

Oaklands School

Whitehall Road, Evington, Leicester, LE5 6GJ

Inspection dates 29–30 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils achieve well. Most pupils make the progress expected of them nationally, and the majority do better than this.
- The behaviour of pupils is good. Staff manage it consistently and pupils understand what is expected of them.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are good. They enjoy school and are keen to take a full part in the interesting lessons and activities.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Staff are sensitive to any changes in pupils' well-being and act promptly if the need arises.
- Teaching is good and is improving as a result of effective support and training from the senior leaders.
- Staff are highly supportive and caring, and pupils are cherished. This culture is strongly influenced by the headteacher.
- The new system for assessing and tracking pupils' developing skills, and setting them demanding targets, is excellent.
- Leaders and managers throughout the school are working effectively to drive improvement.
- Staff are responding well to the widespread changes needed to provide for the school's changing pupil population. They say they are proud to be a member of Oaklands' staff.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage is good. It is led well, children have a good start to school and they make good progress.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Staff and pupils do not use aids to communication and understanding, such as symbols and signing, consistently enough throughout the day. This means that less-able pupils' achievement in communication is weaker than other pupils'.
- Staff do not always use the best resources to help pupils with autistic spectrum conditions learn and understand.
- At times senior leaders do not check well enough on whether teachers have improved weaknesses identified in their teaching.
- Some members of the governing body do not visit the school frequently enough to gain first-hand knowledge of its work. This means that a few members are not confident that they have the expertise to challenge senior leaders about teaching and learning.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 14 lessons taught by 12 different teachers. All of these were joint observations with one of the senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, three assistant headteachers and four teachers with management responsibilities; the school bursar; three members of the governing body, and a representative of the local authority. Informal conversations were held with pupils throughout the two days.
- There were too few responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents and carers, to be shown. Instead, inspectors took into account the results of the school's recent survey of parents' and carers' views. They also took into consideration 32 responses to the staff inspection questionnaire.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documentation including: records of pupils' progress and some of their work; the school's self-evaluation and various development plans; systems and outcomes relating to some school processes, such as assessing pupils' progress and supporting and improving teachers' work; records of pupils' attendance, behaviour and incidents; minutes of governing body meetings, and documents related to keeping pupils safe.

Inspection team

Judith Charlesworth, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Kathy Yates

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Oaklands School caters for pupils with very wide-ranging needs. While the school is designated for pupils with moderate learning difficulties, its intake over the past few years has changed. Only one quarter of the pupils has moderate learning difficulties and this group is steadily reducing. Most of the pupils have severe learning difficulties and autistic spectrum conditions. Some have very challenging behaviour. A small number of pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- The number of pupils on roll is rising steadily. New demountable buildings have been installed to cater for this and the need for fewer pupils in each class due to their complex difficulties.
- All pupils have statements of special educational needs, although occasionally, pupils are placed at the school for assessment.
- About three times the average proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic heritages, and the families of most of these speak English as an additional language.
- Increasingly, pupils enter the school at a young age, although some still transfer to Oaklands from local primary schools. There are four children of Reception age in the Early Years Foundation Stage who are taught in mixed-age classes with pupils in Key Stage 1.
- A much larger proportion of pupils than the national average is supported by the pupil premium. This is extra government funding to support those known to be eligible for free school meals, those looked after by the local authority and those with a parent in the armed services.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement by making sure that:
 - staff and pupils use aids to communication and understanding, such as signing and symbols, consistently throughout the day
 - staff use resources that are as realistic as possible to help pupils with autistic spectrum conditions to understand them.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - systematically checking whether weaknesses identified in teaching have improved
 - improving members of the governing body's first-hand knowledge of the school by more frequent visits and becoming more involved in its everyday work, so that they are in a stronger position to challenge senior leaders.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils join Oaklands with widely varying skills, depending on their age and particular difficulties. However, the skills of all pupils are well below average for their age, very markedly so for most of them. This is due to the impact that pupils' learning difficulties and autistic spectrum conditions have had on their ability to learn and make progress at the usual rate.
- The school has outstanding procedures for accurately assessing and tracking pupils' learning and progress. These show that all pupils achieve well, which means that they are well prepared for secondary school. The large majority make or exceed the progress expected in all subjects. Most reach the demanding targets set for them at the end of Year 2 and Year 6, and the smaller targets set along the way. A number of pupils make exceptional progress and learn very rapidly. If any pupil is found to be off-track for reaching their targets, extra help is given to boost their progress. All parents and carers agree that their child is doing well.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress as they develop their personal, communication and social skills and become ready to learn through more formal activities. Pupils of all abilities with autistic spectrum conditions make good progress as they learn to manage their anxieties and behaviour, communicate more appropriately and settle in class. Pupils with different degrees of learning difficulty achieve well because careful planning makes sure that pupils learn and build up their skills systematically.
- There are no differences in the achievement of pupils from different ethnic heritages or of those who speak English as an additional language, either between themselves or in comparison to their peers. This is because of the school's focus on supporting the development of communication skills in all pupils. However, inconsistencies in the staff's use of communication aids such as symbols and signing has resulted in some less-able pupils of all ethnic backgrounds' achievement in speaking and listening being a relative weakness.
- Pupils usually really enjoy their lessons and are interested in what they are doing. This helps them to concentrate well and contributes to their good progress. Pupils often show new learning or skills in lessons. For example, older pupils with moderate learning difficulties wrote poems of their own using their developing knowledge of letters and the sounds they make. On another occasion, a pupil with severe learning difficulties said 'beep beep' for the first time when playing with a toy car.
- The school's records show that pupils who have fewer skills for learning make slower progress in literacy, numeracy and other subjects than their classmates. As a result, the school concentrates on developing these important skills for learning for these pupils. Records show that once they have gained them, their academic achievement improves rapidly.
- The progress of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and the pupil premium is comparable with others in all subjects including literacy and numeracy. All pupils' personal and academic achievement is very closely tracked. All receive extra support if their progress slows, and the pupil premium is used to fund the support for those eligible. This is not only by supporting, for example, improvement in literacy skills, but often by improving individuals' well-being and personal development which lead to improved achievement.

The quality of teaching is good

- Pupils' good progress is due to good teaching in all subjects and different groups. All parents and carers who responded to the school's survey agreed that teaching is good and their children are making good progress.
- Teaching for children in their Reception Year is good. Early Years Foundation Stage practice is used well throughout Key Stage 1. This means that the Reception-age children have plenty of opportunity to play and work with, and learn from, older classmates as they gain the important communication and personal skills needed for more academic learning later on.
- Teaching assistants make an excellent contribution to pupils' learning, enjoyment and calm behaviour. Teachers keep them well informed, so that they support learning effectively, for example, when working with small groups.
- Lessons all have a clear learning aim, such as to help pupils understand what 'big' and 'little' mean. Teachers plan various interesting activities that encourage pupils to engage, understand, learn and achieve the aim, for example, by comparing and drawing round big and little discs.
- Staff keep pupils' individual learning targets continually in mind so that they can be practised in lessons as well as in the daily sessions specifically timetabled for this purpose. One such example is 'to talk about what I am doing'. This helps pupils to make good progress towards their termly targets as well as meet the lesson's learning aims.
- Staff have very positive relationships with pupils. They encourage them, support them and in almost all lessons make sure that they provide interesting, demanding, enjoyable activities. As a result, pupils are keen to take part and learn. On one occasion, for instance, pupils chose dressing-up outfits to wear and then, in two teams, developed a story around their characters and the extra prop of a cardboard box. The pupils wrote their ideas down on a large story plan as they went along. This activity developed pupils' imagination, confidence, collaboration, speaking, listening and literacy skills very effectively.
- Staff give immediate praise when pupils have learned or behaved well, so that they understand exactly what they have done well and can repeat it. Similarly, inappropriate behaviour is firmly and quickly dealt with, usually by the use of the school's effective 'three steps' behaviour management system, clearly displayed for pupils on classroom walls.
- Literacy and numeracy are taught well and pupils make good progress. Excellent opportunities are given for more-able pupils to practise their skills in other subjects. However, the use of signing to improve less-able pupils' understanding and communication is inconsistent. While the use of symbols to support communication and understanding is carefully taught to less-able pupils, symbols are not used widely enough throughout the day. These factors limit the development of pupils' communication skills and understanding.
- Occasionally staff, working with pupils with autistic spectrum conditions, do not use the best resources to help them understand. For example, a cartoon drawing of a bee displaying human characteristics, such as smiling and walking upright on two legs, does not help these pupils to fully understand what a bee looks like.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils' behaviour is good in class and around the school. Almost all parents and carers agree with this. The more-able pupils are friendly and sociable and happy to talk to adults about their work and activities. Less-able pupils and those with autistic spectrum conditions are usually calm and manage unexpected change or visitors very well. They sometimes come up to a visitor with curiosity and the clear intention of greeting them.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are good. Where teaching is at its best, and the activities provided interest and engage pupils fully, their behaviour and attitudes to learning are excellent. Pupils enjoy school. Their attendance has improved steadily over the past few years and is now broadly average.
- Staff have many effective strategies to help pupils understand what to do or expect next, which keeps them calm and understand what is happening. As a result they cooperate which supports their learning and good progress. Such examples include being clear when an activity has finished and singing a 'sit down' song to identify the transition to the next lesson.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. All staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire agree that pupils are safe at Oaklands. They know each individual pupil very well and are vigilant about changes in their well-being. The school has numerous clear, consistently implemented policies and practices relating to keeping pupils safe which are very effective and result in a safe, calm, very caring school in which each pupil is cherished.
- As far as their understanding allows, pupils are taught to keep themselves safe and to be kind to others through topics, lessons and assemblies. This contributes very well to their personal and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There have been no recent incidents of bullying.
- Staff show great care and concern for pupils' well-being, for example, making sure that they have suitable, clean clothes should the need arise. Strong relationships with parents and carers help the school to support pupils and their families in times of need.
- Staff distinguish appropriately between inappropriate behaviour and the challenging behaviour shown by many pupils with autistic spectrum conditions. This is supported by entirely different but equally effective strategies.
- A few pupils with particular behavioural, emotional and social difficulties sometimes behave inappropriately, for example, by swearing or violence. This is very well dealt with by immediate, clear instructions and the consistent use of the school's behaviour management approaches.

The leadership and management are good

- Almost all aspects of Oaklands are undergoing transformation in response to its changing pupil population. Significant changes have been made to the curriculum, and the way staff are expected to teach, organise their classrooms, manage behaviour and communicate with pupils.
- Good leadership and guidance from the senior leaders are helping staff to adapt to different ways of working. Senior leaders run 'coaching groups' which help staff to discuss issues and share and develop good practice.
- The school's transformation has come about because leaders have a very accurate view of its

strengths and areas to develop. This has led to a number of detailed plans for its improvement. All subjects have an action plan to improve teaching and learning, as do whole-school processes such as assessment. As a result, the school is changing and improving its practice steadily and successfully.

- The quality of teaching and learning is seen as everyone's responsibility, and not just that of the senior leaders. The role of the subject leaders has recently been strengthened to include responsibility for checking and supporting the quality of teaching and learning in their subject. This gives these staff good opportunities to prepare for senior leadership roles in the future.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage is led well and closely follows national guidance, for example, in the way that staff record children's learning.
- A good programme of professional development for individuals, groups and the whole staff contributes well to their changing and growing expertise. Newly qualified teachers are well supported and become competent, effective members of staff.
- Checking of teaching is accurate and judgements on quality are confirmed by the local authority. Areas for improvement are identified and shared with staff, although they are not always the focus of subsequent checks. This means that they are not always taken fully on board by individual teachers to result in better teaching and learning.
- The system to assess and track pupils' developing skills is outstanding. It ensures that pupils are set demanding targets every step of the way from first starting school to transferring to secondary school at the end of Year 6. The system provides detailed information which allows any pupil falling behind to be quickly identified and supported.
- Money received from the pupil premium is well used to fund additional support or provision for individuals. This makes sure that they have the same opportunity to achieve as well as their peers. The best way to support these pupils' achievement is determined through analysis of progress data and the staff's detailed knowledge of each individual. The impact of the additional support is evaluated to check on its effectiveness.
- The school provides an interesting range of subjects, activities and clubs that pupils enjoy and supports their positive attitudes to school and learning, and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Good preparations have been made for the introduction of the new National Curriculum in September.
- The school has used the additional government grant for sport and physical activity very well. Money has already been spent on improving staff skills, coaching for pupils, improving the skills of pupils with physical difficulties and improving sporting and inter-school competition opportunities. The next allocation of money in April is to be used to provide an after-school multi-sports club, a 'change 4 life' club, and transport home for pupils who would benefit from more activity but who are not able to access local home-based provision for various reasons.
- The local authority adviser provides regular, helpful support to Oaklands. This has included: training for staff and the governing body, checking on the accuracy of senior leaders' judgements on the quality of teaching, and putting the school forward as a host school for the authority's newly qualified teachers.
- Partnerships with parents and carers are strong and the school supports them effectively, for example, by providing interpreters for meetings and introducing them to relevant external professionals. The survey of parents and carers' views shows that they are overwhelmingly

happy with the leadership and management of the school.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body fulfils all its statutory duties including those to safeguard pupils.
- Members are kept very well informed about the school through detailed reports, improvement plans and regular presentations from various members of staff. They have input into all areas of the school's development, including making budget decisions. Finances are managed well.
- The governing body questions senior leaders about the school's outcomes and how to improve them. Members understand the school's strengths and areas for development, and how well pupils are doing. They understand the link between teachers' performance, pupils' achievement, pay and responsibility, and the need to support any under-performing teachers.
- Nevertheless, some members of the governing body do not visit school frequently enough to make sure they have enough first-hand information. As a result, a few governors feel they do not have enough expertise to challenge senior leaders about teaching, learning and other aspects of the school's work.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	130353
Local authority	Leicester
Inspection number	430700

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	94
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Malcolm Robbins
Headteacher	Eleanor Shaw
Date of previous school inspection	16 March 2011
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