



Oaklands Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117261
Local Authority HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 290774
Inspection date 22 January 2007
Reporting inspector Ruth Frith

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Great North Road
School category	Community		Welwyn
Age range of pupils	4-11		Hertfordshire AL6 0PX
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01438 715278
Number on roll (school)	157	Fax number	01438 716155
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Julie Cragg
		Headteacher	Mrs Catherine Holmes
Date of previous school inspection	3 March 2003		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector in one day.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average size primary school situated in the village of Oaklands and Mardley Heath on the outskirts of Welwyn Garden City. Pupils come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds and the proportion of pupils receiving free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties is also below average and three pupils have a statement of special educational need. Children usually start school with skills and standards which match those expected for their age. Most pupils come from White British backgrounds and a few speak English as an additional language. The headteacher joined the school at the beginning of this academic year.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school where the friendly and supportive environment, together with good quality teaching, helps pupils to do well. Good improvements have been made since the last inspection and the enthusiasm and commitment of staff and governors, together with the headteacher's good leadership, demonstrate that the school has good capacity for further improvement. Parents are pleased with what the school offers their children and the standards they achieve.

Children make a good start in Reception because the quality of provision is good. They quickly develop confidence and are well prepared for their future learning. Throughout the school, pupils make good progress and achieve well. Over recent years, pupils in Year 6 have reached standards that are usually above average in English, mathematics and science. Sometimes, standards have been high, particularly in mathematics and science. Pupils' writing has been a weaker area but is now improving and standards are rising. Pupils achieve well because their learning is developed systematically over time through the provision of challenging work and activities which match their capabilities. The improvement in pupils' writing is also due to changes in the curriculum which have placed greater emphasis on developing pupils' speaking, listening and use of language and in greater opportunities for drama. In addition, the school has recently introduced a new scheme for teaching younger pupils to read and write. Although teaching is good overall, greater consistency is needed in the way teachers check and mark pupils' work and involve them in their own learning, so that they have a better sense of how they can improve.

The good curriculum provides pupils with a range of interesting learning activities. Because they enjoy what they are doing, pupils behave well and develop good attitudes to learning. Pupils' personal development is good and consequently they develop good relationships with others and show respect for beliefs and ways of living that are different from their own. Care, support and guidance are also good and help pupils to develop into confident learners, well prepared for their next stage of schooling. Attendance is only satisfactory.

Leadership and management are good and result in the school providing good value for money. Staff and governors have a clear understanding of the school and their accurate and insightful self-evaluation helps them to reflect on how well the school is doing and what it needs to do next. Consequently, the school's improvement plan is soundly based. Further improvements are required in tracking pupils' progress over time and setting them appropriately challenging targets. Staff have begun work on this.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the use of the recently introduced system for tracking pupils' progress to more sharply identify their next steps in learning and challenging targets.
- Ensure that pupils are fully aware of how to improve their work.
- Work with parents so that the school meets its attendance targets.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

From starting points broadly similar to national expectations, pupils make good progress and achieve well. This prepares them well for their future lives. In Reception, children become keen and active learners so that by the time they enter Year 1 the vast majority reach the standards expected for their age and some achieve beyond these. The results of the 2006 Year 2 national assessments show a continuation of the above average standards of recent years in reading, writing and mathematics. Over the last few years, results in the national assessments for Year 6 pupils show above average standards in English, mathematics and science and sometimes high standards in mathematics and science. In 2006, standards were above average in English but just broadly average in mathematics and science. This was related to a higher than usual proportion of pupils with learning difficulties within this small cohort and a lower than average percentage of pupils gained the higher level 5 in science. A check of pupils' work in the current Year 6 indicates that standards are on course to return to their previous higher levels and more able pupils are challenged well. Throughout the school, standards in writing are improving. The school met its targets for English and mathematics last year but has recognised the need to identify more challenging targets in the future. Different groups of pupils generally make similar progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and supports the strong school ethos in which pupils feel happy and well cared for. They enjoy school but attendance is only satisfactory because some families are taking their holidays during term time. Pupils have a good understanding of how to live healthy lives and the school's recent focus on physical education is supporting this. Pupils are beginning to put what they learn into practice, for example, by taking a greater part in sporting activities and eating healthy snacks. They are clear about ways of keeping themselves safe and highlight learning to swim and riding their bikes safely as important skills. They also know how to deal with any possible unacceptable behaviour they may receive or see. Pupils feel they can talk with staff and the 'playground squad', made up of Year 5 and 6 pupils, when they are experiencing difficulties. Pupils contribute much to the school and wider community. For example, through the school council, views are being sought on healthy eating so changes can be made. Pupils also raise funds for charities and represent the school in sporting and musical events.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good because staff have a clear understanding of what they want pupils to learn and pupils, in turn, respond positively to the challenges set for them. Pupils confirmed that, 'The work is challenging but not too hard'. Teachers' planning is good because it ensures that activities build systematically on previous learning and are well matched to the pupils' capabilities. Pupils' interests are maintained through a good range of teaching styles and activities. A particular strength is the use of 'buddies' in all classes. This is where pupils work well together and progress is enhanced by them supporting and challenging each other's learning. Staff make good use of information and communication technology (ICT), particularly the interactive whiteboards, and this is helping to motivate pupils' learning. Teachers and teaching assistants work well together, ensuring that pupils receive additional support when they find learning difficult. Teachers know their pupils well and have begun to set targets for pupils effectively as a way to drive up standards but still have more to do.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is organised well to ensure a smooth transition from the good provision in Reception to Years 1 and 2. Curriculum planning in the mixed age classes in Years 3 to 6 meets most pupils' needs well; for example, they are set by ability for teaching in literacy and numeracy. Despite the concerns a few parents have about this arrangement, pupils make good progress. There is a particular strength in the literacy curriculum where much of the school's effective practice reflects expectations in the new national literacy framework. The school has recognised the need to develop the curriculum further by creating closer links between subjects and a new programme is in place. However, insufficient time has passed to evaluate its impact. The personal, social and health education programme is effective in developing pupils' relationships with staff and each other and understanding how to stay safe and healthy. A good range of popular clubs, activities, visits and visitors adds another dimension to pupils' learning and helps them to develop new skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils feel safe and happy in school as a result of the good quality care and support provided by staff. They say, 'You can make friends easily' and 'There is always someone to go to if you have a problem'. Individual support programmes for those who find learning difficult or who need help to behave well are particularly successful. Teaching assistants support teachers well in helping all pupils to make good progress. The school works well with other agencies to make sure that, as far as possible, pupils get the support they need. The needs of pupils are well safeguarded because effective

procedures are in place covering health and safety and child protection issues. A good start has been made with the new system for marking pupils' work. However, practice is still inconsistent and pupils are not always fully involved in this process. Consequently, not all are aware of how they can improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has made a good start because she has quickly identified the school's strengths and introduced new strategies for further improvement. She has been particularly effective at developing a common sense of purpose amongst staff who share her vision for the development of the school. Staff morale is high. There are good systems for checking how well the school is doing and what it could do better. Actions taken by the school are well targeted and have a positive impact on the quality of provision and pupils' progress. Staff are also outward looking and eager to use the expertise of others to improve their practice. This can be seen in the school's partnership with a local secondary school to develop physical education. New systems are in place to track pupils' progress but these are not yet fully effective in raising attainment further. Managers and class teachers need to become more experienced in identifying clearly how much progress has been made, setting appropriately challenging targets and ensuring pupils understand these. Governors are much involved through their visits and the work achieved in committees.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

23 January 2007

Dear Children

Oaklands Primary School, Great North Road, Welwyn, Hertfordshire AL6 0PX

Thank you for making me feel so welcome when I visited your school recently. I enjoyed talking to you and finding out about your work. I was pleased to hear that you enjoy school and you were very positive about all the good things that happen there. I was particularly impressed with the way you work as buddies. These are some of the best things about your school.

- You work hard and do well in English, mathematics and science. Your writing is continuing to improve well.
- You are interested in ICT and particularly like using the interactive whiteboards.
- You like school and behave well because you are interested in what you are doing.
- All the staff work very well together as a team and the teaching is good.
- You find the activities you do and the things you study interesting.
- The work you do in the school council is good and helps you to understand how the school could be improved. I hope your new school sign arrives soon.
- Staff look after you well and you feel safe in school. I was pleased to hear that you would talk to a member of staff if you had problems.

Mrs Holmes leads and manages the school well and staff and governors give her lots of help. They are all keen to make the school even better. We agreed that staff will improve the way they check how well you are doing, so that they set challenging targets and you always know how to improve your work. Most of you arrive at school regularly and on time. Well done! However, the school's attendance rate is not as good as it should be so I am asking staff to work with your parents to see if this can be improved.

I left your school confident that it will continue to improve and wish you all well in the future.

Ruth Frith Lead Inspector