

The Oaks Community Primary School

Rochester Drive, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire CH65 9EX

Inspection dates

6–7 February 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher and governors have successfully steered the school through challenging times. As a result, the school has recovered following a period of decline in the quality of leadership, management, teaching and pupil outcomes.
- Leaders, staff and governors have the pupils' needs at the heart of all they do. They continue to work with determination to move the school forward.
- Significant improvements in the quality of teaching, despite a large turnover of staff, have resulted in pupils in key stages 1 and 2 making stronger progress. Although a few inconsistencies remain, progress is good overall across a range of subjects.
- Gaps in learning caused by earlier weaknesses in teaching are being overcome. In 2018, standards in reading, writing and mathematics were broadly average as a result.
- At times, the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, do not achieve as well as they should because the work set lacks sufficient challenge.
- The vast majority of parents and carers say that children are cared for well. Some, including those whose children have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), would like leaders to improve communication between school and home.
- The school is calm and well ordered. Pupils are happy, feel safe and behave well. They try hard in class.
- Pastoral leadership is strong. Pupils and their families are provided with effective support to help overcome any difficulties they may face. However, a number of pupils still find it difficult to attend school regularly.
- Pupils enjoy a rich and diverse curriculum which offers many exciting opportunities to learn both in and beyond the classroom.
- The effective teaching of drama and art makes a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Children get off to a good start in early years in many areas of learning. However, the teaching and assessment of phonics and early reading, writing and mathematical skills for children currently in Reception lack precision. This limits progress at times.
- Middle leaders drive improvements in their areas of responsibility well. This is raising standards across a range of subjects. On occasion, leaders do not build well enough on the expertise of other staff.
- Governors are well informed and hold school leaders fully to account for their actions.
- Safeguarding systems are effective.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teachers provide work across the curriculum which challenges and deepens the knowledge, skills and understanding of the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged.
- Further increase the impact of leadership and management by building more widely on the views of staff and providing more opportunities to share the expertise that exists in the school.
- Improve early years provision of reading, including phonics, writing and mathematics to ensure that children are well prepared for Year 1 by:
 - improving the accuracy of assessment
 - making sure that teachers plan work matched to children’s needs when they work with adults
 - ensuring that teachers provide activities to enable children to practise what they have learned in adult-led sessions when they play and learn independently
 - ensuring that adults intervene appropriately to move children’s learning on when they work independently.
- Improve communication between home and school so that parents feel fully informed about decisions taken by leaders that affect their children.
- Continue to maintain a robust focus on working with pupils and parents to encourage regular attendance and reduce persistent absence.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The Oaks has been through a turbulent time since the previous inspection. Staffing changes and a period of weak leadership and management which weakened the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have hampered improvement.
- Since her appointment, the headteacher and current members of the governing body have steered the school securely through this challenging period. Their prompt and effective actions have led to considerable improvements in key aspects of the school that were weakened following a period of decline. Furthermore, they have not allowed the need for urgent improvement or the considerable changes experienced in staffing to have a negative impact on pupils' safety or enjoyment of school.
- The headteacher has a clear vision for the school and much has been accomplished in the period since she took up her post. The pace of change has of necessity been brisk. Staff continue to work hard and with a clear determination to bring about ongoing improvement. The school is well placed to continue to improve.
- Until recently, too much of the school's leadership has rested on the headteacher's shoulders. The appointment of the assistant headteacher and a review of leadership roles have strengthened the capacity of senior leadership in the school. The assistant leader has recently taken on the leadership for pupils with SEND and for the early years.
- Middle leaders, including those in English and mathematics, lead improvements well in their areas of responsibility. Other staff have more to offer to the school, and arrangements to build on the views and expertise of other staff need developing further.
- Assessment and tracking arrangements have been overhauled to provide an accurate view of the progress made by all groups of pupils.
- Leaders and governors know their school very well. They use the information from their checks on teaching and pupils' learning to identify the precise actions needed to improve the quality of education still further.
- Well-targeted training and support have proven effective in improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This has led to improvements in the progress made by pupils. Pupils' progress is now good, and although there is more to do to overcome differences in learning caused by previous weaknesses in teaching, standards continue to rise.
- The leadership and the provision for pupils with SEND have been strengthened this year. Extra staff time is enabling leaders to identify precise need and provide the support needed to ensure that all pupils make the necessary steps to successful achievement.
- The pastoral leader skilfully provides support, particularly for those pupils whose personal circumstances might make them vulnerable. In line with the school's behaviour policy, nurture provision is available for pupils who need a time apart from others or quiet areas for individual discussion with an adult. This ensures that pupils have a range of support mechanisms to overcome any barriers to learning.

- Leaders and teachers have planned the curriculum thoroughly. Subjects inspire pupils and offer them rich experiences which enhance academic progress as well as promoting personal development. In addition to a clear focus on reading, writing and mathematics, school leaders ensure that pupils' learning in other subjects, including science and music, are well enriched and take place regularly.
- Leaders prepare pupils well for life in modern Britain. Pupils' understanding of British values is developed well.
- The range of opportunities and experiences provided for pupils strongly promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils' understanding of different cultures and faiths is well developed.
- Leaders make good use of the additional physical education and sport funding to ensure that pupils have access to a wide range of sporting activities. Regular coaching sessions at lunchtime and after school are increasing participation rates and developing pupils' skills in a range of sports well.
- The additional pupil premium funding is used effectively to provide support for disadvantaged pupils' personal, social and academic needs. This is having a positive impact on the attendance of this group of pupils and their good progress from their starting points.
- Parents' views of the school are generally positive. A very large majority of parents say that their children are happy, kept safe and well cared for in the school. Most think that progress is good. However, parents of children who experienced disruption in teaching due to staff changes voiced their concerns about their child's learning. These parents, and a number of parents of children with SEND, would like school leaders to improve communications between home and school.
- During the time when the school was without a permanent headteacher, governors used the support of the local authority and leaders of local schools to secure temporary leadership of the school. A range of support to improve teaching and learning and advice from human resources have proved effective since that time. Although external support is still sought when required, the school now has the expertise to improve itself. Teachers and leaders work collaboratively with other schools to share effective practice.

Governance of the school

- Almost all members of the governing body have joined the school since the previous inspection. Governors have guided the school through some turbulent times. They have provided unwavering support for the headteacher as she tackled the weaknesses she inherited upon her appointment. Most aspects of the school, including leadership and management and the quality of teaching, have needed root and branch changes, and difficult decisions have not been shirked.
- Governors share the headteacher's ambitions for the school and fully support the values and ethos established. They take a keen and close interest in all aspects of the school's work. Governors know the school's strengths and what needs to be done to build on the improvements made to date.
- The governing body checks carefully on the spending of the pupil premium. Governors understand the impact of spending decisions on the personal development and achievement of disadvantaged pupils.

- Governors are aware that, for some time, much of the senior leadership of the school has rested upon the shoulders of the headteacher. The recent appointment of the assistant headteacher has strengthened senior leadership, and a greater proportion of the teaching staff are now experienced teachers, some of whom hold middle leadership roles.
- Governors understand that some parents have experienced concerns about the turnover in staff and the impact that this may have on children’s learning. Governors diligently conduct exit interviews with staff moving on from the school and ensure that induction arrangements for new staff are thorough.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- A strong safeguarding culture exists. School records, including those for any behaviour incidents, are detailed and carefully maintained. Staff are vigilant and demonstrate a strong awareness of safeguarding issues. Training is up to date, and staff know what to do should they have concerns about a pupil.
- Appropriate checks are made on staff before they start employment, and visitors to the school are informed about safeguarding arrangements on arrival. Work with outside agencies and parents is effective to ensure that pupils are kept safe and supported.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Decisive action taken by leaders has secured ongoing improvement in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Weaknesses in teaching experienced in the past have been overcome in key stages 1 and 2, where the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work as a strong team, and positive relationships exist between adults and pupils. The atmosphere around school and in classrooms is calm and purposeful, enabling staff and pupils to be fully engaged in learning tasks.
- The wide range of training provided for staff in most areas of the curriculum has proved effective. Teachers use good subject knowledge to provide clear explanations of new learning. Gaps in learning caused by earlier weak teaching are being increasingly well identified and overcome systematically. Teachers check carefully on pupils’ progress in lessons and strive to make learning engaging. Staff use questioning well to identify and address misconceptions.
- Pupils like the way teachers organise some of their learning into themes or topics. New learning builds on what pupils already know and what they would like to find out.
- Feedback is provided in line with the school’s policy. Teachers provide advice and check that pupils know how to improve their work.
- The teaching of reading, including phonics, is effective in key stages 1 and 2. Leaders have raised the profile of reading across the school, and pupils are increasingly developing a love of reading. Teachers encourage pupils to review and share the books they have enjoyed with others. Teachers carefully choose books to read in class that are of high quality and stimulate the interests of boys and girls alike.

- Grammar, punctuation and spelling are taught systematically in English lessons. Teachers reinforce these skills in a range of other subjects. Pupils are building resilience as writers, including when they write in other subjects. Drama sessions are taught imaginatively and help bring subjects to life and promote pupils' writing skills well.
- Staff training in the school's approach to teaching mathematics is proving successful. Teachers ensure that pupils have a good understanding of number and are demonstrating increasing fluency when tackling problems. Pupils, particularly in key stage 2, are becoming increasingly confident when explaining the strategies used when calculating. For example, Year 6 pupils carefully explained their reasoning when tackling tricky measurement problems.
- Some subjects, including drama, computing and PE, are taught successfully by specialist teachers and coaches who visit regularly to work with classes across the school.
- Well-targeted support in groups is helping pupils with SEND and those who are falling behind to catch up with other pupils. For example, some pupils work with a specialist teacher who visits the school to help improve early reading skills. Pupils are becoming more fluent when using phonic skills as a result.
- The school is rightly proud of the quality of art work produced by pupils. The dedicated art room is a hive of activity in the popular sessions run by a member of the support staff.
- Most-able pupils do not achieve as well as they should. At times, the tasks provided lack challenge and, on occasion, too little is expected from pupils, who become over-reliant on an adult's support when they are capable of working independently and thinking for themselves.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- A strength of the school is the way the needs of pupils whose circumstances might make them vulnerable are met.
- Many pupils make a positive contribution to the life of the school. School ambassadors, for example, take a pride in telling visitors about their school.
- Pupils learn about healthy lifestyles through the curriculum. They understand the benefits of making healthy food choices. Lunchtime coaching sessions and participation in the 'daily mile' help keep everyone active.
- Pupils' personal and emotional development is well supported because adults know pupils well. Regular learning sessions – which the pupils know as 'Tommy' sessions – build self-confidence and self-esteem and promote team-building skills effectively.
- Pupils have a good awareness of the different kinds of bullying, including cyber bullying. A few parents expressed concern about bullying in the school. Views expressed by pupils and staff did not raise this as an issue, and school records kept by

staff support this view. Pupils say that while bullying does sometimes happen, adults deal with incidents well when they are reported to them.

- Pupils are helped to identify risks they may face both in school and beyond the school gates. For example, when using the internet, they know how to keep themselves safe.
- Breakfast club is well attended and gets the day off to a good start for those who attend.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are polite and considerate of others. Pupils say that they enjoy school and their learning. They feel safe and know that there is always an adult ready to listen to them if they have any worries. There are good relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils are used to pupils joining and leaving the school throughout the year. New pupils are made welcome and quickly make friends.
- School rules and awards are well understood by pupils. Pupils think that adults generally apply these fairly and consistently. A few pupils do find it hard to control their feelings at times, and outbursts can occur both outside and in class. Teachers and teaching assistants manage such situations well, in line with the school's behaviour policy.
- Pupils move around the corridors sensibly and play happily together on the playground. Many say how much they enjoy the activities led by the sports coaches at lunchtime.
- Few pupils expressed any concerns about behaviour in lessons disrupting their learning, and work in pupils' books supports this view. Their books show that pupils work hard in lessons. Attitudes to learning are positive, and pupils concentrate well and show good levels of perseverance when tackling challenges set by teachers.
- A system for teachers and support staff to record incidents of poor behaviour is in place. These records are regularly reviewed by senior leaders and reported to governors. They reflect pupils' positive behaviour seen during the inspection both in classrooms and around school.
- The vast majority of parents who contributed to the online survey, the school's own survey and spoke to inspectors said that their children enjoy school. They are kept safe and the school makes sure that behaviour is good. Inspectors agree with this view.
- The pupil survey conducted during the inspection was overwhelmingly positive and supported the school's own survey and the views of pupils who spoke to inspectors. A few staff would like more help from leaders with managing behaviour. A small minority of staff who responded to the staff survey during the inspection do not consider the behaviour of pupils to be good or managed well by staff. Inspection findings do not support this view.
- Although improving, attendance remains stubbornly below average. Despite staff's and leaders' best efforts, the low attendance of a minority of pupils in the school, including some who join the school at other than the usual time, has a noticeable impact on pupils' learning and the school's attendance figures.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Caution is needed when interpreting published data due to the relatively small number of pupils in some groups and year groups. Inspectors took account of the school's own information on pupils' outcomes and evidence in pupils' books, as well as published data.
- Since the last inspection, pupils' progress and attainment in reading, writing and mathematics have had some significant ups and down across the school. Inspection evidence shows that leaders have now steadied the ship, and standards of pupils in key stages 1 and 2 are rising.
- In 2018, progress at the end of Year 6 improved in all three subjects to be in line with the national average. Pupils made at least good progress, despite an uneven pattern of progress as they moved up through the school and given their individual needs and starting points.
- Attainment at the end of key stage 2 has improved steadily from the exceptionally low standards seen in 2016. Pupils who joined the school at the usual time made the strongest progress and securely reached the standard expected for their age in reading, writing, mathematics and grammar, spelling and punctuation.
- At the end of Year 2 in 2018, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard for their age in reading, writing and mathematics was similar to the national average.
- Pupils currently in key stage 1 and key stage 2 make consistently good and sometimes rapid progress in all subjects. Senior leaders' unrelenting focus on improving the quality of teaching is proving successful. Gaps in pupils' learning, for example in basic mathematics and literacy skills, caused by previous weaknesses in teaching are being overcome. As a result, the outcomes achieved by pupils in these year groups continue to improve.
- Disadvantaged pupils, including those with SEND and those who joined the school at other than the usual time, make good progress from their starting points. As with other groups, leaders carefully track the progress of this group of pupils and have a precise understanding of their personal, social and academic needs.
- Pupils new to the school often join with gaps in learning, sometimes caused by missed learning due to previous poor attendance records. Leaders ensure that pupils' needs are identified quickly and appropriate support is provided. Pupils make at least good progress as a result, although some are still working below the level expected for their age.
- The most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, also make good progress. However, at times learning is not fully effective when the work set lacks sufficient challenge to deepen learning. When this is the case, pupils do not make as much progress as they should.
- The achievement of pupils with SEND is good because work matches individuals' needs. Effective support provided by teachers and teaching assistants, and good partnerships with outside agencies, ensures that this group of pupils make at least good progress from their different starting points.
- All pupils experience success in subjects other than English and mathematics. In science, art and computing, for example, pupils produce good-quality work and are

proud of their achievements. However, at times the work set for the most able pupils lacks challenge and limits progress as a result.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- Staff in the early years are caring and their relationships with children are positive and supportive. Children are cared for and nurtured well so they feel increasingly confident and eager to join in activities. However, teaching requires improvement. Not enough children currently in the Reception class are making the progress needed in all areas of learning to prepare them well for Year 1.
- Children enter the Reception class with knowledge and skills generally below those typical for their age. Year-on-year, an increasing proportion of children start school working well below the typical level for their age, particularly in their personal, social and communication development.
- In recent years, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development at the end of Reception has been in line with the national figure. All children made at least typical progress in all areas of learning and some made rapid progress. Children currently in Reception are making similar progress to this in many areas of learning. However, progress in reading, writing and mathematics requires improvement because teaching is not developing children's knowledge, skills and understanding well enough in these areas.
- Children come into school happy, motivated and ready to learn. Behaviour is good because adults set high expectations in both the classroom and the outside area. Teachers provide good opportunities for children to play without adult support, using a range of resources. However, adults do not provide enough opportunities to ensure that children develop their skills in writing, mathematics and reading, including phonics, when they play and learn independently.
- Assessment of some areas of children's development, including that of their personal, social and emotional development, is accurate and well understood. Adults use this information well to plan teaching and a suitable range of activities that promote children's learning in these areas of learning well. However, leaders do not have an accurate view of children's development in reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers do not plan work matched closely to children's needs when they work with adults.
- Teaching requires improvement. Adult help is not always timely in supporting better learning. Questioning is not as probing as it might be. Opportunities to develop children's thinking and deepen their understanding are sometimes missed, particularly when they play and work independently. As a result, progress, including for the most able, is not as fast as it could be.
- Children cooperate well and learn to take turns when they work independently. However, there are too few opportunities for pupils to develop what they have learned when they have worked with an adult when they are given time to choose activities.
- Teaching of phonics lacks a sense of urgency. During the inspection, children were repeating learning from last term rather than learning new letters and sounds.
- The Reception class has experienced similar periods of staffing turbulence as the rest of the school. The current teacher in this class took up her post at the beginning of this

term, and the new assistant headteacher has recently assumed the leadership of the early years. Changes are already reaping benefits.

- Safeguarding and welfare arrangements are effective. The school works well with external agencies and specialists to support children with specific needs, such as delayed speech and language development, so that they are able to participate fully in school life.
- Links with parents are good. Parents feel welcomed and able to contribute to their child's education. The leader of early years has reviewed the current transition arrangements for children joining Reception at the start of the school year. Plans are in hand to carry out visits to children's homes to improve the quality of information about the children who are due to start early years in September.

School details

Unique reference number	134249
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	10045829

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	163
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Francis Kewtang
Headteacher	Jenna McCaffery
Telephone number	0151 338 2111
Website	www.theoaksprimaryellesmereport.co.uk/
Email address	theoaksprimaryhead@cheshire.gov.uk
Date of previous inspection	23–24 March 2014

Information about this school

- The number on roll is rising steadily; however, the school remains smaller than the average-sized primary school. The proportion of girls who attend the school is much higher than the national average. Some classes, particularly in key stage 2, have relatively small numbers of pupils compared to other classes.
- A much higher proportion of pupils than average join and leave the school at other than the usual times.
- The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- There are no Nursery classes. Children attend the Reception class full time and join the school from a number of pre-school settings and some from none.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is more than double the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is high.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has experienced significant turbulence in

staffing. The substantive headteacher post was vacant for a period in 2015. The school was led by temporary headteachers before the current headteacher joined the school in January 2016. The deputy headteacher left his post in September 2016. The assistant headteacher took up her post in September 2018. A significant number of teaching and support staff have joined and left the school since the previous inspection, including a number of teachers new to the profession who completed their period as a newly qualified teacher.

- Almost all governors have joined the governing body since the last inspection.
- The local authority has brokered support for the school and provided a range of human resource advice since the previous inspection.
- The school provides a breakfast club for pupils.
- The school is a member of the Ignite cluster of schools and several other school networks.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment over time. Learning was observed in all classes and when pupils learned in small groups. Inspectors made joint observations with the headteacher and assistant headteacher.
- Inspectors checked the safety of the school premises at different times of the school day. They observed arrangements for pupils' arrival at school.
- The inspectors talked with pupils informally as they played at breaktimes. They visited the dining hall at lunchtime and observed pupils' behaviour as they moved around the school. They met formally with two groups of pupils.
- Inspectors looked at examples of pupils' work and talked to them about it. They listened to pupils read and observed the teaching of reading skills.
- Inspectors held a number of meetings with the headteacher to consider her view of the school and the school's plan for improvement. Inspectors spoke with senior leaders and met with middle leaders and other members of the school's staff.
- An inspector met with the chair of governors and two vice-chairs of the governing body.
- An inspector met with a representative of the local authority and spoke to another member by phone.
- Inspectors spoke to parents at the start of the school day. They took account of 32 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and 22 comments provided for inspectors. Inspectors also took account of 27 responses to the pupil questionnaire and 20 responses to the staff questionnaire, and of the school's most recent surveys of pupils' and parents' views.
- Inspectors examined a range of documents, including information about pupils' progress, the quality of teaching, school improvement plans and external views of the school. They reviewed the contents of the school's website and scrutinised records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding completed by school staff.

Inspection team

Lyn Pender, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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