

The Orchards Community Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125866
Local Authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	315334
Inspection dates	20–21 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Kevin Hodge

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

Type of school	Middle deemed primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	8–12
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	587
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Phillip Papps
Headteacher	Paul Jones
Date of previous school inspection	4 October 2004
School address	Nelson Road Worthing BN12 6EN
Telephone number	01903 520202
Fax number	01903 526133

Age group	8-12
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This school is bigger than average. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is greater than found in many schools and includes 13 pupils attending a special unit for pupils with learning difficulties sited within the school. Those pupils in the unit join classes in the main school for some lessons and also receive specialist support in the unit itself. A very small number of pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds.

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. It has succeeded in improving pupils' level of academic skills since the last inspection to complement those they gain in arts and sports. The sense of community is very strong and pupils are proud to be part of 'our great school'.

Pupils' achievements are good given their starting points, which are below average. They get off to a smooth start in Year 4 because their preliminary visits to the school help dispel any worries. The school has focused closely on raising standards, so that by Year 6 they are broadly average. When pupils leave in Year 7, they continue to reach those levels expected. However, their ability to handle and record mathematical data is a relatively weak area and this slows their progress in mathematics. Progress in English and science is good although, in keeping with mathematics, it is sometimes patchy as the quality of teaching varies between classes. Lots of work to improve pupils' writing, particularly for boys, has succeeded. Science is now a more practical subject than it was, and the school is focussing on making investigative work even more exciting. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, particularly those who attend the school-based centre, achieve well as they are supported effectively. Pupils' achievements in art, music and physical education are particularly good as the school provides an exciting range of activities and specialist teaching in these subjects. Pupils who are from minority ethnic groups achieve similarly to their classmates.

The senior leaders' commitment to the care of each member of the school community results in good relationships between staff, pupils and parents. The pupils' good personal development ensures the vast majority behave well and politely to each other and take their responsibilities seriously, for example in the way 'playground buddies' and 'junior governors' help the school run smoothly. Nearly all parents praise the school's success, and only a very small minority feel that some pupils' behaviour could be better. One comment, 'this is an amazing school!' reflected the views of many parents. Pupils are keen to do well and show good attitudes to learning. Good procedures for pupils' care, guidance and support are effective. Pupils are enthusiastic about school and have a good awareness of how to keep healthy, aided by high levels of physical activity promoted in lessons and at playtimes.

Teaching is typically good, although stronger in some classes than others. Classrooms are generally lively and stimulating places in which teachers make learning enjoyable. Pupils respond with good attitudes to learning. However, in some activities, teachers' explanations are overly long and sometimes lack the spark to stimulate pupils' interest. These relative weaknesses reduce the time for independent work or pupils' eagerness to contribute to class discussions. The curriculum is well balanced. While basic skills are a priority, there are good opportunities for enrichment in other subjects such as art, information and communication technology (ICT), music, sport and a modern foreign language in Year 7. These opportunities develop their cultural experience well, but pupils' multicultural awareness is not as strongly developed. An excellent range of after school clubs helps enrich pupils' class experiences significantly.

Underpinning the success of the school is the good leadership and management of senior leaders and governors. They provide enthusiastic and clear direction to the work of the school, particularly in promoting a wide range of experiences for pupils. The commitment to sharing leadership roles has ensured that most staff contribute to school improvement. Given what has already been achieved, the school's capacity to improve further is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Give pupils more opportunities to analyse, use and record information to enhance their skills and achievement in mathematical work.
- Ensure that all teaching provides exciting activities that encourage pupils to work independently and motivate them fully to learn.
- Help raise pupils' awareness and understanding of the range of cultures and beliefs represented in this country and beyond.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well. They reach broadly the expected levels by the time they leave. The school has steadily improved its results in Year 6 since the last inspection, but it is taking more time to improve some aspects of pupils' mathematical skills. Although pupils are confident and accurate in their calculation work, this success is not yet reflected in their ability to handle or analyse sets of statistical information. Pupils' writing ability has improved, particularly for boys. The more able pupils often write to a very high standard. Pupils' current science work indicates they have good scientific knowledge, and their investigative abilities have improved since the last inspection. The school's checks on pupils' performance indicate that progress is improving, despite some variations between classes. This information indicates that pupils are on track to meet their challenging targets again this year. Those pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities keep pace with classmates. Those who attend the special unit achieve particularly well owing to specialist help and close monitoring of their progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The pupils have good social skills and a well-developed moral understanding. These qualities make a positive contribution to the school and the local community. Pupils' strong personal development is also aided by taking part enthusiastically in the school's rich range of sport, music and art activities. These opportunities also help widen their cultural understanding, but their multicultural understanding is not as well developed. Pupils' positive attitudes help them learn in lessons, but in some activities their ability to work independently is hampered, as not all teaching fosters this aspect to their learning. Many pupils enjoy looking after classmates at playtime, being part of the junior governors and by being school prefects. As a result, their behaviour in the school is good and their attendance has improved so that the majority of pupils now enjoy attending. Pupils move around the school safely and know that there are particular safety requirements in certain lessons, such as design and technology and sports activities. The provision for sport and pupils' social, emotional and health education guides pupils into adopting good levels of physical exercise and healthy lifestyles. Their good levels of social awareness, ability to work together, underpinned by their improving achievement in basic skills, help prepare them well for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Close teamwork between teachers, helpers and pupils, combined with some good specialist teaching, are key features of the typically good teaching in the school. Teachers make good use of new technology to make lessons interesting. Their planning for different ability groups and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities help pupils achieve well. Specialist teaching in physical education and the performing arts help pupils learn at a good rate and is particularly good at developing their creative and sporting talents. However, this good teaching is not yet a feature in all lessons across the school. In some activities, too much 'teacher talk' limits pupils' thinking and ideas. As a result, pupils lose interest, and opportunities for pupils to work independently are too few. The quality of marking is generally good and most gives pupils a good balance between praise and guidance about how to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad, balanced and relevant. It is based closely on pupils' learning needs, and there are many activities to extend and promote their sporting and artistic talents. These strengths are key to pupils' all-round development. Some recent reviews of science, design and technology and ICT have identified further areas for improvement, which the school is already working on. The specialist provision for pupils with severe learning difficulties is very good, because activities are well planned and the pupils benefit from well-resourced, specialist accommodation. In the main school, the grouping of pupils by ability 'sets' in English and mathematics is enabling work to be finely tuned to pupils' needs. Special events such as 'Forces Friday' help spark pupils' scientific ideas. Mathematical work is generally well planned, but the school recognises that pupils' understanding of how to handle and interpret data is an area in need of further development. Pupils really enjoy literacy and creative writing, art, drama and physical education, with the school football team's appearance in the Wembley Schools' final being a highlight. Although pupils' cultural understanding is well provided for, this is not matched by their multicultural education, which is not yet covered in enough detail. An excellent range of after school clubs enrich pupils' class based activities, adding much to their personal development, lifestyles and interests.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The good care and support provided for pupils mean they enjoy school, feel safe and are keen to learn. Pupils know this makes a difference; as one pupil said, 'my friends in other schools are jealous when I tell them all the things we can do at Orchard'. Regular meetings held with parents, teachers and children help to discuss progress and identify areas of success and those to work on further. Some classes have developed this approach better than others, as it is not yet applied consistently across the school. The pupils who attend the special unit receive high levels of care and attention, which enables them to achieve particularly well because they receive high levels of individual support and guidance. Regular checks on all pupils' progress help identify changes to teaching groups or spot those needing further help. Year 7 pupils are adequately primed for their move to high school and the transition arrangement for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. The school has relevant and effective

safeguarding procedures in place and acts quickly when difficulties are noted. Nevertheless, some specific concerns expressed about behaviour by a few pupils are not always recorded systematically, so that any particular trends in unwanted behaviour can be spotted quickly.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The senior leaders have successfully raised academic performance since the last inspection to complement pupils' existing good achievement in ICT, the arts and sport. All but a very small minority of parents recognise the school's successes. As one said, 'A fantastic school and I'm proud to send my child there.' The school recognises that some aspects of teaching and subjects can improve further. School leaders have an accurate view of the school's effectiveness, gained through careful monitoring. Accountability for the school's development is a shared endeavour across management at all levels, although the leadership of subjects is still in need of further refinement so that it can play a full part in pinpointing what will improve pupils' learning best. Governors are 'high profile' and well informed. They attend a wide range of events and support the senior staff well. Their routines to check on the school's work are established at a number of levels, including attendance at staff meetings and with regular discussion with senior leaders. This enables governors to keep a good eye on the school's progress.

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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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ 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	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.

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	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

22 May 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Orchards Middle School, Worthing, BN12 6EN

Thank you for making us feel welcome at your school when we visited it recently. Yours is a good school, which is trying to be even better. It has some really good things about it too. I hope that your football team and supporters had a fantastic day at Wembley!

Here are some of the things we found out

- You make good progress in your work and most of you reach the expected levels, although your mathematical work is not as good as it could be.
- All the staff make sure that you feel safe; you said you like the way teachers deal with those who don't behave well.
- Teachers plan some activities well, but could give you more chance to discuss work in some lessons and let you work on your own more.
- Those of you who are junior governors or playground buddies enjoy your responsibilities and like helping the school to get better.
- You know about keeping fit, active and eating sensibly – your activity week in Year 6 looked really fun and we wished we could have had a try, especially the Frisbee throwing!
- You behave well at playtimes and around the school.
- The staff and governors make sure that the school runs smoothly.
- The staff help run a fantastic range of clubs that many of you attend; if there is not enough space for you to join, it will be worth the wait until you can.

We have asked the school to do three things

- Help you to use and sort out different types of mathematical information and then record it clearly.
- Cut down on the amount of explanations you have in lessons so that you have more time to work more on your own and contribute more to class discussions.
- Help you learn more about the way of life of children and adults who come from different backgrounds or who have different beliefs to your own.

You can help too by continuing to be well behaved and in giving the school more good ideas about improving further.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Hodge Lead inspector