

Oakfield Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133322
Local Authority	Halton
Inspection number	316080
Inspection dates	10–11 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Kevin Johnson

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	264
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Eric Burke
Headteacher	Mr Ian Moss
Date of previous school inspection	23 June 2003
School address	Edinburgh Road Widnes Cheshire WA8 8BQ
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average school serving a suburban area of Widnes. Most pupils are White British and none speaks English as an additional language. The number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is more than double the national average. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also very high when compared to most schools. There are two designated units for pupils who have moderate learning difficulties in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. These draw in pupils from other schools. The school has recently been through an unsettled period during which recruitment of staff, including senior leaders, has been difficult. As a result the school was placed, by the local authority, on the list of schools facing challenging circumstances. The school has recently achieved the highest level of the national Healthy Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a school which has recently improved in many aspects of its performance and currently provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. Their personal development is good. Parents' comments confirm that behaviour has improved tremendously and is now seen to be good. This is a view shared by pupils themselves, who are invariably well behaved and hard-working in lessons and show politeness and good manners around the school. Pupils say that there is no bullying and that playtimes are safe and friendly. Attendance is satisfactory. Although it has not reached the national average, it has improved well over the past year because of the effort put in by the school to teach pupils how important their attendance is.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils learn about other cultural faiths and festivals and are involved in a project to support schools in Kenya. They are mindful of others in school and treat one another respectfully. Pupils enjoy school because they find lessons fun, particularly when practical work tests their skills and creativity. In a science lesson about friction, for example, pupils excitedly tried to pick up pieces of jelly using pencils as makeshift chopsticks. Healthy lifestyles feature strongly in pupils' daily routines. They enjoy choosing from the many healthy options on the lunchtime menu. After-school sports clubs are well attended. Members of the gardening club grow, harvest and enjoy eating their own vegetables. This, among other things, justifies their proud achievement of the Healthy Schools Award. When given the opportunity to contribute to school life by serving on the school council or acting as playground mentors they take their duties very seriously. Pupils are well cared for and supported, especially the most vulnerable and those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Teachers and support assistants have built up trusting relationships with pupils and are on hand to deal sensitively with any situations which arise.

Children's abilities, when they start in the Nursery, are well below the levels expected for their age in all areas of learning. Nevertheless, pupils make satisfactory progress and achieve satisfactorily by the time they leave the school. Although standards at the end of Year 6 are below average, there have been improvements in English and science because better use of assessment has made teaching more effective. As a result, progress in those subjects is gathering pace. The school recognises the need to restore standards in mathematics after they declined in the 2007 national tests. Standards at the end of Year 2 have been below average for the past four years. Pupils in Key Stage 1 have not made the progress they should because what has been expected of them when they enter Year 1 has not followed on directly from where they were at the end of Reception. This has left gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and experiences and slowed their progress, so they have not achieved as well as they could. However, the school is working hard to change this. A new Foundation Stage leader has been appointed and, though it is too soon to see any impact on progress and standards, there are promising signs of improvement.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory and accounts for pupils' satisfactory progress. There has been some improvement in teaching quality, but this is relatively recent and has not yet driven up standards to the expected levels. Some lessons are good and occasionally outstanding, but there are still inconsistencies in the pace and challenge of lessons which result in satisfactory rather than good learning. The curriculum for most pupils is satisfactory. There is good provision for pupils in the designated special units. Some aspects of provision in the Foundation Stage are weak. A strength of curriculum provision is the range of clubs and activities to enrich pupils' learning and broaden their horizons.

Although the leadership and management of the school are satisfactory overall, the headteacher's strong leadership accounts for the many recent improvements. He has brought about a cultural change in the school by securing the well-being of staff and pupils to create a safe and positive climate for learning. Teachers' expectations have been raised. The resulting planning and use of assessment is beginning to push up standards and achievement. Parents are supportive and acknowledge improvements in behaviour and the sharing of information. Monitoring and self-evaluation of the school's performance are both rigorous and accurate and have clearly set the right direction. With support from the local authority, a decisive improvement plan has been drawn up which enables governors to check progress in all aspects of the school systematically. Previous difficulties with regard to recruitment of staff have been resolved. Two assistant headteachers, appointed at the beginning of the school year, fully share the long term vision for the school and are increasingly sharing leadership and management responsibilities. Though both of their roles are clear and are already influencing work in the school, their full impact on achievement and standards has yet to be determined. There is a satisfactory capacity, at this stage, for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

The quality of provision for children in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory. Children make satisfactory progress. By the end of Reception year they are working steadily towards many of their expected targets, but speaking, reading and writing skills, and mathematical development are still well below average. Aspects of personal, social and emotional skills develop satisfactorily. For example, children work contentedly alongside others and generally behave well, but they do not show the levels of independence normally expected. Teaching is satisfactory. Recent improvements have brought about planning which is linked more closely to children's individual needs. There is an increasing focus on early skills such as counting and learning letter sounds, and teachers use every opportunity to encourage children's speaking skills. The curriculum is satisfactory. It is undergoing rigorous review under the scrutiny of the new assistant headteacher in order to strengthen such areas as the quality of the learning environment. This particularly applies to displays and activities to stimulate children's curiosity and independent learning. Also, the outside area is not used as well as it could be to enrich children's learning. When children move into Year 1 from Reception, work is often too difficult for them because they have not reached all of their Foundation Stage targets. Leadership and management of the Foundation Stage are satisfactory. The new assistant headteacher with responsibility for the area has identified clearly where developments are needed and has made a good start in overseeing improved planning and teaching.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English, mathematics and science throughout the school.
- Improve the effectiveness of the Foundation Stage, including the way in which it links with provision in Year 1.
- Increase the proportion of good teaching.

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 the next Section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils are achieving satisfactorily by the end of Year 6, which represents a marked improvement on recent years. Standards in English and science are below average, but unconfirmed results in 2007 show that attainment is closer to the national expectation. Standards in mathematics, in 2007, dipped after a steady performance in the two previous years. The school has investigated this and put in place measures to improve progress in mathematics, but it is too soon to see the impact of these initiatives. A similar situation exists in Key Stage 1. Achievement is sound, but standards do not yet reflect the kind of progress being made in some lessons. Pupils in mainstream classes who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities make steady progress and achieve as well as others. Individual learning plans address their needs well and pupils benefit from the additional adult support they receive. Those in the designated special units make good progress owing to the calm and purposeful learning they experience and the skilful intervention of teachers and teaching assistants. This prepares them well for the integrated sessions they have when they work alongside others in mainstream classes.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy coming to school because, they say, 'Teachers are nice and they make lessons interesting.' They have positive relationships with one another and are adamant that bullying is not an issue in the school. Pupils know how to stay safe and keep themselves healthy. They enjoy the range of physical activities on offer and understand the importance of a sensible diet. Good behaviour and manners are the accepted code of conduct and are not far short of outstanding. When differences do occur, pupils respond well to peer mentors who are there to help negotiate settlements. Attendance is improving. Although it is still below average, pupils strive to make their class the best for weekly attendance. Pupils develop important life skills; for example, by putting forward ideas as school council members, charity fundraising and by representing the school in sports and other community events. During residential visits, as well as in lessons, pupils develop good teamwork skills and take some responsibility for their own learning. Pupils still have some ground to make up in literacy and numeracy for their future economic well-being to be assured.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Recent evaluations of teaching have brought about improvements which are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' progress. For example, teachers increasingly involve pupils in assessing their own work, using success criteria to measure their progress. This motivates pupils to work harder in order to reach their next target. Teachers' expectations of pupils are higher than they were previously, as evidenced by the headteacher's monitoring, and planning takes account of pupils' varying abilities. Resources to help pupils learn are used effectively to make lessons more interesting. Good use is usually made of interactive whiteboards to display information and keep pupils' attention. Teaching assistants form a valuable part of the teaching team. The additional support they provide is a strong contribution to pupils' overall progress. Relationships in lessons are good. Teachers have a good rapport with pupils who are willing to

share their ideas because they can do so, in a positive climate, without any loss of self-esteem. There are some inconsistencies in teaching. The pace and challenge of some lessons is not good enough to bring about noticeable progress and, occasionally, pupils are not sure what they are supposed to be learning because it has not been made clear to them.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum satisfactorily enables pupils to achieve in literacy and numeracy, and promotes their personal development well. The good range of after-school activities provides ample opportunities for pupils to develop their particular skills and interests. Learning is enriched by a good number of planned visits and visitors to school. Pupils learn about the possible dangers surrounding drugs and other substances and the importance of secure relationships. There is sufficient emphasis on basic skills. The school has focused on raising standards, but there is scope to plan for the use of writing, mathematical and information and communication technology skills more widely across all subjects. Good provision for pupils in the units, who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, results in their good progress. The curriculum has been broadened by the introduction of French in Years 3 to 6. A positive initiative has been the Aim higher project. This link with Liverpool University enabled some Year 6 pupils and their parents to sample some of what higher education has to offer, with a view to giving pupils something to aim for in the future.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Parents agree overwhelmingly that due to the guidance pupils receive, and the school's expectations, their children are safe and well cared for. The most vulnerable pupils are cared for and supported very well. Support staff are dedicated and sensitive to pupils' particular needs and circumstances. There are specific learning plans for all who have additional needs and the school works well with outside agencies to ensure pupils receive good support and achieve as well as others. The school does all it can to promote attendance. This includes weekly home visits by the education welfare officer and, as a result, attendance is improving. Pupils' health and safety is given high priority. All safeguarding policies and procedures are in place. Consequently, pupils feel secure in school and share trusting relationships with all members of staff. Academic guidance is improving and there are some good elements within the systems for tracking progress and setting targets. Information is shared well with teachers who use assessments with increasing effectiveness to plan pupils' learning. Marking is generally good and includes helpful guidance on how pupils can improve their work, but the quality is not fully consistent throughout the school or across all subjects.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher's skilful leadership and management have had a considerable impact in the school. Incisive evaluation provided a clear picture of what needed to be done. The headteacher has vigorously challenged pupils' behaviour and attitudes, parents' views and expectations and teaching quality. Dogged determination on the headteacher's part has resulted in a school which is fast becoming a happy, orderly community. Pupils' personal development thrives, teaching continues to improve and standards, by the end of Year 6, are beginning to rise. Recent

new appointments to strengthen leadership and teaching have improved the school's prospects, but it is too early to see the impact of their work on achievement and standards. Systems for monitoring and evaluating the school's work are solid. A raising attainment plan, drawn up in partnership with the local authority, is the basis for school improvement and sets out areas of accountability for all staff and governors. There have been some recent appointments on the governing body. They have undertaken relevant training in self-evaluation and are satisfactorily prepared to hold the school to account. They manage finances carefully to raise standards, so ensuring satisfactory value for money.

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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?	3
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	3
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	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?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
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	2
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	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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

As you will remember, three inspectors visited your school recently. I must thank you for the delightful welcome you gave all of us. You made our visit very pleasant and we enjoyed talking to you about your school.

You are making satisfactory progress in your work and we were pleased to see that English and science standards are getting better. You told us that you enjoy lessons and we agree that many of them are fun. We could see that from all the achievement awards which were given out during your assembly. Well done for that! Your teachers work so hard to make your lessons interesting. Although your attendance is improving, you must all continue to try to make it better so that you all have the chance to achieve as well as you can.

We found out that all of the grown-ups in school take good care of you and make it a safe place to be. We could not help noticing how well behaved you are. We were really impressed with your politeness and good manners, and how much you do to help others. Well done also for being a healthy school. It is little wonder you are all so fit after those fantastic school dinners you get each day!

Your parents, teachers, school governors and you too, I am sure, would like your school to improve even further. To make that happen we have asked your headteacher and teachers to do three things. First, we have asked them to help you all reach better standards in English, mathematics and science. Of course you will have to work hard at that too. We have also asked them to make sure that the very youngest children in the school get off to the best possible start. Finally, we have asked your teachers to make every lesson as much fun and as good as the next.