

The Orchard School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132232
Local Authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	360412
Inspection dates	17–18 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Alan Dobbins

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	129
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Bill Jinks
Headteacher	Helen Atkins
Date of previous school inspection	18 September 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Inspectors observed, in part or in full, 13 lessons and 13 of the school's 15 teachers. They held meetings with the Chair of the Governing Body, staff, groups of pupils and the school's local authority link advisor who is also the school improvement partner. Inspectors looked at policies and reviewed documents and the data the school has on pupils' progress. They scrutinised 38 parent and carer questionnaires and spoke with five parents.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How clear an understanding the school has of pupils' progress, especially the progress of the higher attaining pupils and those with the most severe and complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities and, against equivalent pupils in similar schools.
- How effective senior leaders have been in driving up teaching over the recent period of staff change.
- How well the school knows the progress children make in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Information about the school

This is an average size special school designated for pupils with profound and severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities. All have statements of special educational needs or are undergoing assessment. Increasingly, pupils are entering the school with more complex difficulties that include vision impairment, medical conditions and challenging behaviour. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is greater than is typical. About half of the pupils are of a White British heritage and most of the others are of an Asian heritage. There are more than twice as many boys than girls. Since the last inspection there has been considerable change. The school has moved into new accommodation and increased its roll by about 30 pupils. Six teachers have joined the school, five being newly qualified. A good number of awards have been gained, including the Leading Parent Partnership Award and the Me2 Award for Extended Schools.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Orchard is an outstanding school. It is a happy and harmonious place where pupils thrive as growing young people and as learners. Within the constraints of their special needs, they are prepared as well as possible for the next stage of their education and their future lives. Parents and carers are uniformly supportive of the school. The comment of one reflects the feelings of many: 'The school is fantastic. The teachers and staff are wonderful and work brilliantly with my child. She really enjoys being at school and can now do so much.'

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make a good start to their schooling. Caring and sympathetic staff help them settle quickly. Their individual learning needs are recognised as a first step to planning specific activities and support that result in all children making equivalently good progress against their starting points in each of the early learning areas and outstanding progress in improving their communication skills. By the time they enter Year 1, even those with the greatest difficulties in communicating know the rules and expectations for learning. Between Year 1 and Year 6, the focus of the curriculum is to help pupils become as independent as possible. Outstanding teaching of a precisely planned curriculum helps pupils realise outstanding gains in their personal and social development, and in gaining communication skills and the basic skills of numeracy. For the lowest attaining pupils especially, the curriculum focuses less on reading and writing skills. Nevertheless, through the use of pictures, signs and symbols pupils make good progress in reading and writing.

The school takes great pride in the way the pupils are looked after. All staff, including the lunch-time staff and administrators, have outstanding relationships with the pupils. They trust staff and see them as their friends who will always help them if they are bothered or distressed. It is not surprising that pupils say they like school. Most attend regularly and when they do not attend it is most often because of their fragile health. They know that school is a place for work and they are committed to doing their best in the lessons. Their good attitudes and outstanding behaviour are important contributors to their high quality learning. As they move through the school they gain an excellent understanding of the importance of being safe at all times and what to do if they feel troubled; and they gain a secure awareness of right and wrong. Many show maturity when they have choices to make, including those to do with staying safe and when they choose healthy food at lunch times.

Over a time of change, the senior management team have used the self-evaluation procedures very effectively to improve the school. They know the strengths and weaknesses well very well. Movement into the new building was accomplished very smoothly and the considerable support provided to the newly qualified teachers has allowed them to quickly gain the specific skills and techniques required to be fully effective

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in their work. The very close links between school staff, specialist teachers and multi-agency staff, together with the outstanding facilities within and around the new building, help staff to fully meet the learning and additional needs of all pupils.

The headteacher has led important improvements in the school over a time of change, most notably in the better progress of pupils and better teaching. She and the Chair of the Governing Body are enthusiastic and committed to driving the school even further forward. They know that the assessment procedures work very well for recording and tracking progress against curriculum plans and for helping plan lessons made up of tasks that are always right for each pupil; not too hard and not too easy. Nevertheless, this information needs to be mapped against national information for children and pupils in other similar schools in order to gain a precise judgement on how well children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and pupils throughout the school are doing in their learning. Since the last inspection teaching is better and pupils are making more progress. Gaining the Leading Parent Partnership Award is helping parents and carers to be more effective in supporting the work of the school and the range of learning experiences has been broadened through, for example, the Me2 extended schools initiative. These, and other improvements, show the capacity for sustaining improvement to be outstanding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Put in place procedures that accurately judge the progress children and pupils make against equivalent children and pupils in similar schools nationally.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

The effect of their special educational needs limits the levels at which pupils are able to attain. Most enter the school with levels well below those expected for their age. Pupils in all year groups make better progress in moving toward independence and in learning to communicate than was the case at the last inspection. This includes the minority of girls and those with the most severe and complex learning difficulties, including those with autism and vision difficulties. All make outstanding gains in learning to be as independent as is possible in preparation for the challenges of the next stage of their education. They do well in physical education and sports because of the school's link with the specialist sports school and the opportunities offered by the high quality indoor and outdoor facilities of the new building.

The strong relationships pupils have with their teachers and teaching assistants help them to be comfortable and confident as learners. Because of this, most lessons are enjoyable events characterised by pupils' outstanding behaviour and by the serious efforts they make to do their best for the adults, even when they are tired or feeling the effects of medication. For example, in a lesson in art, pupils were excited about scrunching up different types of paper to make different noises before they created a collage. Those with the greatest difficulties with learning glued coloured paper of their choice to a backboard while those with the fewest difficulties explored symmetry by making a collage with equivalent colours on each half of the backboard. Over the full duration of the lesson, all pupils worked hard on their tasks and had fun doing so as they made outstanding progress against their individual lesson targets.

Pupils have a clear awareness of the importance of staying healthy. Many have fragile health and know the value of taking their medication. Regular visits to, for example, the

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physiotherapist or occupational therapist make clear to pupils the need to maintain flexibility and increase strength. School dinners always include healthy food and a good choice of fruit. The school council meets regularly and members are aware of the support for charitable causes, such as Comic Relief. They gain outstanding awareness of the needs of the local community through their many visits to local places, such as the Black Country Museum and the City Learning Centre, and to the local shops and parks in support of their learning. Each pupil is eligible to take part in two residential visits over their time at school. These are much enjoyed and are very valuable in raising awareness of the wider world. Pupils' cultural differences are celebrated through the special days of different religions and countries. The outstanding gains pupils make in their self-confidence and self-esteem support a good awareness of spiritual issues, such as the importance of trust and friendship.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	*
Pupils' attainment ¹	
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is outstanding because lessons routinely are made up of tasks that match very well with the specific learning needs of each pupil. This means that pupils work on tasks that are right for them, not too hard and not too easy. This is possible because in each of the subjects curriculum plans provide for small step learning. Additionally, assessment

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procedures against the small steps give teachers a clear knowledge of what pupils know and can do. The outstanding progress they make against their targets is the result of this. The skill and commitment of the teaching assistants is another important contributory factor: they are generous in number and are skilled in the use of additional communication strategies, such as picture exchanges and signing. Routinely, they are deployed well and provide expert support for learning.

The curriculum has been carefully thought through to match the primary need of pupils, which is to gain the skills of independence as best they can. It matches outstandingly well with their personal and social needs, especially the need to communicate increasingly effectively, by providing many opportunities to practise emerging speaking and listening skills through lateral progression over all subjects and through enrichment opportunities provided by the extended schools project. Resources are plentiful, from small size apparatus to large outside equipment such as carts and tricycles, and there are many interactive white boards. Of very high quality are the specialist rooms for the subjects, such as the art room and the design and technology room, and the rooms for multi-agency personnel, including the physio, occupational and speech and language therapists, the specialist teachers for vision and hearing impairment and the nurse. Of similarly high quality are facilities such as the swimming and hydrotherapy pools and the outside play and learning areas. Collectively, these work very effectively in extending pupils' learning experiences and in supporting their full and equal access to all curriculum opportunities.

Pupils are looked after and supported outstandingly well. Each pupil is well known as an individual with an emerging personality and preferred learning styles. Each gains the expert help and advice they need to support them in growing toward independence and in their learning. The link between the work of the multi-agency team and school staff is seamless. More often than not multi-agency personnel are in lessons working together with teachers and teaching assistants. The result is that, whatever the needs of pupils, the highly effective cooperative work of the multi-agency and school staff results in pupils attending to their learning for longer periods of time with greater vigour. The outstanding progress they make in becoming as independent as possible and in their learning is testament to this and is the primary reason the school recently gained the Me2 award for the way it prepares pupils for more inclusive situations. The additional provision as outlined in pupils' statements of special educational needs is met in full. All reasonable steps are followed to improve the attendance of the small number of pupils who do not attend regularly. Transition arrangements for the next stage of education are well established and provide very effective support for both pupils and their parents and carers.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

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How effective are leadership and management?

The school is a joyous place in which to learn and to work because staff are unified behind the headteacher and trust and respect her as a leader and a manager. Since the last inspection the outcomes of rigorous self-evaluation have provided clear guidance in helping her steer the school with vision and authority. Positive developments, most notably improving teaching and progress, show the strength and effectiveness of the senior leadership team. The exacting procedures for monitoring and evaluating teaching, and for supporting teachers, have resulted in more teachers teaching a greater proportion of outstanding lessons than hitherto. Driving lesson planning for each subject through the school's small-step curriculum has many advantages, and these outweigh the single disadvantage of not being able to accurately match progress on the small steps to national scales for judging progress, such as the Foundation Skills Profile and Progression Guidelines. Senior leaders know this and have worked hard to re-moderate the speaking and listening assessment as a first step to gaining an accurate match with national measures for other subjects.

Governors have taken a full part in planning for development and follow rigorous procedures to ensure pupils are safe at school. The newly appointed governors considerably extend the collective base of skills and experience of the governing body. Governors are now fully capable of taking a greater role in challenging and supporting senior leaders in maintaining the very high standards seen across the school. Safeguarding procedures are very thorough. Parents and carers and pupils see the school as a very safe and secure place. There is no discrimination of any sort and a strength is that all pupils have equal access to all the school offers. Due regard has been paid to community cohesion. Pupils have a very good knowledge of their local community through many well-established links and their regular visits to local places. Experiences of communities outside of the local area are primarily gained through residential visits. International links are being established. The impact of partnerships is having a very positive effect on pupils' progress. Partnerships with other schools provide outstanding support for the work of the school, especially in promoting inclusion opportunities. The partnership with parents and carers is having a very positive impact on their children's learning and their health and welfare. The home/school diaries are valued as a means of daily communication with the class teacher, as are the newsletters and web site. The home visits are very much appreciated and many parents and carers take advantage of the bi-weekly coffee mornings and training sessions to learn, for example the skills of Makaton and picture exchanges, feeding techniques and the management of behaviour. One parent commented: 'The school does more than I thought it could for my daughter in helping her learn and in becoming more independent. It meets all our needs because it also educates us in dealing with our daughter.'

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children make a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. This key stage is purposeful and well organised because leadership and day-to-day management are good. In a safe, secure and comfortable environment children, together with their parents and carers, develop strong relationships with staff. Teaching is good and children make good progress over all the early learning areas and outstanding progress in improving their communication skills. The curriculum is broken down into small steps and this advantages planning for individual learning. However, assessment links between the small steps and relevant national measures of progress are not secure enough to authoritatively judge the comparative progress of children with that elsewhere.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account: Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

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Views of parents and carers

The parents and carers who returned the questionnaire or who talked to an inspector were uniform in their praise for all aspects of the school. Overall, they are happy with the school because their children enjoy school and that know that they are safe there. They agree that the school is led and managed very effectively and that their children make good progress in preparation for the next stage of their education. One parent said wistfully. 'I would be very pleased if my son could stay here forever'.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Orchard School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 38 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 129 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	31	82	7	18	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	29	76	9	24	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	29	76	9	24	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	24	63	13	34	1	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	28	74	10	26	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	26	68	12	32	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	22	58	16	42	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	18	47	17	45	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	26	68	12	32	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	23	61	15	39	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	24	63	13	34	1	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	26	68	12	32	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	28	74	10	26	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

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.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



19 January 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Orchard School, Oldbury, B68 8LD

It was a pleasure for me and my colleague to meet and spend time with you when we visited your school. Thank you for making us welcome. We found your school to be an outstanding school. These are some of the things we especially liked.

The outstanding progress you make in your learning and in developing as independent young people.

The outstanding way you behave and work hard in your lessons.

That you feel very safe and are happy at school.

That you are learning what is right for you so that when you leave you are prepared very well for your next school.

The outstanding way your headteacher, the staff and others who work at the school help you in your learning and in growing up.

The way in which your leaders provide extra opportunities for your learning through linking with other schools and through the Summer School and after school clubs.

There is one thing that should be done better. Your leaders and governors need to improve the way they check on how well you are doing in your learning against other pupils in similar schools. This is a good way of showing just how hard you work and how good you are at your learning. You can all help, too, by always behaving as well as you did and working as hard in all your lessons as you did when my colleague and I visited your classrooms.

Yours sincerely

Alan Dobbins

Lead inspector

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