



Oulton CofE (C) First School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 124276
Local Authority Staffordshire
Inspection number 292941
Inspection date 17 October 2006
Reporting inspector Carol Worthington

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

Type of school	First	School address	Rock Crescent
School category	Voluntary controlled		Oulton
Age range of pupils	3-8		ST15 8UH
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01785 354100
Number on roll (school)	99	Fax number	01785 354100
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	I R Forster
		Headteacher	Susan O'Neill
Date of previous school inspection	2 July 2001		

Age group 3-8	Inspection date 17 October 2006	Inspection number 292941
-------------------------	---	------------------------------------

© Crown copyright 2006

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

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.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Oulton is a small rural school. It is popular and oversubscribed. There are three classes of mixed-age pupils. When children start at the school their skill levels are broadly those expected. However, this fluctuates yearly depending on the number of children with learning difficulties, which in some years is up to a third.

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 which gives an effective education to its pupils, all of whom are well known as individuals to the staff. The school is successful in its aim to develop the whole child. Both academic and personal development are good. Children make good progress throughout the school because of good teaching, a good, well-planned curriculum and a good learning environment. Each individual achieves well.

Leadership and management are good. Accurate self-evaluation has led to a rise in standards, particularly in literacy after a focus on its improvement over the past two years. The school has identified underachievement in some aspects of mathematics, where standards were lower than those in reading and writing in the past year. It is beginning to address this with the same rigour as the literacy drive. It is too early yet to see the consequences.

All staff work together well as a team to provide a very good level of pastoral care and support for all pupils, which is enhanced by the effective academic guidance. The governing body is well informed and executes its duties well. Parents are appreciative of all aspects of the school, and their children enjoy the friendly atmosphere. Pupils themselves praised the teaching and they learn and achieve well, reaching standards above those expected nationally by the end of Year 4.

Children make a good start to their education in the Foundation Stage, where the emphasis on developing personal and social skills provides a firm basis for both independent and cooperative learning as they get older. They make good progress in personal development and in literacy, and at least sound progress in other aspects of the curriculum. They enter Year 1 with skills at least as expected and better in literacy and social skills. Teachers' planning ensures that work given to pupils effectively matches their ability, so they achieve well. Teachers use a variety of interesting methods that motivate pupils to learn. Relationships at all levels are good and pupils respond by behaving well and showing enthusiasm in acquiring their 'good learner' skills.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and generally meets the needs of all pupils. Regular French lessons extend it and add interest. Very good attention is paid to the development of literacy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards of pupils' achievement in the shape, measurement and calculation aspects of mathematics, so that mathematics standards match those in literacy.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children enter the school with broadly expected levels of skills, though there is considerable variation in different years. In the Foundation Stage, children make good

gains in personal and social development, language and literacy, and at least sound progress in other areas of learning.

All children make good progress in Years 1 and 2. Any fluctuation in standards is due to the number of children with learning difficulties in any one year. Since this is a small school, this has a much greater effect than in larger schools. Results at the end of Year 2 in 2005 were a little above average in reading, and broadly average in writing and mathematics. This was a slight drop from previous years, since one third of the pupils had learning difficulties in that year. Nevertheless, a large proportion of children achieved above-average levels, particularly in reading. In 2006, the school improved its performance in reading and writing following its focus on literacy improvement, though mathematics standards did not improve as much. Analysis of mathematics results showed areas which need development, especially in understanding shapes, measurement and calculation, and the school is now tackling this rigorously.

Standards achieved by children aged eight are above those expected at this stage. Current Year 4 pupils have made good progress in reading and writing, and steady progress in mathematics; although standards are above average, extended calculations have been identified as needing improvement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school and attendance is good. They feel safe both in class and in the playground. Behaviour is good. Pupils are happy that the rare incidents of bullying are dealt with swiftly. They willingly take responsibility in activities such as the school council, and are involved in the local parish activities such as charitable fund-raising.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Throughout the school there is a calm, supportive atmosphere in which pupils feel confident and secure. They develop a positive self-image and feel part of the school community. They come to school eager to learn because they like their teachers and find lessons interesting and challenging. They very often spontaneously bring in items relating to their studies, as, for example in a recycling topic where two children made robots at home from egg boxes and soft drinks bottles.

In the Foundation Stage, the emphasis on developing personal and social skills gives children a good start. As they move up the school, they gain confidence and are not afraid to voice their opinions. They cooperate well in groups that are often of mixed age and ability, helping each other to succeed and gaining skills which, together with the Young Enterprise activities in Years 3 and 4, prepares them well for their future.

The school has a major focus on the need for a healthy lifestyle, and the effect of this is positively apparent in pupils' choice of food and their attendance at extra-curricular sporting activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers plan lessons very thoroughly and produce different tasks to challenge and motivate the full ability range. They make learning exciting by using a variety of teaching methods such as the use of role-play, for example, in the demonstration of the homophones sea and see.

Teachers manage the mixed ages well. In the Foundation Stage, Nursery and Reception children socialise in the same classroom, but the good provision of a nursery nurse and teaching assistant as well as the teacher enables them to be separated into small groups for much of the time. Similarly, an additional teacher in Years 1 and 2 enables pupils to have most lessons separately, though noise from different groups in the same classroom can be intrusive.

Pupils in Years 3 and 4 work mainly in ability groups whatever their age, and this ensures that they all move at their own pace. Brighter pupils are stretched, and the significant number with learning difficulties also make good progress with the guidance of experienced teaching assistants. In the frequent class and group discussions, however, pupils of all abilities and ages are mixed. Outstanding use of questioning focused on individual attainment was observed in a Year 3 and 4 literacy class, where all pupils felt confident enough to respond, having acquired their 'good learner' skills to assess their own and others' progress.

All teachers develop the key skills of literacy strongly and, after a recent focus on ICT, computers are being used well in other curriculum areas, though they could be more widely used for group work. The mathematics deficiencies identified are being addressed. Pupils' learning in the wider curriculum benefits from teachers taking all classes in their particular specialisms, such as music, French and ICT.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum broadly meets the needs of all pupils. The Foundation Stage curriculum is particularly strong in developing personal and social education and literacy. It provides a rich environment for development through focused play, both indoors and outdoors.

The curriculum is enhanced in all classes by the addition of French from Reception to Year 4, and its influence is apparent in the many notices around the building and the school's recent Franco-British Sports Award.

The curriculum is modified to take account of all ages and abilities so pupils progress well at their own levels in all three classes. There is good provision for developing pupils' knowledge of their own and world culture, and is starting to be extended to prepare for life in multi-cultural Britain.

Provision for personal, social and health education is good and helps pupils acquire life skills and knowledge in preparation for the next stages of education.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school takes very good care of all its pupils. It provides a secure and stimulating learning environment in which all children are encouraged to do their best. Every pupil is known well to all staff. Starting in the Foundation Stage, all children have individual profiles which are continually added to over time and then passed on to the middle school.

Academic and personal progress is meticulously tracked and intervention is made to address underachievement or to extend brighter children. Those with learning difficulties or disability are supported well and they make good progress as a result.

All adults guide pupils carefully in spiritual reflection and morality and in gaining social and community spirit.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has a good vision for the development of the school and focuses on raising standards in all areas of the school's provision. All staff are very supportive and form a close-knit team that works well to manage the two distinct year groups in each class. Teaching and learning are monitored and evaluated regularly. Teaching is consequently good throughout the school, with excellent features in Years 3 and 4.

Development planning involves the whole staff, governors, parents and pupils themselves through the school council. The school development plan forms a firm basis for improvement and is successful in achieving it. The school has moved on well since its last inspection and this track record of good improvement indicates the school's overall good capacity to improve.

Governors are experienced and knowledgeable. They are frequently in school monitoring provision, including lunch. They ensure that funds are used efficiently to finance the school's improvement and give good value for money.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Inspection judgements

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

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	2
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

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited your school last week. We enjoyed our day and particularly liked seeing the lovely displays of your work around the school.

We found your school to be one where you receive a good education. Your headteacher and other members of staff work very hard for you. We agree with you that teaching and learning are good and that it is a happy and friendly school. You do well in your lessons because teachers give you interesting things to do. We are pleased to see that you eat healthy food at break and lunchtimes.

You do well in reading and writing but your mathematics is not quite so good. This is something you can improve. The school helps you to grow up and know the difference between right and wrong. It is also helping you to learn more about the different ways of life there are in this country. We wish you well in your education at this school and in the future.