

# Oaklands Junior School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	118437
<b>Local Authority</b>	Medway
<b>Inspection number</b>	312939
<b>Inspection dates</b>	7–8 November 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Janet Simms

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Junior
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	167
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Barbara Derham
<b>Headteacher</b>	Les French
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	30 June 2003
<b>School address</b>	Weedwood Road Walderslade Chatham ME5 0QS
<b>Telephone number</b>	01634 861428
<b>Fax number</b>	01634 861996

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

This is a smaller-than-average community junior school. The falling birth rate means that fewer pupils are joining the school so there are two relatively small single-year classes in all but Year 3, where there is one class. Although numbers claiming free school meals are relatively low, the proportion of families either not claiming or just above that level is exceptionally high. Very few pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds or speak languages other than English at home. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is high.

## 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 pupils are happy, developing the confidence and personal skills to succeed when they move on. From a base of low self-esteem and standards, pupils' personal and academic progress is good through the school. National tests do not always reflect this achievement because some pupils remain under-confident about working without staff support in an 'examination' context. Standards are average by Year 6 but the school recognises the need to provide for a more diverse range of learning styles and greater challenge, particularly for abler pupils, to ensure that they perform well independently. Writing, though improving, remains pupils' weakest skill. Pupils take longer than usual to learn 'how to learn', often because they lack support from home, as at the last inspection. Despite strenuous efforts by the school, many parents do not reinforce high expectations, for example, of doing homework or of regular attendance. An identified imbalance between the quality of teaching and of learning exists sometimes because learning is too passive and pupils too inactive. This decreases by Years 5 and 6, when most pupils have developed the maturity to learn more effectively.

Pupils respond enthusiastically to the school's strong culture of praise, encouragement and celebration of success. They acquire a keen sense of pride in being valued as part of 'Team Oaklands'. Teaching is good and despite the time it takes to become good learners, most older pupils have the capacity to become more active partners in pushing themselves forward towards their learning targets. A good curriculum, which increasingly integrates subjects well so that pupils understand the links between them, engages their interest, providing life experiences not otherwise accessible. Good pastoral care and support are central to school thinking and planning, making pupils feel safe and cared for in school. Sometimes, school is a haven for those at risk elsewhere. Academic guidance via marking is satisfactory, successfully motivating pupils, but does not always provide specific advice about how pupils can make 'next-steps' improvements, or insist on consistently good handwriting and presentation.

Good leadership and management have maintained morale and achievement since the last inspection, with strong, effective teamwork underpinning all the school's work. After a highly positive last report, leaving no key issues for improvement, the school has successfully set its own agenda, which accurately identifies weaker areas. Staff have sustained determined efforts to improve these, often despite significant frustrations and slow responses. Targets set are challenging and an in-depth review of the reasons why these were not achieved in 2007 has led to swift changes in provision. The team's refreshingly open, honest approach to advice and critique has prevented complacency, demonstrating good capacity to improve further.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards, especially in writing and in the presentation of work in Years 3 and 4.
- Provide more practical, active opportunities to stimulate learning in more lessons.
- Use more informative assessment to involve, in particular, older, abler pupils in understanding their own learning so that they can achieve their full potential independently.
- Reinforce endeavours to involve more parents and carers in actively supporting their children's learning.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Good liaison with the on-site feeder school leads to a helpful understanding of pupils' complex personal and social backgrounds and below-average standards on entry. Pupils achieve well in developing their confidence and ability to learn during their first two years in school, though standards remain below average. Academic learning and achievement accelerate significantly in Years 5 and 6, and overall progress through the school is good. Staff do a very effective job in keeping personal and academic achievement moving forward in tandem, often despite setbacks in pupils' personal circumstances. Year 6 are on track to achieve broadly average standards, but writing remains the weakest skill across the school.

Accurately based tracking of pupils' academic performance shows that some achieve consistently higher levels in classwork than they attain in national tests. This was particularly so in 2007, when higher-attaining pupils did not perform well enough in writing, and girls did less well in mathematics; pupils maintained their good achievement in science. Some pupils' 'real' levels were therefore higher than test results, causing great concern to the school and initiating an intensive review of provision. Pupils' reliance on staff encouragement and support to achieve well lies at the heart of such under-performance. The school now recognises a need to develop greater independence, particularly amongst higher-attaining pupils, so that they properly reflect their abilities in tests. Some are disadvantaged by a lack of parental support, which shows little understanding of the need to support homework, to have pupils in school regularly, in bed early and well fed before tests and so on, all of which impacts adversely on achievement and performance. Lower-attaining pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do well, often because they have a higher level of well-focused staff support.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils' personal development and welfare, including their understanding of social, moral, spiritual and cultural matters, are good. Pupils come to enjoy learning more and more as they move through the school. Immaturity on entry is slowly eroded, with pupils gradually acquiring confidence and higher aspirations for their lives. They become proud of themselves, valuing all the rewards and praise they receive, wanting to succeed and contribute to school successes. By Years 5 and 6, pupils have improved the presentation of their work and try purposefully to achieve their targets, most doing so in classwork. Behaviour is good in classes and elsewhere. A few parents express concerns about bullying, but pupils say this is rare and is dealt with effectively; none was seen on inspection. Indeed, relationships are harmonious because adults consistently reinforce high moral and behavioural expectations.

Pupils are enthused by visits, swimming and the Spanish lessons they have started, and are keen to tell visitors all about them. Those with responsibilities such as 'ambassadors' take their roles seriously, taking pride in helping the school. Pupils understand how to stay fit and healthy, but not all lunchboxes provide as healthy an option as school meals. Attendance remains stubbornly below average, despite strenuous endeavours to improve it, because parents continue to take holidays in school time. Pupils contribute actively to their school community and more widely, developing good skills such as teamwork which provide a strong foundation for future learning and work, supported by sound basic skills.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. All is satisfactory, with some outstanding lessons inspiring pupils through a range of exciting learning experiences absent elsewhere in their lives. Learning is best where 'real/hands-on' activity enables pupils to understand learning objectives in the context of real life. This type of reinforcement created good learning in English, with sand, shells, buckets and so on stimulating pupils' imaginations and evoking memories of a sunny day at the beach, and in mathematics, using tactile three-dimensional space and shape equipment. Pupils learn much less well from lengthy spells of listening, with too few opportunities for focused talking to others or doing anything active.

The school's evaluations are accurate, identifying key areas for development, which relate mainly to learning. A determined drive amongst staff to improve standards is informed by accurate assessment and generates suitable targets for most pupils. Provision to challenge higher attainers, particularly the gifted and talented, is at an early stage of development, though. These pupils do not yet develop the degree of independence they need to perform at their best in all situations. Adults' high levels of care for pupils are extremely helpful in motivating them through encouraging marking, but this does not always give guidance about improvement. Able pupils in particular lack advice about how they can become more responsible for identifying for themselves what they could do next.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 2

A good curriculum provides a broad range of classroom and other activities which extend pupils' limited life experiences. Recent integration of subjects, particularly of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum, is making links clearer in pupils' minds and creating better understanding. The recent focus on writing and mathematics, building on successes in reading and consistently strong science, has improved achievement. Pupils are on track to achieve better in English this year; while writing still needs development, issues in mathematics are resolved. Recent improvement in ICT resources is starting to raise achievement, but many pupils lack computers at home to reinforce learning. ICT clubs have just started, ensuring more equal access to equipment. Teachers use electronic whiteboards well to stimulate learning, but pupils are not involved sufficiently actively in using these. Sports, especially swimming and dance, provide good opportunities for exercise and enjoyment.

### Care, guidance and support

#### Grade: 2

The school gives high levels of care and support, which results in good personal development. Given the circumstances of the school, the evident high awareness of child protection issues is essential. Procedures are robust and pupils feel safe in school, which is a haven of security for some vulnerable pupils. The school uses partner agencies such as attendance authorities effectively, though not always successfully, because of parental resistance. Behaviour support is a fundamental pillar of the school, with rewards and sanctions leading effectively to an orderly, friendly school environment. Targets are beginning to provide proper guidance for

pupils' learning, with most older ones knowing their 'levels'. Some good practice exists in written marking to guide pupils about next steps, but this is by no means consistent across the school.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The headteacher's strong leadership and management have maintained the many strengths reported at the last inspection through an effective team spirit. Community circumstances present an increasingly complex, challenging background against which to maintain the quality of provision. While the expectations of education move on, those of many in the community have not kept pace and the school strives constantly to raise the aspirations of parents. Challenging, realistic targets are sometimes missed because the school has to reconcile tensions between its own high expectations and less strong home support. Self-evaluation is thoughtful and reflective, accurately identifying the same issues as inspection findings. The school openly welcomes critique from advisors such as the new school improvement partner, taking decisions about implementation of ideas, which are firmly rooted in consideration of pupils' best enjoyment, achievement, safety and welfare. Governors provide proper support for staff and are actively involved in school life. Middle managers are accountable for subjects and aspects of the school, sharing ideas effectively to promote improvement. English and science leaders, for example, have worked together to make learning more active in English, like that in science.

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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?	2
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?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3
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 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?	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

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	2
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

4 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Oaklands Junior School, Chatham, ME5 0QS

Thank you so much for welcoming us into your school on 7 and 8 November. We had a very interesting time there and I am writing to tell you what we found out.

Your school is a place where you feel happy and safe and it provides you with a good quality of education. Teaching is good and all the adults know you well, taking good care to protect and encourage you. Although many of you lack confidence and are a bit shy when you come to the school, you soon learn to be proud of yourselves and welcome the rewards you get for doing better and better work as you get older. By the time you are in Years 5 and 6, your academic progress speeds up because you have become better learners.

We were pleased to see your good behaviour, the ways you encourage other children and value each other as 'Team Oaklands'. Even though some of your parents told us about some bullying, we talked to you about this and you think it's not a problem and if it is, it's dealt with quickly. We feel sure you will keep it like this. We enjoyed hearing your feelings of enjoyment about swimming, your new Spanish classes and the visits you make. We feel the school is good at providing you with lots of opportunities like these that you wouldn't get otherwise.

To make things even better, we have asked the school to keep on improving your writing and to make sure you take more care in presenting your work neatly, right from Year 3. We've also asked them to give you more 'active' bits in lessons because you learn better like that. We think that in the upper years, more of you could do better if you understood more clearly what to do next to improve your work, so we've asked staff to mark work to give you ideas about this. Some of you could even start to think for yourselves how you could set your next targets, and teachers will be very pleased if you do. It would be good if you could get your parents involved in this too.

Thank you again for your welcome. We hope you enjoy the rest of this term.

With best wishes

Janet Simms Lead inspector



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