

Oughton Primary and Nursery School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133323
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	316081
Inspection dates	6-7 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Colin Henderson

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	181
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Richard Parsons
Headteacher	Mrs Wendy Sims
Date of previous school inspection	19 May 2003
School address	Mattocke Road Hitchin SG5 2NZ
Telephone number	01462 450716
Fax number	

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Most children come from nearby housing estates in an area of some social and economic disadvantage. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds is above average and 13% of pupils speak English as a second language. The number of pupils who have learning difficulties or disabilities is higher than most schools of this size. The attainment of most children starting in the Nursery is considerably below that expected for their age.

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 an improving school that provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. The school is emerging from a difficult period caused by staff illness and re-organisation proposals. The headteacher has provided good leadership throughout this challenging period and standards are rising. She gives a strong focus to improving pupils' attitudes and behaviour and as a result, pupils behave well and are keen to learn. She has developed effective procedures that track the progress of individuals and groups of pupils, which puts the school in a good position to improve further. These procedures are helping to raise standards year on year. However, they are not developed fully to ensure that pupils' achievement is targeted rigorously throughout the school.

Staff work hard to provide a calm and purposeful working atmosphere that is valued by pupils and their parents. One commented that 'this is a good place for my children and their education'. Pupils get on well together and benefit from good care, support and guidance. This helps them to settle to work well in most lessons. Their achievement is satisfactory overall. Teaching varies in quality and is satisfactory overall. Year 6 pupils make rapid progress in their learning because of the consistently high quality teaching they receive. They respond positively to the teacher's high expectations and use their targets to improve their work, particularly in literacy and numeracy. However, teaching and learning are not consistently good in each class so pupils do not always progress as quickly as they could. They attain standards that are well below the national average at the end of Year 2 and below average by Year 6. These are reflected clearly in the results of national tests and teachers' assessments, which show a trend of small and steady improvement over the last few years.

Pupils' personal development is good. Most enjoy school and listen well in lessons. Year 6 pupils are willing to take on responsibilities to help with the smooth running of the school, for example, by looking after the younger ones at lunchtimes. However, opportunities for some others to become increasingly independent and responsible for their learning are limited. Most pupils understand how to adopt healthy and safe lifestyles. Some teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to share ideas and help each other to improve their work, although this is not established consistently to help pupils gain a more detailed understanding of how to make their work better. The curriculum is enhanced well by themed weeks that are valued highly by pupils.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The purposeful leadership of the headteacher has been particularly effective in promoting a caring school ethos and providing a broad range of learning activities. She is currently providing more opportunities for other key staff to improve their understanding of how well the pupils are doing and to focus on what needs improving in their areas of responsibility. This is not yet developed enough to enable leadership and management to be fully effective. Governors are increasingly involved in working with the school to check on and improve provision, although a high level of change has limited their overall effectiveness. Parents are informed regularly about how well their children are doing. The school is working to establish an effective partnership with parents to support their children's learning but this has some way to go.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Teaching in the Foundation Stage is good and children flourish in the productive learning environment that has been established. As many children start school with a very limited understanding of everyday words, teachers place a strong emphasis on developing speaking skills, extending children's vocabulary and encouraging communication.

Children receive a warm welcome when they start in the Nursery and they quickly settle into school routines. They are good at putting equipment away when they hear the music that signals tidying up time. They love listening to stories and many of the books they read form the basis of many good learning opportunities for example, to follow a recipe to make dough and bake bread. Although many are shy when they start school, they are encouraged to grow in confidence and soon feel able to express their views and opinions.

Children continue to make good progress in the Reception class where imaginative play stimulates language development well and improves their knowledge of the world. For example, children discuss how to rescue victims and assess injuries when acting out a 999 emergency call. They learn to identify injured parts of the body and how to read phrases such as, 'Help! Help!'. Children benefit from a well-organised range of activities, although the outside area is not so well developed as a learning resource.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend pupils' learning by improving teaching to a consistently good level in all classes.
- Increase the involvement of other key staff in checking how well pupils are achieving and targeting areas for improvement.
- Develop a more effective partnership in learning between home and school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Children in the Nursery and Reception class make rapid progress as a result of good teaching and a strong focus on social and language development. By the time they enter Year 1, their skills and knowledge are well below those expected of their age, especially in language and creative aspects. Pupils make satisfactory progress overall in Years 1 to 5. Year 6 pupils progress very well because they respond enthusiastically to the high expectations of their teacher. Attainment is improving as children are moving on from the Foundation Stage with better skills and more self-confidence. This is built on satisfactorily as pupils move from year to year. However, although standards are rising, they are below the national averages by Year 6. The achievement of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is satisfactory overall and reflects the variation in teaching. Pupils who find learning difficult make satisfactory progress. Many make good progress towards their specific learning targets and benefit from extra support in small groups. They do not progress as well in those lessons where activities are not matched so effectively to their learning needs.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are well behaved in and around the school. Pupils, staff and parents report that behaviour has improved significantly over the past two years. Pupils' positive attitudes are beginning to

have a good impact on their learning. They are gaining in confidence, but for many their self-esteem is fragile. The school has not yet established a consistent approach to encouraging pupils to use their initiative and to become increasingly independent and self-assured. Several pupils have very challenging behaviour, but this is managed well by teachers and support staff so that lessons are not interrupted. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and promoted well through theme weeks such as 'Literacy Week'. Pupils have a good understanding of how to eat a balanced diet and the need for regular vigorous exercise. Opportunities for pupils to work with a nearby secondary school help them to prepare for their future economic well-being. Their attendance is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Most teaching is satisfactory and helps pupils make satisfactory progress. However, there is considerable variation across the school. Teachers plan a good range of learning activities but in some lessons, they are not matched to pupils' differing learning needs effectively. Many teachers use technology successfully to capture pupils' interest, for example, the outstanding use of an interactive whiteboard to extend knowledge and use of punctuation. They use questions and talking partner activities to encourage pupils to share their ideas. Even so, pupils do not always know what is expected of them because it is not made clear enough to enhance their learning. Inconsistencies in the pace of some lessons and in managing pupils to stay focused on their task affect the progress and achievement of some.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is relevant to pupils' needs, with a strong emphasis on developing language and communication skills. It is enriched well by events such as 'Literacy Week' when the whole school engages in music, art, dance and drama based on traditional stories from around the world. An appropriate range of educational visits, including residential visits, helps to enrich learning and effectively support pupils' personal development. After-school sports and dance clubs contribute well to pupils' fitness and well-being. Pupils particularly enjoy the weekly enrichment afternoons where they choose from a range of creative and sporting activities, including cookery and judo. The school is working towards making closer links between subjects to create a more exciting curriculum that captures pupils' imaginations and extends their skills. Information and communication technology resources have been improved, although pupils do not use their skills enough to enhance their learning in different subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

There is a high proportion of pupils who find learning difficult and many are emotionally fragile. Provision for these pupils is good and helps them to achieve at least satisfactorily, often from very low starting points. Pupils who find it difficult to adjust to classroom routines are withdrawn to a special 'Nurture Group' room where they receive individual help to develop their social skills.

Pupils are taught about the dangers associated with drugs and how to look after themselves and to develop a good understanding of how to stay safe. They also receive good academic

guidance through discussing their work with teachers. Most are aware of their targets to help them improve their work in literacy and numeracy, although they are not always guided consistently over what they need to do next to raise their standards.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The good leadership of the headteacher is providing the school with a clear direction, which is raising standards. She has focused successfully on improving pupils' attitudes and behaviour. In addition, she has developed better procedures to track pupils' achievements and to set realistic targets for year on year improvement. The headteacher is using this information to raise the performance of groups' of pupils, for example, those of average attainment. The procedures for checking how well the school is doing are improving. The headteacher is beginning to involve other key staff in evaluating standards of teaching and learning, although this is in its early stages of development. Teaching quality is checked regularly, but not enough attention is paid to looking at its impact on pupils' learning and their progress. Recent changes in the governing body's personnel and structure provide more opportunities for governors to check the school's effectiveness.

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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	2
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	3
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	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	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

8 February 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Oughton Primary and Nursery School, Hitchin, SG5 2NZ

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking to you about what you do in school, looking at your work and watching you learn. You clearly enjoy school and, together with most of your parents, you think that it is a happy and friendly school - and we agree.

We were pleased to see how well you get on together. Your behaviour is good and this means that teachers can get on with the job of helping you to learn. It was interesting to talk to school councillors about how they are helping to improve the school, such as the playground equipment. You told us that you enjoy your work, especially the interesting themed weeks and the different visits. We think that many of you learn well and Mrs. Sims and her staff are working hard to try to help you to learn as well as possible. Many of you enjoy the good teaching in some of your lessons and we have asked the headteacher and her staff to try to help you learn even better by making more of your lessons interesting and challenging. Some of you enjoy being helped to learn at home by your parents, friends and members of your family. We have asked the school to try to encourage more of these people who care for you to help you with your work, such as your reading. We have also asked your school to provide more opportunities for teachers who are responsible for particular subjects or year groups to see where they can help you achieve even better.

Thank you again for helping us to find out about your school and we hope that you will continue to be happy and to work hard.

Colin Henderson

Lead inspector