

Oakley Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109474
Local Authority	Bedford
Inspection number	356555
Inspection dates	28–29 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Vivienne McTiffen

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	207
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Roz Gray
Headteacher	Sarah Lovett
Date of previous school inspection	14 April 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Fifteen lessons or parts of lessons and one assembly were observed. All nine teachers were seen at least once and most were seen twice. Inspectors spoke to pupils and parents and carers, and meetings were held with staff, groups of pupils and school leaders, including members of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at tracking data on pupils' progress, lesson planning, safeguarding documentation and samples of pupils' work. In addition, 90 parental questionnaires were analysed.

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

- Are specific groups of pupils, particularly the most-able and those in the junior classes, doing well enough, especially in writing and mathematics?
- Are teachers' expectations consistently high enough to ensure all pupils make good progress?
- How well do pupils know their targets and how involved are they in evaluating their own levels of success?
- To what extent are leaders and managers at all levels involved in monitoring the work of the school and driving improvement?

Information about the school

This is a smaller-than-average primary school. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below the national average, as is the proportion of those who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. The school has achieved National Healthy School Status. The school runs daily breakfast and after-school clubs during term time and these are managed by the governing body.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school, which has continued to improve since its last inspection. Pupils achieve well and make good gains in their personal development. They enjoy school and are keen to learn, a view supported by parents and carers and confirmed in high levels of attendance. An outstanding factor in their successful learning is pupils' exemplary behaviour. The school's strong emphasis on values is reflected in the way pupils relate to each other. Pupils are polite and highly considerate of others' needs. They work very well together in lessons and pay full attention. They look out for those needing company during playtimes. Due to the school's focus on healthy lifestyles, confirmed by its Healthy School status, pupils are very well informed on factors affecting health and have a well-defined understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. They participate very enthusiastically in a wide range of physical activities. The school has acted upon the views of parents, carers and pupils to ensure an increased uptake of school meals and takes steps to ensure equal access to physical activities, especially those outside the school day, for all pupils.

Attainment in English and mathematics is above average. It is consistently high in reading. This is because the school keenly promotes a love of books and reading, involving pupils in activities such as World Book Day. Books are often used in lessons to support topics such as The Great Fire of London, motivating pupils to learn and inspiring them to write. This, together with work on letters and sounds for younger pupils and the use of high-quality text to stimulate writing, means that pupils' writing skills are improving, but this remains a weaker area. There are some good examples, but pupils have limited opportunities to extend their creative writing for a range of purposes or to write extensively in other subjects other than English.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Adults have very good relationships with pupils and high expectations of what they can achieve. Teachers use the information they have about pupils' progress well to plan for the next stage of learning. This means that, generally, there is a good match of work to ability, although the most-able pupils are not always challenged sufficiently, especially in writing, to reach their full potential. In many lessons, pace is good, but occasionally over-long introductions mean that pupils do not have enough time to apply their writing skills.

A key improvement since the last inspection is the adoption of a creative approach to curriculum planning. This links subjects together under one topic, such as China, to enhance enjoyment and help pupils make sense of their learning. The monitoring role of subject leaders has improved greatly since the last inspection. This means there is a clear focus on the quality of learning and the progression of skills in all subjects. Regular monitoring of the quality of teaching means teachers know how to improve. Good use is made of other institutions to aid professional development, but there are not enough

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opportunities for teachers to share expertise and high-quality teaching skills within the school. Leaders, managers and the governing body have a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses, leading to well-formulated plans for further improvement. There is a strong focus on continuing to raise attainment and accelerate progress. In light of this and improvements made since the last inspection, the school has demonstrated good capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in writing by:
 - extending opportunities for pupils to write creatively and extensively for a range of purposes and in a variety of subjects
 - ensuring that the most-able pupils are challenged sufficiently so they make as much progress as they can
 - allowing enough time in lessons for pupils to use their writing skills.
- Ensure that leaders and managers utilise the expertise already in the school to raise the quality of teaching to be consistently good or better.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

When children start in the Reception classes, their abilities are broadly in line with those expected for their age. Pupils make good progress to reach above-average attainment by the end of Year 4. Because the school monitors the progress of individuals and specific groups of pupils, including those known to be eligible for free school meals and those with special education needs and/or disabilities, these pupils make good progress in line with their peers, as do the very small number who speak English as an additional language. Good support in classrooms and in small group and individual work aids learning for these pupils. The most-able pupils are monitored regularly as individuals, although the school does not check their progress as a group to ensure they are all doing equally well.

Pupils enjoy working together and sharing practical activities. This was seen to good effect in an outstanding mathematics lesson when pupils investigated different methods of multiplying. They responded in a lively manner to the teacher's well-aimed questions and, excitedly, shared ideas with each other during group work, using a range of resources as they explored their ideas. They concentrated very well and were fully engaged in the tasks. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe and feel secure in school, a view supported by the vast majority of parents and carers. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils take an interest in new experiences and enjoy learning about others, supported well by the school's positive promotion of community cohesion and interesting curriculum. Pupils are very proud of their school community and are ready to take on responsibility, especially to help younger pupils or participate on the school and Eco councils. Their well-developed basic skills and personal qualities equip them well for the future.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

Teachers have good subject knowledge and link subjects together skilfully to make learning interesting. For example, in a history lesson, pupils were finding out about the Great Wall of China. This was linked effectively to English and information and communication technology (ICT) as some pupils used computers for research whilst others referred to books, resulting in a writing activity. This lesson made a good contribution to pupils' creativity and independent learning. Pupils know their targets and evaluate how well they do in lessons. Teachers' marking in books helps the pupils to understand how to improve. Learning support assistants play a valuable role in learning, especially for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, but in some cases they are insufficiently involved during lesson introductions.

The curriculum contributes well to the development of pupils' talents, especially in creative arts and through a range of sporting activities and clubs. Many of these are as a result of well-developed partnerships which offer facilities the school alone could not provide. All pupils benefit from trips and visitors, promoting cultural awareness. Recent spending on ICT provision is paying off. Pupils make good use of computers in classes and many demonstrate writing skills to communicate with each other on the newly established Learning Platform. Links between subjects are developing well, although there are not enough planned opportunities to practise and consolidate writing and mathematical skills in different subject areas.

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The school offers a good level of care to all its pupils. Links with external agencies are well established and well utilised, especially for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and for those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. The breakfast and after-school clubs are well run and offer valuable provision for pupils at the beginning and end of the school day. Staff are well qualified and apply the good systems for keeping pupils safe consistently. Arrangements for children starting school are good and appreciated by parents and carers. Effective links ease the transition of pupils from Year 4 to the next stage of their education.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher works actively with other institutions to benefit pupils' learning and staff development. This has led to curriculum innovation and improvements in ICT, enthusiastically supported by staff. Leaders and managers share views in staff meetings, resulting in the trialling and evaluation of new initiatives. As a result, there is a common sense of purpose in improving the school and a shared determination to build upon strengths and tackle any remaining weaknesses. The collection of good-quality data provides relevant information upon which to base challenging target-setting. The governing body is well informed about how well the school is doing and shows a good understanding of what needs to be done to improve further. It creates effective links with staff and parents and carers. The school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination well. Gaps in performance are identified and addressed. For example, the current drive is to increase pupils' interest in writing, especially for boys, so that all are motivated to learn. Procedures for the safeguarding and welfare of pupils are good. Issues about safety are integrated fully into the curriculum, resulting in pupils' well-defined understanding of how to stay safe. The school knows the characteristics of its population and promotes community cohesion well. Partnerships with the local community are well established and the school has realistic plans to engage with a range of community groups further afield, following an effective evaluation of its work so far.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
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	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children get off to a good start in the Reception classes. They make good progress in all areas of learning. Some make exceptional progress in reading, writing and creative development as, in some cases, these areas are underdeveloped when children start school. They do well because good teaching encourages them to build early literacy skills and develop imagination, knowledge and understanding, especially through play. For example, during the inspection, children were learning about growing. Busily, they ran the 'Garden Centre' shop and prepared planting areas in the outdoor space. These activities encouraged children to investigate and develop their own story lines. Children are happy and behave well. They choose what activities they will do keenly from a wide range of inviting tasks, although sometimes they spend too long on some because they are not made sufficiently responsible for their own learning. There is a good balance between adult-led and child-initiated tasks, with an increasing emphasis on activities based upon children's own interests and responses. Welfare requirements have a high priority. Children make a good start in understanding about being safe and healthy. Staff work together well as a team and have strengthened links with pre-schools to ease children's induction into the Reception classes. Links with parents and carers are good, enabling them to be involved in their children's learning.

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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

Views of parents and carers

The overwhelming majority of questionnaires returned from parents and carers were positive. All agree that their children are kept safe. The vast majority agree that teaching is good, children are helped to have healthy lifestyles and they enjoy school. One parent commented, 'I cannot speak highly enough of the school environment and the staff. Our child looks forward to going to school and enjoys learning.'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Oakley Lower 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 90 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 207 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	64	71	25	28	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	71	79	19	21	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	63	70	26	29	0	0	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	66	73	21	23	1	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	64	71	25	28	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	59	66	29	32	1	1	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	65	72	24	27	1	1	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)	54	60	30	33	4	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	58	64	28	31	3	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	47	52	35	39	2	2	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	54	60	27	30	4	4	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	57	63	30	33	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	68	76	20	22	2	2	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.



30 March 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Oakley Lower School, Bedford, MK43 7RE

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. We were impressed by your politeness and your outstanding behaviour. We enjoyed seeing you at work and listening to you tell us about the exciting things you do at school.

You attend a good school and, by the time you leave, you reach levels above those expected for your age in English and mathematics. You do particularly well in reading because your school encourages you to enjoy books. Your writing is improving, but we think you can do even better. The school looks after you all very well and helps you to understand how to have a healthy lifestyle. Because of this, you are very keen to take part in physical activities and many of you know a great deal about the importance of a balanced diet. You enjoy school and your attendance is high.

We have asked your headteacher and her staff to make the following improvements:

- help you to do better by giving you more chances to write and allowing you enough time in lessons to get on with your writing
- make sure those of you who can learn quickly have the right match of work to your ability so that you make as much progress as possible in writing
- use the skills of adults in the school to develop teaching so it is always good or better.

All of you can help the school to achieve these things by always trying your best and continuing to enjoy school.

Yours sincerely

Vivienne McTiffen

Lead inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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