

The Oaktree Centre

The Oaktree Centre, Sulby Avenue, Pallister Park, Middlesbrough, TS3 8RD

Inspection dates 27–28 January 2015

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The inspirational and vibrant leadership of the headteacher ensures that the quality of learning is constantly improving. Her high ambitions are shared by a diligent and skilled team of staff.
- Pupils make rapid progress in their personal development because staff set high expectations and use praise, rewards and any sanctions consistently and fairly. This ensures that their interest in learning is rekindled, preparing them well for a return to their mainstream school.
- Pupils make good progress in their reading, writing and mathematics because the interesting curriculum is really well-matched to their needs.
- Pupils' progress is carefully checked and the information effectively used to pinpoint the intervention and support that are needed.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. Their sometimes high level of commitment is reflected in their good pattern of attendance and their good levels of self-control.
- Pupils feel very confident and safe in the happy, friendly family atmosphere. This is because the school makes an excellent contribution to their safety and well-being. Pupils are taught how to recognise and calculate risk very successfully.
- The provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very effective. It is successful in helping pupils to value the importance of respect and tolerance in their relationships.
- Teaching is extremely well led and managed with staff skills and talents nurtured effectively. As a result, teaching and classroom support are constantly improving.
- Disadvantaged pupils who have gaps in their attainment and skills start to catch up quickly as a result of the effective teaching and the well-targeted help that they receive.
- The shrewdly-led governing body makes a very significant contribution to the school's ethos and vision and the non-stop progress in performance.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching does not always produce a consistent pattern of rapid progress and high achievement, because, now and then, expectations are not high enough.
- Opportunities are sometimes missed to use questioning to stretch pupils' thinking more; offer clear steps for improvement in marking; and guide pupils to be patient and keep trying when working things out for themselves.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed seven lessons, including four paired observations, and carried out a scrutiny of pupils' work with members of the senior leadership team. In addition, the inspector made a number of short visits to lessons, listened to pupils read and undertook learning walks around the school in order to check the quality of what is provided for pupils.
- The inspector spoke with pupils and had discussions with the headteacher, middle managers, staff, governors, the school improvement partner, and the local authority virtual school head who is responsible for the achievement of looked after children.
- The inspector also examined a range of documents including those related to safeguarding, the school's view of how well it is doing, the monitoring of staff performance, the school's improvement plan and records relating to pupils' progress and behaviour.
- There were insufficient responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) for the inspector to be able to consider. The inspector spoke to a parent governor, reviewed the school's own recent parent survey and spoke to three parents on the telephone.
- The inspector took account of seven responses to the inspection questionnaire for staff.

Inspection team

Clive Petts, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Almost all of the pupils are on the roll of their mainstream school as well as the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). It provides individualised learning and support programmes for up to 12 pupils, in Key Stages 1 and 2, who have a range of specific needs and are potentially vulnerable.
- Pupils are referred either because they are permanently excluded from mainstream school, or at risk of this happening, have medical needs, or who are anxious pupils failing to engage with a mainstream school. Pupils normally stay for between two and three terms.
- Oaktree is one of three PRUs located on one site, in addition to the Hospital Teaching Service, which form the Complementary Education Service of the local authority. They all share the same headteacher and the same governing body.
- The capacity of the school was doubled from six to 12 places in April 2014.
- There are more boys than girls and all have special educational needs.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and eligible for support through the pupil premium is well above average. This funding is for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- All pupils are of White British heritage.
- The PRU provides a breakfast club each morning.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure teaching consistently inspires and excites pupils' thinking to enable them to learn exceptionally well by:
 - raising expectations even higher of what pupils of all starting points can do and achieve
 - making sure that pupils develop more patience and resilience when working things out for themselves in all of their learning
 - ensuring that teachers' questioning constantly checks and tests pupils' knowledge and understanding
 - providing concise and clearly defined steps to improve their work and making certain that pupils have followed this advice.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The passion and drive of the headteacher has made sure the school is constantly adding to its many strengths. Senior leaders, including governors, have a clear vision and high ambitions for the continuous improvement of the quality of provision.
- Leaders have robust systems for checking its performance, particularly the progress and achievement made by pupils. Coupled with a reflective and self-critical approach, leaders have a clear understanding of school strengths, priorities for further improvement and how these can be achieved.
- The relentless focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning has resulted in considerable gains in pupils' progress and achievement. The determination to ensure that pupils reach the levels of which they are capable in reading, writing and mathematics lies behind the success in reintegrating pupils back into mainstream within two to three terms. This illustrates the school's good promotion of equality of opportunity and rigorous tackling of discrimination.
- Those staff who have middle management roles use their expertise to good effect. They check pupils' performance and promptly address any inconsistencies in order to sustain rates of progress and levels of achievement.
- Performance management is rigorous and effective, making certain that there is no automatic pay progression. Staff training is carefully tailored to meet school and individual needs to ensure that staff skills are continuously developed and extended.
- The rich and varied curriculum is effectively adapted to meet the needs of all pupils. A wide range of thought-provoking experiences help to bring learning to life, often in interesting, practical ways. The imaginative promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is evident in the sometimes high levels of respect and tolerance pupils demonstrate towards staff and their classmates. The provision for pupils' personal development is a strength, preparing pupils very well for life in modern Britain.
- The primary school sports funding is used effectively to maintain high pupil participation levels and enjoyment, enhance staff coaching skills and promote higher skills in a broad range of sports. For example, such as in the partnership working with Middlesbrough Football Club, pupils are able to gain the sport leaders award. Residential visits to activity centres introduce pupils to outdoor sports such as rock climbing, abseiling and competitive quad biking.
- Pupil premium funding for disadvantaged pupils is used effectively to close any achievement gaps between their attainment and progress and other pupils in the unit.
- Safeguarding and child protection arrangements meet requirements. Procedures are firmly established and much best practice and high-quality care is adopted in the day-to-day management, care and protection of pupils.
- The local authority has an accurate view of school performance. It challenges and supports in equal measure with excellent collaborative working to help the PRU ensure that potentially vulnerable pupils receive the highest quality care and protection.
- Partnership working with local schools, including a special school, are a real strength. Good relationships are promoted highly effectively with parents. As a result, parents are highly supportive because their views are listened to and they feel valued.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The strong governing body is effective, challenging and supportive. Governors are sharply focused upon ensuring the best possible outcomes for pupils. They maintain a close check on the quality of teaching and learning. Governors check performance information regularly and display a detailed and insightful grasp of strengths and areas for improvement. They ensure that performance management is effective. Governors hold staff to account to ensure that extra funding for the disadvantaged and for sport have the intended impact in raising standards and skills. They ensure that equality of opportunity is promoted very well and that discrimination is not tolerated.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Relationships between pupils and staff are often excellent. This is because of the upbeat and happy working atmosphere and the excellent role models provided by staff. Consequently, there is a strong sense of belonging and pride in the school.
- Pupils respond positively to the high expectations that are set by staff, particularly developing effective

self-control. They quickly acquire the habit of working hard and they are very clear about the boundaries that are set for their conduct. Any low-level disruption in lessons is handled skilfully by staff.

- Social times, including breakfast, are calm, happy and friendly occasions. At lunchtime, a relaxed atmosphere permeates the dining hall when staff and pupils enjoy a meal together. Younger pupils enjoy and benefit from mixing with older pupils from Key Stages 3 and 4, such as when playing table-tennis matches at break time. This highly positive tone continues into lessons when pupils demonstrate a willingness to learn and make up for lost time.
- Discussions with pupils reveal that they feel extremely well looked after by staff. They report that they feel safe and demonstrate full confidence that staff will promptly resolve any worries or concerns that they may have. Pupils are extremely well informed about bullying in all of its various forms and do not see bullying as an issue.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Pupils are exceptionally well-informed about risk and danger. They appreciate the lengths to which staff go to teach them how to manage their own personal safety. They are sensible and safety conscious, such when cooking pasta on a gas hob or involved in physical activity in the sports hall. They are very knowledgeable about the dangers of cyber bullying. For example, they are clear about when and how to block unwanted email.
- Highly effective collaborative working with families and specialist support services to improve attendance ensures that their attendance is well above that of similar schools.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching is good with occasional examples of inspiring and imaginative practice. Inspection evidence and the school's own monitoring records reveal continuous improvement in the quality of teaching since the previous inspection. This is because the skills and talents of staff are fostered and developed so well.
- Teachers, support staff and visitors, such as the local librarian, enjoy excellent relationships with pupils. This underpins much of the good progress in pupils' learning. Staff display a clear-cut understanding of the learning needs of each pupil and this is reflected in the good match of curriculum activities. Classrooms are busy places in which pupils are keen to learn. Pupils are encouraged to work things out for themselves and expected to explain their thinking, ideas and solutions.
- When pupils' progress is quickest and achievement approaches higher levels:
 - expectations of what can be achieved are made crystal clear and are understood well by pupils
 - activities and methods adopted are closely matched to each pupil's individual needs
 - skilful questioning constantly probes pupils' thinking and checks and tests out their understanding
 - marking ensures pupils are able to recognise what has been completed well and what can be improved.
- On those few occasions when progress is a little variable and requires improvement:
 - tasks are not always matched closely enough to pupils' abilities or adapted when the learning rate falters
 - demands made of pupils are not always challenging enough
 - questioning misses opportunities to assess pupils' knowledge and understanding
 - marking does not always require corrections or make certain that pupils are in no doubt as to how their work can be improved.
- Teaching is usually characterised by a determination to constantly improve skills in reading, writing and mathematics and to foster positive attitudes to learning. Teaching is mainly well-organised and stimulating, and high expectations encourage pupils to develop their resolve to work out problems without help. For example, a group of pupils were absorbed in reviewing a photographic collage of people and children of all types, cultures and appearances. After a pause, and without prompting, pupils concluded that: 'looks do not matter, it is about the inside!' However, this practice is not always consistently adopted.
- Frequent marking and accurate assessment are increasingly thorough but, from time to time, opportunities are missed to demand essential corrections and provide well-defined ways for pupils to improve their work.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Most pupils arrive at school with skills, knowledge and understanding below those that are typically expected. Previous disruption to their learning often results in gaps in their attainment and skills. Good teaching, in a highly supportive and happy atmosphere, ensures that progress accelerates and enables all pupils to achieve well. In individual cases, outstanding progress radically improves pupils' commitment in lessons and boosts their confidence and self-esteem.
- On arrival, the abilities and needs of pupils are quickly and accurately assessed. Personalised programmes are sensitively and precisely tailored to individual needs. This includes effectively planned reading, writing and mathematics. Full account is taken of their often complex needs and vulnerabilities. All settle quickly and happily, including those with anxiety issues.
- Current school information, confirmed by work scrutiny and observation of learning, reveals that good, and sometimes rapid, progress is made in reading, writing and mathematics. Any deficiencies in pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding are addressed quickly. This includes disadvantaged pupils entitled to additional funding.
- The most able pupils make equally good progress. This is because staff work hard to shape tasks which stretch their thinking further. Even so, now and then, opportunities are missed to be more thought-provoking and extend knowledge and deepen understanding even further.
- Excellent opportunities are provided for pupils to develop new skills, such as in cooking. They respond enthusiastically to the high expectations and tough challenges set for them in a practical environment, including for personal safety. This provides them with opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning, such as organising the sequence of preparing, measuring and cooking their ingredients. Nevertheless, in a few lessons pupils are not encouraged enough to take more responsibility for their own learning or to extend their perseverance when responding to a question or solving a problem.
- A high priority is given to fostering enjoyment in reading, especially by boys. Imaginative approaches, such as using puppets, helps pupils to generate emotion in their language when reading well-known stories. In turn, this successfully encourages pupils to regularly read for pleasure. As result, pupils' reading fluency, accuracy and comprehension all improve at a good rate from below average levels. Vocabulary is systematically extended although, occasionally, opportunities are missed across all subjects to add to the richness and accuracy of their vocabulary still further, such as in mathematics. Inspired methods when setting writing tasks, such as using the First World War as a theme to capture interest, motivate pupils to achieve well.
- Achievement in mathematics is good. Staff make topics interesting and provide opportunities to solve problems in practical ways. These reinforce pupils' grasp of using and applying mathematical concepts.
- In discussions with parents, all were really positive about the considerable turnaround in their children's progress, achievement and attitudes. The comment, 'he cannot wait to go to school' typifies the views of parents.

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	134328
Local authority	Middlesbrough
Inspection number	448065

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	11
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Janice Brunton
Headteacher	Linda Harries
Date of previous school inspection	27 March 2012
Telephone number	01642 213799
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	cegeneralenquiry@mcschools.org

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