

Oakmere Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117371
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	312591
Inspection dates	17–18 June 2008
Reporting inspector	David Speakman

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	278
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Les Bullamore
Headteacher	Mrs Julie Lilly
Date of previous school inspection	26 January 2004
School address	Chace Avenue Potters Bar Hertfordshire EN6 5NP
Telephone number	01707 656963
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average sized primary school. It serves a community with broadly average social circumstances, and the proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is about average. The attainment of children starting school is below that expected nationally for their age. Most pupils come from a White British background. An average number come from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds and the traveller community is represented in the school. A small proportion is at an early stage of learning English. The number of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is broadly average but the proportion with a statement of special educational need is above. Learning difficulties and/or disabilities include moderate learning difficulties, speech and language, autism and behavioural/emotional needs. Awards achieved include the Artsmark Gold Award and Healthy Schools Status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The effectiveness of this school is satisfactory. However, under the new leadership team, there have been significant improvements in key areas, and this is now a rapidly improving school. Strengthened management procedures have improved the quality of school's self-evaluation and the school's leaders use tracking systems effectively to hold staff accountable for the progress of pupils in their classes. The quality of teaching and learning has improved because teachers and teaching assistants have had more opportunities to develop their professional skills. Governors are more involved in the school and have plans to develop further their expertise.

Although achievement over time is satisfactory, pupils' academic progress has accelerated this year and they are now making good progress. Standards remain below average at the end of Year 2, but attainment at the end of Year 6 has risen and is now broadly average overall, following a steady fall over recent years. Attainment in English and mathematics is average, but in science it is below. Pupils' personal development is good. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good.

Pupils work well together, play well together in breaks and are keen to take part in all school activities. They attend lessons with a willingness to learn and enjoy their education.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Teaching seen during the inspection ranged from satisfactory to good with outstanding features. This means however, that there is some inconsistency in the quality of teaching and learning and hence in progress as pupils move through the school. The curriculum is good and serves the needs of different groups of pupils well. The care and guidance shown for pupils is good. The school takes great care to ensure that all are fully included in all aspects of school life and all have the same opportunities to make progress.

Leadership and management are good. School leaders are spearheading a refreshed and vigorous drive to improve provision and raise standards throughout the school. The headteacher has very quickly promoted strong teamwork through which staff and governors share a determination that all pupils should achieve their best. A new senior leadership team has been set up. This small group takes on a wide range of responsibility and is busy providing other staff with the professional skills to take over some important areas. Self-evaluation is accurate and honestly identifies strengths and weaknesses. There are clear strategies for continued improvement; the leadership of the school, including governors, has plans realistically aimed at immediate and long-term development. Taking these factors into account and the recent rate of improvement, the school has good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Children make a sound start to school life in the Nursery, because staff have a good knowledge of how young children develop and learn. Progress is satisfactory overall throughout the Foundation Stage. With the support of the senior colleagues, the lead teacher is providing increasingly effective leadership. She has established a stimulating learning environment, both indoors and outside, and has strengthened planning and assessment in order to improve children's progress. As a result, the curriculum and daily planning are good. The lead teacher ensures that children experience all areas of learning, with a good balance between play-based

and more formal learning and that staff make effective use of the many resources to ensure activities are as exciting and inspiring as possible. Furthermore, recent changes to the teaching of letters and sounds are beginning to impact on standards and are providing children with a secure start to early reading and writing. The lead teacher has a clear understanding of the need to embed further the recent changes so they have a consistently good impact on children's learning and achievement over time.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is at least good in all classes to ensure consistent progress as pupils move through the school and raise standards, particularly at the end of Key Stage 1 and in science at Key Stage 2.
- Continue to develop staff leadership skills to support further distribution of key responsibilities.
- Make sure that processes that have led to recent improvement become fully embedded in practice to promote further and sustained improvement across the school, including in the Foundation Stage.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged to be satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next Section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children in the Foundation Stage make satisfactory progress in relation to their generally low starting points but, by the time of transfer into Year 1, most do not reach the nationally expected standards for their age. Pupils continue to make satisfactory progress throughout Key Stage 1, but standards have remained below average for some years. Current standards at the end of Year 2 are below average in reading but well below in writing. They have improved in mathematics, where attainment is about average. There has been a significant improvement at the end of Key Stage 2. Standards at the end of Year 6 had fallen since the previous inspection, and had been below average for some time. Over the last year, there has been a concerted and successful drive to raise standards, which are now broadly average. In the short term, these pupils have done well but good progress is not yet an established trend. Pupils who find learning more challenging, those from a Traveller background and those with English as an additional language make progress similar to other pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, with the school making a particular effort to build up pupils' self-esteem. Pupils have very good relationships with adults and each other. The school has worked hard in improving attendance so that it is now broadly average. Pupils have a good understanding of safe practices and generally apply these at school to ensure their own and others' safety. They know about the importance of healthy living and adopt increasingly healthy lifestyles. The vast majority eat healthy food at lunchtimes and participate in a wide range of physical activities in order to keep fit. Pupils make a good contribution to school life. Using the school council, pupils learn about their rights and responsibilities and influence the quality of school life. They take on responsibility in the classroom and around the school well, doing their jobs reliably. They also contribute well to

the local community, for example by participating in a range of musical events, which bring pleasure to those entertained. Pupils receive an adequate preparation for their future lives by developing sound levels of competency in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology and good social skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Recent improvement strategies are already having a positive impact on the quality of teaching and consequently the rate of learning is improving. Lesson planning is effective; skills for learning are developed progressively. However, the criteria by which pupil progress in lessons is judged often refer to what pupils have done rather than what they learnt. The good use of interactive whiteboards makes lessons interesting and teaching clear. Teachers have created an environment in which pupils are ready to learn and the pace in the best lessons now promotes effective learning. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively and so give good support to individuals and groups. Learning is less successful when adults talk for too long in lessons. This limits pupils' activity time and the pace of learning slows. Furthermore, the planning of tasks to challenge pupils of all abilities remains inconsistent across the school. The quality of marking is also variable because teachers' comments do not always give a clear indication of how pupils can improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a wide range of activities and is rightly proud of its provision for the arts, for example in the various performances in the community and the letters of commendation received. Visits and after school clubs very effectively increase the opportunities that pupils have to learn. Teachers are responsive to changing local and national guidance and therefore seek to include more creativity in the curriculum. Links between subjects are strong and add relevance to learning. Curriculum planning takes good account of the needs of different groups such as pupils with English as an additional language, pupils from Traveller communities or those who have difficulty in learning. There is a growing awareness of the needs of pupils who have special talents and teachers are starting to plan work to challenge such pupils, although this, and plans to extend the teaching of modern foreign languages are at an early stage of development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

All requirements for health and safety, child protection and safeguarding pupils are met. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the care given to their children, a view shared by pupils, who also appreciate the support that the teachers give them. Pupils feel safe and are confident that the staff will deal effectively with any incidents that occur. The school uses its links with others well to promote the well-being of all pupils, providing effective academic, social and emotional support where needed. The academic progress of pupils is monitored carefully, providing staff with detailed analysis of pupil performance and allowing support strategies to be used quickly to raise attainment. The use of targets that allow pupils to monitor their own

progress is now established. However, it is yet to have its full impact on their learning and achievement, because it is still being developed and embedded in practice.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and new senior leadership team have made rapid improvements and have led the way forward by example. Rigorous and honest analysis of performance data and in-school monitoring provide a very accurate view of the school's strengths and areas in which it needs to improve. Teachers now have to account for the progress of pupils in their classes and this has placed the focus firmly on learning and achievement. Through the 'pupil progress review meetings' held with the senior leadership team each term, they assess each individual pupil's achievement and agree the next set of challenging targets. This process has been fundamental in raising achievement this year and improving the effectiveness of teaching and learning, and it gives the school a good capacity to improve further. Governors' role and impact on school improvement is satisfactory, but is another area that is improving quickly. Governors are much more involved school life and, as a result, have a better understanding of the school's performance. They have recently completed an audit of their own performance and identified areas of governance that they need to strengthen.

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Annex A

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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
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.

Annex A

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

19 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Oakmere Primary School, Potters Bar, EN6 5NP

We enjoyed visiting you recently and would like to thank you for making us welcome. We enjoyed the opportunities we had to talk to you in lessons and at other times during the two days we spent with you. We were pleased to see that you appreciate what teachers and other adults in school are doing for you and that you enjoy being at Oakmere. You have good attitudes to school. This was clear from the good behaviour we saw in lessons and at other times. The way in which you look after each other, speak kindly about other children and contribute to life in school is good. The adults working at Oakmere Primary care for you all well. All this helps you settle in quickly and feel safe.

Although the school is still judged satisfactory, it has improved a lot over the last year. This is due to the hard work that the staff have put in, particularly those teachers with the job of leading the school. A lot of work has gone into improving classrooms and resources to help learning, and to make sure that the quality of education improves. Your progress and the standards in your work are therefore getting better. This is clear at the end of Year 6, where there is a big improvement in English and mathematics this year. Standards in science and in Key Stage 1 still need to be improved.

We have asked your teachers to make sure that teaching in all classes is at least good so you all make good progress and standards improve where they need to. We have recommended that more adults take on important responsibilities and that you all make sure that the school continues to improve at the rate it has done this last year.

You can play your part by continuing to cooperate and behave as well as you do.

We wish you all well in the future.

David Speakman

Lead inspector