

Oakley Lower School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109474
Local Authority	BEDFORDSHIRE LA
Inspection number	309997
Inspection date	14 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Joanne Harvey

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 on roll	
School	167
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Kathleen Marshall
Headteacher	Mrs Sarah Lovett
Date of previous school inspection	25 April 2004
School address	Station Road Oakley Bedford Bedfordshire MK43 7RE
Telephone number	01234822104
Fax number	01234826472

Age group	4–9
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues. Whether all pupils achieve as well as they can, whether teachers use assessments effectively, the impact of academic guidance on achievement and standards and the impact of leadership and management since the last inspection and its effectiveness at different levels. Evidence was gathered from discussions with the headteacher, staff and governor representatives. In addition, there was observation of parts of several lessons, scrutiny of school information and its self-evaluation, analysis of samples of pupils' work, evaluation of parents' questionnaires, and discussions with pupils. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified. Where appropriate, these have been included in this report.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average size school serving the village of Oakley and the surrounding area on the outskirts of Bedford. Most pupils are White British and very few pupils are learning English as an additional language. The number of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average. The number of pupils with a learning difficulty and/or disability, including those with a statement of special educational need is broadly in line with most schools. The school has achieved a National Healthy Schools award and a Silver Active Mark award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with outstanding features, which provides good value for money. Standards are above average in English, mathematics and science and sometimes exceptionally so. Pupils, including those who find learning more difficult, make good progress and sometimes better, from broadly average starting points whilst they are at the school. Arrangements for children in the Foundation Stage are also good.

The school's success arises from the clear vision and direction given by the headteacher to a caring and committed staff. Everyone works hard as a team, in partnership with governors, to successfully achieve their aim, 'to provide a positive, secure, happy and stimulating learning environment in which all children are valued and educated according to their needs and potential.' The positive ethos and atmosphere are evident on entering the school, which is clearly a focal point for its local community. The school environment is nurturing yet challenging, so pupils become well-rounded individuals. As a result, pupils not only achieve well academically but many of their personal achievements are exceptional. It is not surprising that parents are highly appreciative of the school. One wrote, 'as a parent I could not have asked for a better start to my daughter's school life. She settled quickly and was welcomed as part of the school community. We feel very well informed about her progress both academically and socially.' This comment represents the views of many. Pupils echo this sentiment and one said 'lessons are really fun, everybody is friendly here and teachers encourage us to do good things.' Pupils' enjoyment is reflected in the well above average level of attendance.

Pupils' personal development, including their social and moral development, is outstanding. Their spiritual and cultural development is good. Behaviour is exemplary, so not a moment is lost maintaining discipline. Pupils are encouraged to express their opinions and to accept responsibilities as often as possible, so they grow in confidence, often beyond their years. They take pride in helping others. They demonstrate an excellent understanding of how to keep healthy, love to be active and have a good understanding of how to keep themselves and each other safe. The combination of good literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology (ICT) skills and highly developed personal skills equip pupils well for the next stage of education and life. The good care and guidance offered include systems for ensuring the health, safety and welfare of pupils and safeguarding procedures that comply with requirements. Pupils say they feel safe and are confident that there is always someone to help them with any problems. However, they were quick to volunteer, 'we are taught how to sort out our own problems.' Systems to provide academic guidance are based on regular and rigorous checks of assessment in English and mathematics. They result in personal learning targets, which pupils say they find helpful though not all know them well enough or how to measure their own success effectively.

Good teaching inspires pupils, with the enthusiastic delivery of carefully planned lessons tailored well to meet individual needs. Teachers and pupils are clear about what needs to be achieved in each lesson. Relationships are positive and pupils are keen to work hard. Those who find learning more difficult get good support from able teaching assistants, so these pupils achieve and are included well. The good curriculum has focused well on ensuring the development of pupils' important basic skills, including ICT. Evidence in school confirms that the curriculum is particularly effective when it involves practical activities such as science experiments, art and design projects and topic themes such as The World War where many subjects are taught together in creative and memorable ways. These give children many opportunities to practise

their skills and help them to achieve higher standards. Leaders recognise that this approach is not applied widely enough to encourage consistently higher standards, particularly in subjects other than English, mathematics and science. Pupils enjoy an impressive range of activities in lunchtime and after-school clubs which go beyond the required subjects and are highly valued by pupils and parents alike. A high degree of staff commitment ensures that pupils both benefit from and contribute outstandingly well to the local community, for example, through musical performances.

Leadership is good. Expectations are high and challenging targets are set and met. Governors offer a good degree of support and challenge to school leaders. Leadership is being successfully devolved. However, leaders and managers of Foundation subjects are not fully effective in checking how well pupils are doing in their subjects and consequently in ensuring that higher standards are consistently attained. The highly effective senior leadership team has ensured not only that issues identified at the time of the last inspection have been successfully addressed but also that the school has continued to go from strength to strength, demonstrating a good capacity to continue to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children do well in the Foundation Stage. They settle quickly because of the good support and knowledge of staff, who make children feel valued, secure, confident and ready to learn. Children enter with skills broadly expected for their age. They thrive and make good progress. Interesting activities are planned based on careful assessment, which contributes to good teaching and effective support from teaching assistants. These offer an appropriate balance between teacher-led and child-initiated activities. Consequently, by the time children enter Year 1, they achieve levels of knowledge and skills expected for their age and many surpass them. Leaders are not complacent and are keen to improve further the access to the curriculum available outdoors in the pleasant outdoor area.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop a whole school curriculum using themes and topics which cross subject boundaries.
- Ensure curriculum leaders monitor the progression of knowledge, skills and understanding in all subjects.

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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?	2
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?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
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	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

15 April 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Oakley Lower School, Oakley, Bedfordshire, MK43 7RE.

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school recently. This letter is to tell you what I found out.

There are many good things about your school. Some of them are:

- you achieve higher standards and make better progress than most children
- your attendance is outstanding, you behave extremely well and work extremely hard to help others
- your knowledge of how to keep yourself healthy is outstanding
- you enjoy school and the school is good at organising interesting things for you to do
- all of the adults in your school make sure that you are well cared for and looked after
- your headteacher, and all of the other people who help run your school, are highly effective at making sure that you get a good education.

I agree with your parents that you go to a good school. However, all of the adults in your school want it to be even better. To help them with this the most important things to do next are:

- to plan to teach even more subjects through the interesting topic themes that you enjoy and which help you to learn so well
- to check carefully that you are doing as well in other subjects as you are doing in English, mathematics and science.

I certainly enjoyed talking with you and finding out all about your school. I particularly enjoyed hearing you sing so nicely in assembly and seeing you join with staff for the daily whole school keep fit session. Keep on working hard, doing your very best and enjoying your time at school.

Joanne Harvey

Lead inspector