

Oakmere Primary School

Chace Avenue, Potters Bar, EN6 5NP

Inspection dates 12–13 February 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The school has improved because the headteacher and the governing body have focused successfully on raising standards. As a result, teaching and learning are good and pupils achieve well, whatever their starting points.
- Leaders work well with staff to check on pupils' progress. They use this information well to identify and tackle areas for improvement.
- The school encourages pupils to read regularly in school and at home to develop good reading skills. Any pupils who fall behind are helped to catch up quickly.
- Pupils behave well and take good care of each other. They feel safe in school and know how to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations in and out of school.
- Pupils enjoy school because they find lessons interesting and fun. They work and play well together and usually concentrate well.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are very well supported. They are fully included in school life and achieve well.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils are not given enough opportunities to write at length.
- There are too few opportunities for pupils to evaluate each other's work and celebrate successful learning.
- Teachers' questions do not always give the pupils enough scope to deepen and extend their thinking and learning.
- Although attendance has improved over recent years it has fallen so far this year.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 21 lessons of which three were joint observations with the headteacher. They also attended two assemblies and visited the school’s breakfast and after-school clubs.
- Discussions were held with staff, pupils, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at a wide range of documentation, including the information the school has collected on pupils’ standards and progress, procedures for keeping pupils safe, and the school’s development plan and self-evaluation summary. They also heard some pupils read.
- Inspectors took account of 31 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in making their judgements. They also spoke informally to parents and carers to seek their views about the school.
- The views offered by 28 staff who returned a questionnaire were considered.

Inspection team

Gillian Scobie, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Keith Williams	Additional Inspector
Ken Parry	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is well above average. Pupils come from a diverse range of backgrounds. The majority are from White British heritage and the next largest group are Traveller children of Irish heritage. The proportion of pupils speaking English as an additional language is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding is well above the national average. This funding is received for particular groups of pupils, including those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or through a statement of special educational needs is well above the national average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action is well below average.
- No pupils are taught in alternative provision away from the school site.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - offering pupils more opportunities to evaluate each other's work
 - providing more consistent opportunities for pupils to write at length in a range of subjects
 - ensuring that teachers question pupils more carefully to allow them to extend and deepen their understanding of what they are learning.
- Work more closely with parents to raise attendance levels.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Many children join the school with skills and understanding that are considerably lower than those typical of children at that age, particularly in their understanding of language and number. Children in the Nursery and Reception classes make good progress in all areas of learning. They benefit from a good balance between activities they choose for themselves and those where they work closely with adults.
- Although standards in Year 2 have been below average in recent years, they have been rising slowly, and pupils currently in Year 2 are on track to reach broadly average levels in reading, writing and mathematics.
- This pattern of rising standards continues with the older pupils so that, by the time pupils leave the school at the end of Year 6 they are making good progress and attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is broadly average.
- Disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs and pupils eligible for support from the pupil premium make good progress as a result of carefully planned help and guidance from teachers and teaching assistants.
- Regular checks on pupils' attainment, the school's records and the work in pupils' books show that the gap between the attainment of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and other pupils is closing. Attainment of pupils eligible for free school meals is closer to that of other pupils than is the case nationally.
- Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, including those of Traveller heritage and pupils speaking English as an additional language, achieve well because their progress is tracked carefully and extra support is provided where it is needed.
- Teachers have worked successfully to improve the teaching of letters and sounds, and the proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard in the national check was well above the national average. The school is continuing its work successfully to strengthen pupils' confidence and knowledge in the early stages of reading.
- As a result of good teaching, pupils of all levels of ability make good progress in learning to read. Pupils read at home regularly, as well as at school. Pupils' enjoyment of reading is fostered well, for example by some classes visiting the local library regularly. Consequently, many pupils read widely for pleasure and to support their learning in other subjects.
- The progress made by pupils in writing is also improving, although the opportunities for them to use their skills to write at length are not always taken.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers encourage a positive approach to learning and build good relationships with pupils. They capture their interest and give them the confidence to try new things. There is a strong emphasis on providing real-life situations. For example, learning about clothing in times gone by was brought to life for pupils in Year 1 by using a washboard and carbolic soap to wash socks in the old-fashioned way.

- Good use of questioning in Nursery and Reception supports children well in developing their speaking skills and helps them learn new words with confidence. The children had great fun joining in with an action poem to help them talk about making pancakes. Across the school, teachers do not always ensure that the questions they ask help pupils to deepen and extend their thinking.
- There are good systems to support disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, which enable them to make good progress. Similarly, good support for pupils who speak English as an additional language helps them quickly gain confidence and take a full part in lessons.
- Pupils eligible for pupil premium funding are taught well because they are given specific help to overcome some significant barriers to learning in order to reach their potential.
- Lessons are well planned for pupils of all abilities to help them build their confidence and develop an independent approach to learning. The use of dictionaries and using the internet in a safe environment help pupils to explore and discover for themselves.
- Teachers keep a careful check on pupils' progress. They use marking well to help pupils to improve their work, and ensure pupils have time to respond to their written and verbal comments. However, there are limited opportunities for pupils to evaluate each other's work and talk about what works well and what could be changed or improved.
- Teaching assistants work well with teachers and make a strong contribution to the learning of pupils of all levels of ability. They are vigilant during lessons and will go to help an individual pupil whenever appropriate.
- Homework is used creatively to support the work done in lessons and prepare pupils for the next stage of learning. Homework tasks cover a range of imaginative activities, and parents are encouraged to become involved in the creation of items such as posters and booklets.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils enjoy school and are very positive about their lessons and their learning. They know why it is important to come to school regularly but, despite strong efforts to promote good attendance and follow up absences that have seen attendance levels rise slowly, the rate so far this year has fallen.
- The behaviour in lessons is usually good and allows everyone to concentrate on their learning. Pupils work well together and often support each other in small group activities and discussions. Their behaviour on very snowy and icy days, when they had to stay in classrooms at break and lunchtime, was exemplary. The school has an excellent range of strategies to help pupils manage their own behaviour and understand the behaviour of others.
- Pupils feel safe at school and this is strongly supported by all the staff and parents who offered an opinion. Pupils say the school helps them to stay safe in a variety of situations including when they are working on the computer.
- Pupils, parents and staff all say that instances of bullying are very rare and they are confident that, when these situations do occur, the staff deal with them quickly and effectively.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher is supported well by the senior team and, together with staff and governors, there is a strong focus on improving teaching and learning. All parents and carers who offered an opinion agreed that the school is led and managed well. The school fosters good relationships to ensure that pupils of all backgrounds and abilities are fully included and able to achieve well.
- The school received clearly defined support from the local authority after the last inspection to develop school managers' ability to improve pupils' progress and achievement, and this has contributed to the current and sustained improvements.
- The school has robust systems for checking teaching and learning and ensures that pupils of all backgrounds and abilities make good progress. Information about pupils' progress is used well to hold staff to account and help them to improve their practice. Staff speak highly of the guidance and support they are given to extend their understanding of good teaching and learning.
- The school offers a broad and interesting range of lessons, often using topics and themes to interest pupils and extend their knowledge in a wide range of subjects. A good range of experiences, such as sports and music clubs, is available outside the school day. Leaders and staff have high expectations of pupils and promote positive values of achievement, motivation and confidence that prepare them well for the future.
- The school works well with parents and carers, who are very positive about the school and feel the school responds well when concerns are raised. This is particularly true of parents of pupils of Traveller heritage, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs or those whose children have challenging behaviour.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body offers strong support to the school. Several governors are new to the role. They have received specifically focused training that has improved their understanding of the school's work. Consequently, they are increasingly able to challenge leaders about the school's performance. Governors make regular visits to the school and have a good understanding of what is working well and what needs to improve. Appropriate links are made between the performance of teachers, staff training and their salaries, and governors are closely involved in making decisions about, and checking the effectiveness of, financial decisions. They ensure that available funds are used very well to provide extra support for pupils eligible for the pupil premium, particularly to help those who need to catch up with their reading. This is having a positive impact on their achievement. The governing body organises activities for the pupils, helps them to produce and publish an occasional newsletter and organises forums to hear the views of parents, carers and pupils.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	117371
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	405701

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 of pupils on the school roll	265
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Linda Patrick
Headteacher	Julie Lilly
Date of previous school inspection	29 September 2010
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