

Overstone Combined School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110519
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	325165
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Emma Ing HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	243
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Varey
Headteacher	Mrs Naima France
Date of previous school inspection	11–12 October 2005
School address	Church Street Wing Leighton Buzzard LU7 0NY
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out at no notice by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and by an Additional Inspector. The inspectors visited fifteen lessons and held meetings with governors, staff and pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's plans, its self-evaluation, its tracking data and the minutes of the governing body. They considered the responses in 55 questionnaires that had been returned by parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the effectiveness of the school's work to ensure that individual pupils are well supported
- the progress made by pupils in writing
- the effectiveness of school leaders in planning for improvement in pupils' outcomes.

Information about the school

This is an average sized primary school situated in a large village in a rural area. Most pupils are White British but there are a very few who have Romany or Gypsy heritage and a few others with mixed heritages. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language. Recently, the school has been affected by high mobility with significant numbers of pupils arriving and leaving at stages other than expected during their education. The proportion of pupils with special needs is well below the national average.

At the time of the inspection the school was being led on a temporary basis by an acting headteacher and a high proportion of teaching staff were relatively new to the school. During this period the governors have arranged for the school to be supported by a consultant headteacher for one day a week.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Overstone Combined School provides a satisfactory education.

- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage get off to a good start in the Nursery.
- Higher up the school the progress that they make in their learning is satisfactory. It is much better in mathematics and science than it is in English.
- Pupils enjoy their learning. Nearly all of the older pupils do extra sport in their free time and many are learning to play a musical instrument.
- From an early age pupils are courteous, considerate of others and responsible. They have good understanding of how to stay healthy and safe.
- Pupils are well cared for. Teachers know pupils as individuals but are less good at analysing trends in performance. They are generally very good at helping individuals overcome any barriers to their education and work well with outside agencies.
- Teaching is generally sound and sometimes good, but teachers do not focus sharply enough on the learning outcomes of each lesson.
- Leaders have identified areas for improvement and have set in place systems which are yielding improvement. They are not sufficiently rigorous in planning for success to ensure that the school is making good progress in improving outcomes for all pupils.

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.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Help pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 to make faster progress by making sure that:
 - lessons are sharply focussed on clear learning outcomes
 - teachers give pupils clear feedback throughout lessons and when they mark pupils' work on what they are doing well and what they need to do to make their work even better

- Make better use of assessment information to:
 - set more precise learning targets
 - match teaching to individuals' learning needs
 - give leaders information about trends in attainment and progress
- Take a more rigorous approach to development planning, making sure that:
 - it is based on thorough self-evaluation of outcomes for pupils
 - it identifies clearly what actions the school will take to improve outcomes for pupils and how it will monitor their progress

How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

3

Pupils are making satisfactory progress in their learning. Their good behaviour means that teachers can allow them to do exciting and interesting activities in lessons and that they respond to challenge well. Inspectors visited during science week and it was evident from the many scientific activities going on that pupils were making satisfactory and sometimes good progress in this subject with considerable enjoyment. Test results indicate that they have been making excellent progress in mathematics, but inspectors observed that at the moment this is not consistent across the school. Pupils continue to make satisfactory progress in writing and in English overall. They are held back by the need to develop their expertise in writing for different audiences and in different styles.

For the last three years pupils have attained above-average scores in tests at the end of Key Stage 2 in mathematics and science. In 2007 attainment in English overall was also above average, but this masks weaknesses in writing. Unvalidated test results of those who left in 2008 indicate that there was a drop in the number of pupils who achieved the highest level in writing and mathematics, but attainment overall remained above average.

The few pupils from minority ethnic groups are integrated well in lessons and when they are present in lessons, they make as good progress as the others. Others who have experienced difficulties in their lives or who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are also making satisfactory progress. There are pupils, however, whose attainment is below average as a result of previous difficulties and absence. While they are making satisfactory progress, they are not making the good progress that they need to make if they are to catch up.

Pupils have a good understanding of personal safety and feel safe around the school. They are conscious of the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle and because teaching about this is very thorough, the pupils are good at identifying what this entails. Many participate in a lot of sporting activities, both with the school and through extended school provision.

Although the school council is not yet managing a budget, pupils have learned about money and have, for their ages, a good understanding of these matters. Older children support younger children well through, for example, buddy systems and

helping in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	3
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	2
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	2
How well do pupils behave?	2
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	2
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	2
Pupils' attendance	2
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	2
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	2

The quality of the school's work

Teaching is satisfactory but it is not consistent across the school. Teachers organise their classrooms well and create a welcoming learning environment. Their subject knowledge is generally secure and there is some good use of open questions which prompt pupils to develop their understanding. They use a good range of strategies and generally set pupils interesting activities which helps them develop and consolidate their learning. However, there are some common weaknesses. Several pupils, and not only the most able, commented that their work is sometimes too easy. The observations made by inspectors support this view. Teachers do not use assessment information well enough to ensure that individuals are all appropriately challenged by their teaching. Sometimes, too much time is spent on an area of learning that pupils have already mastered.

The school has tried to improve the progress pupils make in writing by using broad, but different, targets for pupils in their writing. School leaders have recently evaluated the impact of this, and have correctly identified that it is not having as much of a positive impact as they hoped for. In part, this is because these targets are not used precisely by teachers. Many pupils do not know what they are aiming for, or when they have achieved it. New strategies are being introduced, such as the Big Write, which are helping pupils develop their use of a rich vocabulary and creative approaches in their written work. However, because lessons are not sharply focused on the intended learning, pupils are not making the faster rates of progress of which they are capable. Similarly, although some marking of pupils work is helpful in advising pupils how to improve, this is not yet well developed or consistent across the school.

¹ Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

The school has sound systems in place to track the progress made by pupils which gives a broadly accurate picture of pupils' achievement and this enables teachers to identify pupils who are slipping behind and offer them additional support. However, this information is not being analysed with sufficient rigour to give school leaders information about the performance of different groups or developing trends.

The curriculum is broad and balanced. There are some delightful opportunities for pupils' learning to be enriched by educational trips and by subject focus weeks, such as science week, but learning in the classroom is sometimes not very interesting. The school has not been keeping records of pupils' attendance at after-school activities, but a recent questionnaire indicates that high proportions of pupils are engaged in extra-curricular sport and music. Some pupils are able to attend master classes in neighbouring schools. The school, however, has not been proactive in modifying the curriculum to meet the needs of all groups of pupils, such as those joining the school during a key stage or those whose home circumstances have caused them to fall behind.

Pupils are well supported in their personal development. However, systems to identify pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are not supported by sufficiently clear criteria upon which decisions are made. Nevertheless, they work because staff know individual pupils well. A wide range of different intervention strategies are used to support pupils' different needs, including their social and emotional development. By working with outside agencies the school has been able to make sure that pupils who are experiencing difficulties are well supported and can make at least satisfactory progress in their learning and development. An after school club provides a safe and welcoming environment for children at the end of the school day.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	3
Effective assessment	3
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	3
Support, guidance and care	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher, acting headteacher and consultant headteacher have successfully maintained stability during a period of significant staff changes. They have identified areas of relative weakness such as some aspects of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage and have made improvements. These build on an overall trend of improvement in the standards reached by pupils at the end of Year 6. Leaders, including governors, set challenging targets for pupils' attainment and generally manage to meet them. They seek the views of stakeholders regularly and work well in partnership with parents and others to broaden the range of opportunities open to pupils.

Leaders tend to have an over-generous view of the school's performance, but do recognise that there is still much to do. Sometimes their attention is focused on the actions they are taking rather than evaluating the impact they are having on improving performance. In addition, because the development plan does not identify measurable improvement targets, it is hard for the governing body to hold senior leaders to account with any rigour.

Procedures to ensure the safety of pupils are robust. The school has made appropriate checks on all adults who work in the school. Accident records are thorough and up to date, risk assessments are in place and health and safety procedures have been graded excellent by a recent local authority audit.

Leaders have considered how the school might contribute to community cohesion and have developed a number of strategies to promote equality and community cohesion. They strive to give pupils opportunities to develop an understanding of and forge links with people who are different to them. These have included links with a school in Africa, work with local faith groups and with older and younger people in the local community and children at other schools. The school itself is welcoming to all and respectful of different backgrounds. All groups of pupils are making satisfactory progress and are fully included in the life of the school. Pupils are confident that no one is picked on because they are different.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	3
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	3
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	2
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	3
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision-making about matters relating to learning and well-being	2
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	2
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	3
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children get off to a good start in the Nursery because there is good leadership and teaching. Provision in the Reception classes has, until recently, been more formal and the progress children have made in these classes has been satisfactory. The school has identified and implemented clear priorities for improvement in this area. These have not yet had time to have a great deal of impact, although children are adjusting well to the new systems. All staff are now involved in planning and in the assessment of children's learning. Children play together well and are very well behaved. They enjoy their learning. Data show that children's attainment when they enter the Early Years Foundation Stage is in line with expectations. Overall they

make satisfactory progress and at the end of Reception most reach the levels expected for their age.

Staff provide well for children's welfare. There is a coordinated approach to using the indoor and outdoor learning areas. The outdoor area is well laid out to promote children's physical development and children respond well to the opportunities it affords. Both inside and out, children now access a varied and stimulating range of activities which support their personal development as well as their communication and language skills, creative development and knowledge and understanding of the world. Construction toys are used sensibly. Inspectors saw two boys make a 'temple' which they talked about with animation. There is a good balance between child-initiated and adult-led activities. Adults generally support children well and their explanations are clear.

How good are the outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	3
What is the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	3
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?	3
Overall effectiveness: how well does the setting/school meet the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	3

Views of parents and carers

This was an unannounced inspection of the school and the time available to parents to complete a questionnaire was therefore very short. Nevertheless 55 parents responded. Most parents are very positive about the provision offered by the school. In particular they comment that teachers make themselves available to parents and are always willing to talk things through and sort out difficulties that their children may be experiencing. Parents feel that the ethos of the school is a strength and many expressed satisfaction at the progress their children are making. Around one quarter of parents, however, expressed minor concerns about the school, although there was no specific trend or pattern to these issues.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

- Attainment:** the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
- Progress:** the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
- Achievement:** an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
- Capacity to improve:** the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
- Leadership and management:** the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



16 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Overstone Combined School, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 0NY

Thank you for welcoming us with such courtesy when we visited your school recently. As you know, we came to inspect your school, and, as I promised many of you, I am now writing to let you know what we found.

Your school provides you with a satisfactory education. You are well cared for and are developing into well-rounded, well-behaved young people. We were impressed by your knowledge of how to keep healthy and safe.

There are lots of good opportunities for you at school and you enjoy much of your learning, particularly in science. You have been making excellent progress in mathematics and good progress in science, but do not do as well in writing.

We have asked your teachers to improve some important things:

- make sure your lessons are sharply focused on what they want you to learn and that you are given clear feedback about how to improve your work
- use their knowledge of how well you are doing to set you precise learning targets and work that closely matches your needs
- make sure that they really know how well the school is doing and that they plan carefully to make things even better.

As for you, keep up your good work and your lovely manners. Make sure you listen carefully and follow the advice about your learning that your teachers give you.

With best wishes

Yours faithfully

Emma Ing
Her Majesty's Inspector

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