

Oakfield School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123866
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	314746
Inspection dates	25–26 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Nick Green HMI

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	684
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sarah Hynds
Headteacher	Peter Hill
Date of previous school inspection	6 December 2004
School address	Oakfield Road Frome BA11 4JF
Telephone number	01373 462539
Fax number	01373 453370

Age group	9-13
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is larger than the average Middle school in size. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The prosperity of the area served by the school is varied, though a large minority of pupils come from an area of significant economic and social deprivation. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is just above the national average, though the percentage with a formal statement of special educational needs is well below. Pupils' attainment on entry is broadly average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Oakfield is a satisfactory and improving school. Standards are broadly average by the end of Years 6 and 8. In relation to pupils' starting points when they enter the school, their progress and achievement are satisfactory. However, while the most able pupils do well, too few of the other pupils who are capable of doing so achieve the higher grades in national tests and examinations. Standards are not yet consistently high enough in English, mathematics and science. This is because teaching and learning, whilst improving, have yet to achieve a consistently good standard across the school. The effective headteacher and senior leadership team have maintained the school's performance at a satisfactory level for several years. Since the last inspection, they have taken suitable steps to promote improvement; pupils' personal development and well-being and the curriculum are now better than at that time. The school is now poised to make further improvement. Staff and pupils have been set clear direction and expectations that are focused firmly on better teaching and learning, and raising achievement and standards. The school monitors teaching and pupils' progress well and has clearly identified the key areas for development. Improvements in pupils' personal development, in the curriculum, in standards in English and lower ability boys' achievements and the success in increasing attendance show that the school has the necessary capacity for further improvement. However, not all middle managers are monitoring and improving their subjects with suitable rigour, and self-evaluation is not used diagnostically enough to identify the most effective action needed to improve pupils' performance. The great majority of parents are supportive of the school and feel they are consulted; a minority are concerned about pupils' behaviour and say that the school does not seek their views or those of their children. However, inspectors judge that behaviour is good in lessons and around the school and that the school does take account of parents' and pupils' views. As one parent wrote to inspectors, 'Any concerns we have raised have been effectively and sensitively dealt with.' Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. They enjoy school, as shown by their good attendance; they adopt healthy lifestyles and are willing to take on responsibilities. Pupils also develop secure competence in workplace and enterprise skills. The school provides a good level of care, guidance and support for all pupils, particularly the most vulnerable and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Suitable arrangements are in place for safeguarding pupils. The school works effectively in partnership with outside agencies and local schools to promote pupils' well-being.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, and often good in Years 5 and 6. Teachers make clear to pupils what they are to learn and use their subject expertise well in their planning and teaching. Information and communication technology (ICT) and teaching assistants are used effectively to support teaching and learning. However, teachers' expectations are not always high enough and pupils are not always challenged sufficiently, particularly to improve their writing. Pupils are aware of their academic targets. However, the frequency and quality of marking is not consistently good across the school. As a result, some pupils do not always know what they have to do to improve their work. The school's curriculum meets pupils' needs and capabilities well. Extra-curricular activities enrich students' learning and make a good contribution to their enjoyment, to their personal development and to their achievement. Parents' satisfaction with the school is reflected in the words of one parent whose son at first had worries about transferring to a bigger school: 'He is now very happy to go to school and has made good progress throughout the year both personally and academically.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' achievement and standards, particularly those of middle and lower ability pupils, in English, mathematics and science.
- Ensure teaching is challenging for all pupils and that expectations of the standards they are capable of attaining are high enough, particularly in writing.
- Ensure that the frequency and quality of the marking of pupils' work is consistently good so all pupils know what they need to do to improve.
- Use self-evaluation more diagnostically to inform improvement planning and make sure that all middle managers monitor provision in their subjects rigorously.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged 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

The standards attained by pupils at the end of Year 6 in 2007 were broadly average. None was significantly below average. Improvements were made in mathematics and in English from 2006 when pupils' standards were below average in English. The latest assessments by the school show pupils' current standards in Year 6 are similar to last year and the improvements in English have been maintained. This was reflected in lessons seen during the inspection, which also indicated that pupils' progress in many subjects is improving. In relation to pupils' attainment on entry to the school, their progress and achievement are satisfactory by the end of Year 6. The most able pupils make good progress and no groups of pupils underperform. Lower ability boys' achievement was significantly lower than other groups in 2007; however, this has improved this year because of the increased support provided for them. The school recognises that literacy, particularly writing, is an area for improvement and has introduced suitable strategies to do this. It also knows that further work is necessary to ensure that more pupils reach the higher levels in English, mathematics and science.

Standards in Year 8 have been broadly average for the last two years. Pupils maintain this level of attainment by the end of Year 9 in the upper school to which they transfer. In respect to pupils' starting points when they enter Oakfield School, they progress satisfactorily and their achievement is satisfactory by the time they leave.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils of all ages enjoy their education and exhibit the personal skills and attributes of confident and considerate young people. This is demonstrated by their good behaviour, positive relationships with staff, enthusiasm and good attitudes in lessons, and high participation rates in extra-curricular activities. They appreciate and respond positively to the school's rewards system and wear their merit badges with pride. Playground 'buddies' support younger children well. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, as shown by the warm relationships between pupils, and their sensitive understanding of other cultures. Pupils and parents speak positively about the school as a safe place to be. They are confident that the rare instances of bullying are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Pupils are aware of the need to eat well and stay healthy; a great many participate in sport and exercise.

Pupils make the most of the many opportunities open to them to contribute to the school and wider community, particularly through performing arts events, fund raising for charities, education/business ventures and sports activities. They are keen to take responsibility, for example, by older pupils helping younger pupils with their reading and raising issues about their learning through the curriculum council. However, opportunities for developing leadership skills are underdeveloped.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is improving but has not yet become consistently good enough to raise pupils' performance beyond a satisfactory level. It is stronger in Years 5 and 6 than in Years 7 and 8. Teachers communicate learning objectives to pupils effectively so that they know what they should achieve. They increasingly plan their lessons so that pupils interact with each other, conduct their own research and then present their findings to each other, which pupils find an interesting way to learn. As one parent wrote, 'Learning styles are engaging and lessons seem to be taught in a variety of ways.' Teachers have a good knowledge of their subjects and are confident in asking open-ended questions which get pupils to think for themselves. Classrooms are managed well and pupils listen attentively and work amicably with each other. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively to support pupils and help lessons run smoothly. Interactive whiteboards are used to good effect to motivate pupils. However, the level of expectations and challenge for pupils is uneven, and faster workers say that they often finish early and have to ask for extra work.

Pupils are increasingly involved in the assessment of their own work, for example through using 'marking ladders' in English, where they can apply criteria to evaluate what they have written. However, the frequency and quality of marking is variable. The best regularly reviews pupils' work, correcting carefully and providing suggestions for improvement. However, some marking is infrequent, superficial and too tolerant of unsatisfactory work habits, including poor presentation.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is planned well to build on learning in the first schools and to complement the learning opportunities in the upper school to which pupils subsequently go. It meets the needs and interests of all pupils, as well as national requirements. Provision for literacy and numeracy is satisfactory. Opportunities in ICT, modern foreign languages and the performing arts are good; all pupils study French and drama in Years 5 and 6 and they take a second modern language in Year 8. Physical education is also a strength and pupils respond enthusiastically to the varied sporting activities on offer, including an introduction to golf in Year 8. The most able pupils are catered for very well, as one parent wrote 'my child has benefited from the gifted and talented programme and leads a full and busy school life'. The school evaluates its curriculum regularly and well-considered improvements are to be introduced from September 2008.

A broad range of extra-curricular activities ensures that pupils can develop a range of sporting, artistic, performing and cultural skills. These are highly valued by students and taken up by a significant number. The school is rightly proud of the quality of its drama and music productions.

A range of visits and community and business enterprise events enrich the curriculum and contribute much to pupils' personal development. Cooking and gardening clubs help to develop their knowledge about healthy eating. Year 8 pupils particularly enjoy their three-day residential visit to an outdoor activity centre which offers them challenge and opportunities to develop self-confidence and team-working skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Staff show high levels of care and concern for all pupils and each is valued and respected. All legal requirements for the safeguarding of pupils are in place. The school is committed to equality and demonstrates this in its practices. Racist incidents are rare and firmly tackled when they occur. Recent measures to improve attendance have been effective and have raised it to above the national average. The needs of all groups of pupils are provided for and the number of pupils excluded from school has declined. Pupils have a good understanding of the targets they are working towards in their learning. However, they sometimes do not know what they need to do to improve due to the variations in the quality of marking. Transition from first schools and to the upper school is well managed. Pupils are well informed about future career options. Pupils with additional needs or learning difficulties and/or disabilities are identified early and suitably supported, for example, pupils struggling with reading and writing have responded well to additional help. In respect to the value of this on her son's progress, one parent wrote, 'The special needs/learning support team have made a big difference.' The school works well with other agencies to ensure that pupils get any extra assistance they need.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and senior leadership team provide clear strategic vision and direction for the school. Together, they are gradually overcoming the school's barriers to raising performance. A common sense of purpose is being created among all staff, which underpins a determination to improve. The impact of this is already evident in the good curriculum, care, guidance and support. It is starting to strengthen teaching, and is also helping to improve pupils' achievement and standards. However, the school recognises that further work is needed.

Middle managers are committed and their effectiveness is growing. However, there are variations in the quality of their self-evaluation, in their monitoring of the quality of provision in their subjects and in the extent to which they share good practice and challenge weaknesses. The leadership and management skills of middle managers are being developed through additional training and guidance from senior leaders. Effective procedures are used to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning, and the school is starting to use challenging targets to raise standards. Self-evaluation procedures result in an accurate identification of the school's strengths and areas for development. However, self-evaluation is not yet used sufficiently diagnostically to inform improvement planning so that the precise action needed is identified.

Despite many members of the governing body being relatively new, they fulfil their responsibilities effectively. They are well informed about the school's performance. As a result, they have a good awareness of the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. They support the school well and provide a good level of challenge.

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.

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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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	2
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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
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	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

30 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Oakfield School, Frome, BA11 4JF

Thank you for the help you provided to the inspection team when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting members of year groups and we learned a great deal from our discussions with you in lessons and around the school. Your school provides a satisfactory education and it is improving.

Standards are broadly average in Years 6 and 8. In relation to your attainment when you enter the school, your progress and achievement are satisfactory. We were pleased to see that results in English improved last year and that this has been maintained. Boys who find learning difficult have also improved their standards this year. However, there is scope for all of you to achieve higher grades, and standards are not yet consistently good enough in English, mathematics and science. Teaching is satisfactory and often good in Years 5 and 6. Teachers plan lessons well, have good subject knowledge and use ICT and teaching assistants effectively to support your learning. However, you are not all encouraged to work as hard as you could and your work is not marked consistently well.

You clearly enjoy school and your attendance is good. You behave very well, have positive relationships with staff, and show enthusiasm and good attitudes in lessons. It was pleasing to see so many of you taking part in extra-curricular activities and we saw your pride in your roles as representatives on the school and curriculum council and as 'buddies' to other students. The quality of the care, guidance and support you receive from staff is good. You are made aware of your targets but sometimes you do not know what to do to improve due to the variations in the quality of marking. The curriculum is good as it meets your needs and interests well.

The clear direction and effective leadership and management of the headteacher and senior teachers are helping the school improve. To assist this, we have asked the school to raise achievement and standards, particularly in English, mathematics and science. We have asked that teaching is made more consistently good by setting you high expectations and challenging all of you to do your best, particularly in written work. We have asked that all teachers mark and assess your work frequently and thoroughly. We are asking some heads of subjects to improve their practice. You can also help by striving to do your very best in national tests. Best wishes with your studies.

Nick Green Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex B

30 June 2008

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Best wishes with your studies.

Nick Green
Her Majesty's Inspector