

Oaklands Park School

John Nash Drive, Dawlish, EX7 9SF

Inspection dates 2–3 July 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Recent complaints have highlighted some potential shortcomings in terms of the safety of pupils. New procedures are now in place across the school.
- Some teaching assistants are not used appropriately or given time to plan support for pupils with the classroom teacher. As a result, sometimes the help they offer pupils is not as effective as it could be.
- The very small sixth form requires improvement to ensure that pupils achieve well.
- School leaders do not always check carefully enough that school systems are used by classroom teachers or give enough support to those wishing to introduce new approaches to learning.
- Governors do not routinely check the day-to-day running of the school to ensure that they understand what is working well and where improvements are needed.
- Teachers and teaching assistants do not have enough support when dealing with some pupils' very challenging behaviour, particularly during lesson times.

The school has the following strengths

- The Principal, school leaders, teachers and teaching assistants know every child very well. They have tackled areas needing swift improvement. As a result, pupils make good progress over time and feel safe.
- Teaching is good. Lessons encourage the pupils to practise their skills in a variety of ways using both the school grounds and the local community.
- The behaviour of pupils at break times and during free time around the school is often better than in class. The atmosphere at these times is calm and quiet.
- School leaders, teachers and teaching assistants use an effective range of methods to improve pupils' social, language and communication skills.

Information about this inspection

The inspection was carried out in response to two complaints made to Ofsted which raised serious concerns. The complaints were deemed to be qualifying complaints and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector decided that an unannounced inspection of the school would take place to follow up the issues that were raised. The inspector sought to establish whether:

- safeguarding procedures are adequate, including the response to pupils with challenging behaviour
 - suitable adjustments are made to behaviour management procedures according to the pupils' needs and disabilities
 - staff are suitably trained and able to seek advice and support when required
 - leaders and the governing body are effective in monitoring and evaluating the school's policy and practice for behaviour management and safeguarding.
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- The inspector observed four parts of lessons, including two with the Principal, watched an assembly and made short visits to a number of lessons to observe learning.
 - There were only four responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and therefore none was available to view.
 - Questionnaires from 36 members of staff were analysed.
 - The inspector looked at a range of documents, including those relating to the school's evaluation of its own effectiveness, safeguarding and pupils' assessment information, as well as examples of pupils' work.
 - The inspector held discussions with representatives from the governing body, the local authority, staff and groups of students.

Inspection team

Helen Matthews, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Oaklands Park Special School is a small school with boarding provision for approximately 20 pupils.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage and do not speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for children in the care of the local authority and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals) is just above average.
- All of the pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- The majority of students have severe learning difficulties or autistic spectrum disorder.
- No students attend an off-site provision.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - checking carefully the impact of new initiatives on pupils' learning ensuring that systems for checking pupils' progress are effective
 - ensuring that teaching assistants are attached to appropriate groups and given time to plan activities with teachers
 - ensuring that governors rigorously check the effectiveness of the school for themselves.
- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.
- Improve pupils' behaviour and safety by:
 - ensuring that recent changes designed to keep students safe are consistently applied across the school
 - improving the management of pupils' behaviour so that they learn how to behave, particularly when working together in class
 - giving teachers and teaching assistants further guidance on how to manage pupils' behaviour effectively.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils arrive at the school with very low attainment and very complex learning needs. By the time they leave the school, pupils have made good progress, not just in terms of communication, literacy and mathematics, but also in terms of their personal and social skills.
- The school actively promotes 'life skills' for pupils and, as a result, they are all well prepared to move to the next phase of their education or training.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 are taught phonics (letters and the sounds they make) every morning. No pupils pass the national phonics check due to the inability of many children to communicate a response verbally. However, throughout the inspection, there was clear evidence of pupils' understanding of different letter sounds. They use technology resources to match simple words with pictures.
- In Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils are encouraged to hold pens and paintbrushes, and begin to make simple marks that gradually build to short bursts of writing. There is clear evidence of improvements over time in pupils' work.
- In Key Stages 3, 4 and 5, pupils do a range of very practical, real-life activities. These are designed to combine their preparation for the life outside of school with mathematics, communication and language skills. A range of evidence is collected. This includes teachers' notes, photographs, commentary and pieces of work, which demonstrate the progress made in learning. This evidence contributes to qualifications entitled 'Life and Living'.
- All pupils have individual education plans which are carefully checked and changed accordingly so that pupils make good progress.
- All pupils, including those eligible for additional funding, make good progress over time in their language, social and communication skills. The funding has been effectively used to provide additional teaching assistants to work with the youngest pupils in the school and on the new literacy programme that is having a positive impact on reading.
- The school regularly works with partner schools to ensure that teachers' assessments of how well pupils achieve are accurate.
- The library has been updated, and with the appointment of some older pupils working as 'librarians', there has been a recent push to encourage further a love of books. A shared reading experience with an adult, for every child, is arranged each day. This is having a positive effect on pupils' interest in books and reading. Recently introduced reading logs and assessment sheets mean that teachers can accurately track pupils' progress in reading and writing.

The quality of teaching is good

- Pupils' learning is encouraged through a mix of practical activities and play. This encourages them to work together and communicate with both their classmates and adults in the room.
- Teachers and teaching assistants communicate using sign language, facial expressions and spoken words to encourage pupils to take part in the activities.
- Teachers in all key stages know their pupils extremely well and plan accordingly, often providing separate activities for individual pupils. They are flexible and able to change plans quickly to meet the emotional needs of the pupils. As a result, pupils make regular, small steps in learning.
- Teachers and teaching assistants understand the emotional and physical needs of pupils. Where necessary, they allow pupils to have 'down time', such as a walk in the fresh air or listening to a favourite song. This encourages them to rejoin the learning activity afterwards.
- A mixture of physical activities, stimulation of the senses and communication from the adults ensures that pupils' learning, while often in very small steps, is very intensive in class. For instance, in a mathematics lesson, pupils were expected to catch a soft ball and then count down to the next number. While many found this tricky, pupils encouraged each other, hinting at what the number might be. They then had to use real money to prepare for their visit to the

beach the following day. The teacher continually raised the level of challenge throughout the lesson, so that even the most-able pupils had to work hard to find the correct amounts by the end.

- However, teachers and teaching assistants do not always plan lessons together. The large amount of daily, more individual work is not planned sufficiently well. As a result, these shorter and focused activities do not always move pupils' learning forward as quickly as they could.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

require improvement

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure requires improvement. The governing body and senior leaders have thoroughly investigated the complaints and worked very hard to tackle the issues raised. However, the final outcome of one investigation became known during this inspection and school leaders are still taking advice about the most appropriate way to proceed.
- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. While, during free time, pupils are generally calm and well behaved, this is often because they are allowed to play alone and make choices about what they want to do. In lessons however, there are times when pupils are expected to work together and concentrate on activities chosen by the teachers. Some pupils find this very difficult and, as a result, their behaviour becomes poor.
- Teachers and teaching assistants receive regular behaviour management training and they use a range of strategies to encourage pupils to behave well. However, they need further support from senior leaders on how to deal with those pupils with the most challenging behaviour, in order to minimise risk to themselves and other pupils in the school.
- There is very little deliberate bullying at the school. However, sometimes, pupils become involved in minor disputes in class, due to the limited ability of some to understand each other's feelings or to share. These disputes sometimes take a while to be resolved appropriately.
- All relevant safeguarding and behaviour policies have recently been reviewed and are in line with current regulations. Pupils report that they feel safe.
- School leaders track and record all incidences of poor behaviour and these are regularly analysed. Over the past few months, there has been a decline in incidences of very challenging behaviour.
- Pupils' behaviour during free time at break and lunchtimes is good. Pupils respect each other's physical space, and the dining areas are quiet and calm. The large and beautiful school grounds are separated into different areas for specific groups of pupils. However, at times, pupils of all ages are encouraged to mix together, and they do this well.
- The school works hard to celebrate differences and tackle discrimination. Pupils go out into the community on a daily basis and are taught practical life skills such as using the bus, keeping themselves safe on busy roads and issues to do with 'stranger danger'.
- Pupils use computers regularly in class to help them learn. They are taught the dangers of social media and their use is carefully monitored.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and attendance is above average. They are often excited by the numerous practical activities on offer, especially swimming. During the inspection, they were keen to say hello and share their positive experiences.

The leadership and management

require improvement

- While senior leaders are clearly committed to improving pupils' learning and opportunities once they leave school, they have not always been successful in sharing their vision. As a result, teachers work very hard in their own areas but are not always supported in their work with pupils or in introducing new methods in their teaching.
- Although there are a very large number of experienced teaching assistants, they are not always

deployed to work with the most appropriate children. There is limited time for them to plan activities with the teachers and, as a result, sometimes, their contribution is to occupy pupils rather than help them to learn.

- School leaders do not have an overview of how the outdoor activities help to improve key skills such as language, communication, literacy and mathematics. These activities are very much chosen and provided by individual teachers. As a result, it is difficult for senior leaders to check the impact of the activities on pupils' progress.
- While school leaders have put in place some systems for collecting information about the day-to-day progress of pupils, they do not always check that the systems are used. As a result, valuable information about pupils' small steps in their learning is sometimes lost.
- The older pupils, particularly the very few in the sixth form, have the opportunity to work towards national qualifications, although none has yet achieved them.
- However, the Principal, governing body and other senior leaders are ambitious for all the pupils at the school. The Principal, in particular, is committed to ensuring that every child is prepared for the next stage of education or training and, as a result, all pupils go on to a suitable setting when they leave school.
- Senior leaders know each child personally and, with their teachers, carefully track their progress, in academic work, social skills and behaviour, throughout the year.
- Individual education plans are up-to-date and every teacher has a range of specific methods for supporting each child.
- Senior leaders undertake regular lesson observations, and encourage teachers and teaching assistants to share their ideas about what works well for individual pupils.
- The range of subjects taught and the activities outside the classroom are practical, wide and varied. Swimming, the newly introduced forest school and cooking are amongst the pupils' favourites. Some boys enjoyed sharing their experiences of muddy wellingtons and wet tents while on a Ten Tors adventure.
- The government funding for primary sports has been used to purchase and install a large, safe trampoline for pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2. Pupils thoroughly enjoy using this equipment during free time and it has helped them to practise turn-taking.
- The school's promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development goes on throughout the school day. For many pupils, practising social communication skills in a range of real-life experiences is key to them making progress.
- As a result of requests from the governing body, the local authority has recently provided support for the school in terms of financial management and an audit of safeguarding pupils procedures.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body has spent considerable time investigating the complaints brought against the school and has followed all procedures in an appropriate way. It has also been actively involved in resolving a financial overspend caused by issues in the residential part of the school. However, it is not active enough in challenging the school on day-to-day matters, particularly about the quality of teaching and learning. It relies too much on the Principal's reports on progress and teachers' performance.
- However, the governing body is actively involved in checking the performance of school leaders and has both supported and professionally challenged the Principal more over the past few months, to try and improve weaker aspects of the school. All safeguarding requirements are now met.

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	113642
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	447435

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	All-through
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	56
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	5
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Annie Raine
Headteacher	Bob Pugh
Date of previous school inspection	24–25 January 2012
Telephone number	01626 862363
Email address	admin@oaklandspark.devon.sch.uk

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