation that is adding value to Cherry Oak. Collaboration with staff at Victoria supplements well the good opportunities that staff have for professional development. The system for performance management is well established and holds teachers and subject leaders accountable for their work. More recently, teaching assistants have been included in the process. Under the leadership of the executive headteacher, subject leaders' roles have been rapidly developed and include monitoring of teaching. The school can demonstrate the impact of this, such as improved assessment opportunities in lessons. However, while data are used well by senior leaders to evaluate pupils' progress, subject leaders do not yet use them to test the success of provision in their subject areas. Teaching assistants also have responsibilities, such as for monitoring groups of pupils' communication targets.

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

The governing body makes a significant contribution to leadership and management. Governors are committed, have strong expertise, are very much involved in the school and provide both support and challenge. They are proactive in planning anticipated changes in the budget and are fully involved in school improvement planning.

Despite the lack of continuity in leadership, there has been good improvement since the last inspection. After-school clubs have been established and some are shared with Victoria. These enrich further the broad and suitably balanced curriculum, which is personalised effectively to meet pupils' individual needs. Links with external agencies, such as therapists, enable the school to meet pupils' particular needs. Robust procedures for assuring the accuracy of assessment mean that there is a secure basis on which to evaluate pupils' progress. Where pupils are not on course to achieve the challenging targets set for them, suitable interventions are made and these ensure that all pupils make equally good progress. The performance of different groups is analysed and shows that no differences exist. Implementation of the school's policies and procedures ensure that there is no discrimination of any sort. A wide range of cultures is celebrated in school.

Safeguarding has a high priority. Staff are well trained in child protection and associated aspects, such as physical management and paediatric first aid. All the required checks are carried out on staff before they are employed. Parents and carers appreciate the support that they and their families receive from the staff.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



11 May 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Cherry Oak School, Birmingham, B29 6PB

Thank you for making us welcome when we came to your school, for talking to us about your work and reading to us.

Cherry Oak is a good school. Your behaviour is outstanding and you feel very safe at school. You all help out at school, get on well and make friends.

Your lessons are good and you make good progress in communication, reading, writing and mathematics.

Your parents and carers think that your school is good too. They like the way that staff make them welcome and help you to improve in many ways.

The people who are in charge at school are doing a good job and are making it better all the time.

We have agreed with your headteacher that the school is going to do two things:

- make sure that most of the lessons are outstanding
- teachers who are in charge of subjects will check up on more things than they do at the moment.

You can help by coming to school as often as possible. Well done on improving the attendance already! We hope you enjoy your Olympics sports day!

Yours sincerely

Sue Aldridge
Lead inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone **0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.**