

Orchards Academy

Inspection report

Unique reference number	136304
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	382049
Inspection dates	8–9 February 2012
Lead inspector	Robin Gaff

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Secondary
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	515
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	51
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jim Rouncefield
Headteacher	Ben Smith
Date of previous school inspection	3–4 December 2008
School address	St Mary's Road Swanley Kent BR8 7TE
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

Inspection team

Robin Gaff	Additional inspector
Fran Ashworth	Additional inspector
Bob Miller	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. They observed 25 part lessons, taught by 22 teachers, observing seven lessons jointly with senior leaders. They also made shorter visits to classes to observe individual students and groups at work. Inspectors talked to students and looked at their work. Meetings were held with groups of students, school leaders and representatives from Kemnal Academies Trust. In addition, inspectors looked at school documentation, including safeguarding and attendance records, monitoring files and self-evaluation and planning documents. They analysed questionnaire responses from 86 students and 34 members of staff, as well as 44 questionnaires returned by parents and carers.

Information about the school

Orchards Academy replaced the former Swanley Technology College in November 2010, when the school became a member of the Kemnal Academies Trust. Orchards is smaller than the average secondary school. It is a non-selective school in an area which operates a policy of selection by ability. The current headteacher was appointed in December 2010. Since September 2011, the school has operated under a joint governing body with Kemnal Technology College. There have been several changes in the composition of the senior leadership team and in teaching staff since the school's previous inspection. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average. Most students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is much lower than that found nationally. The proportion of students who are disabled or who have special educational needs is well above the national average. The main group represented is that of students who have moderate learning difficulties. The school meets the current floor standard. A privately-owned nursery operates on the school site. This is subject to separate inspection arrangements.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- Orchards Academy is a good and rapidly improving school. Students' achievement has improved considerably since the previous inspection and is now good. GCSE results have risen substantially in recent years. Students throughout the school, including those who are disabled or who have special educational needs, make good progress from their starting points.
- Teaching in the majority of lessons is good, and in some it is outstanding. Most teachers plan their lessons carefully to meet the different needs and abilities of the students in their groups. They have high expectations of students in terms of work and behaviour. Teachers mark students' work thoroughly, but they do not always provide them with enough detailed written advice to help them to know how to improve their work.
- Students behave well in lessons and around the school, and they say they feel safe there. They have few concerns about bullying because, they say, it is dealt with well if it does occur. Many students report that behaviour has improved considerably in recent years. A small number of parents and carers expressed concerns about behaviour, but inspection findings did not support their views.
- Leaders and managers, together with the governing body, have accurately evaluated the school's strengths and weaknesses. Leaders have set and achieved challenging targets for raising students' attainment. They closely monitor the quality of teaching and help teachers to improve their practice. Cooperative work with other schools in the Trust has helped considerably to improve the quality of provision and of outcomes for students. Partnership with parents and carers is less well developed. The school recognises that students do not have enough opportunities to take on responsibility.
- The sixth form is good. It is well led and managed, and the school has improved the guidance it gives and the range of courses it offers to students.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all teachers give students sufficiently frequent and detailed written advice to help them to improve the quality of their work.
- Enhance students' preparation for further study and employment, by giving them, throughout the school, more opportunities to take on positions of responsibility.
- Improve communication with parents and carers in order to enable them to participate more fully in the school's work and to support their children's learning.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students join the school with levels of attainment in English and mathematics that are well below the national average. Their attainment, as represented by the proportion who gain five GCSE A* to C passes including English and mathematics, has increased rapidly over the last three years and in 2011 was broadly average. Passes already achieved and module results gained by current Year 11 students, as well as the school's own reliable assessment data, indicate that this improvement is being maintained, confirming that students make good progress from their starting points. Students in the sixth form begin their courses with lower levels of prior attainment than those found nationally. They make good progress towards challenging but realistic targets. Most parents and carers believe their children are making good progress at the school.

In the majority of lessons observed during the inspection, students' learning and progress were at least good. Inspectors' observations showed that students learn best and make the most rapid progress in lessons where they clearly understand what they are going to learn and are given good opportunities to think about, discuss and evaluate their own and each other's work. They work well as individuals and in groups, and listen to and learn from one another as well as from their teachers. Students who are disabled and those who have special educational needs make good progress because of the well-targeted support they receive from teachers and teaching assistants in mainstream classes and in small group sessions. In a Year 8 English lesson, students made outstanding progress in writing complex sentences and in using sophisticated vocabulary to justify their opinions on the legalisation of drugs. They made good use of opportunities for discussion in groups and in pairs and expressed their views sensibly and confidently. This, together with students' response to activities in other lessons observed, indicates the school's successful promotion of their social and moral development. The strong development of students' literacy and numeracy skills is having a positive impact on their achievement in other subjects.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching overall, including in the sixth form, is good and is improving. Most parents and carers agree that their children are well taught and inspectors' findings confirmed this. The curriculum is effectively planned to ensure continuity between different phases, for example from primary to secondary education, and a good range of choices for students in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Students' social and moral development is promoted well through group work and opportunities for them to discuss their own ideas. Assemblies, as well as music and drama lessons, give students good opportunities for spiritual and cultural development.

Teachers make good use of assessment information to plan activities which are well matched to students' abilities and interests. Teachers relate well to students and ensure that teaching assistants are appropriately deployed to ensure that all groups, including those who are disabled or who have special educational needs, are fully included and make at least as much progress as their peers. Lessons proceed at a good pace, because transitions between activities are smooth, so that little time is wasted. Teachers make good use of resources such as interactive whiteboards and classroom displays featuring key words, concepts and techniques. They use questioning well during lessons to check and to develop students' understanding, and enable them to learn from assessing their own and each other's work. Sixth form students speak highly of teachers' approachability and their willingness to provide extra help outside lessons. In an outstanding physical education lesson in the sixth form, students with a wide range of abilities made excellent progress in raising the level of their own performance in a series of fitness-related activities. The teacher ensured that students made appropriate links between their knowledge of, for example, muscular functions with the tasks that they were undertaking and observing. As a result they also developed an extremely good understanding of the links between theory and practice. Where the teaching observed by inspectors was no better than satisfactory, this was because teachers talked too much and did not give students enough opportunities to work independently, or failed to ensure that activities were sufficiently well tailored to students' different abilities. This resulted in some students not being challenged enough, while others found the work too difficult.

Most teachers mark students' work regularly and thoroughly. They correct work accurately and give students good-quality written feedback which enables them to build on their strengths and eliminate weaknesses. However, the quality of marking is inconsistent, across and within different subject areas. Some teachers do not mark students' work often enough. Many teachers provide students with detailed written advice which enables them to know what next steps they need to take to improve their work, but others' comments are too brief or too imprecise to be helpful.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students move sensibly and safely around the school, and behave well in assemblies, tutor group periods and in lessons. The majority of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire agreed that behaviour is good, that lessons are not

disrupted, and that the school deals effectively with bullying. Inspectors found little evidence to support the concerns about behaviour in lessons or about bullying expressed by a small minority of parents and carers. Students who were interviewed indicated that instances of poor behaviour and of low-level disruption in lessons are increasingly rare because staff are more consistently enforcing school policies. Further confirmation of this improvement is provided by the sharp decline in the number of students who are excluded because of poor behaviour. In almost all the lessons, students showed positive attitudes to learning. They were attentive, worked hard and related well to their teachers and to each other. On the few occasions when behaviour was satisfactory rather than good, this was because activities were not sufficiently stimulating to engage all the students' interest throughout the lesson.

Students report that they feel safe in school. They understand the nature of different types of bullying, such as cyber-bullying, and say they have few concerns, because they know who to approach if it occurs, and are confident that any incidences will be dealt with promptly and firmly.

The school has succeeded in considerably improving attendance since the last inspection, when it was well below average. Absences have declined because the school responds quickly and effectively to investigate and to address the causes of persistent absenteeism and of unexplained absences. As a result students' attendance over the last academic year was above the national average. The school had identified punctuality to lessons as being an area for improvement. Inspectors' observations indicate that it is also succeeding in addressing this issue.

Leadership and management

The headteacher and senior leadership team, several of whom are relatively new to their posts, have an ambitious vision for the school, and have successfully communicated this to staff and students. Senior leaders have accurately evaluated the quality of teaching and have considerably strengthened the school's systems for monitoring its impact on students' learning. They have been relentless in challenging less effective practice and its causes. Strong support from and cooperation with other schools in the Trust have resulted in staff benefiting from extensive opportunities to share good practice through, for example, joint training activities. Middle leaders are held firmly to account by the senior team but also confirm that they are well supported in fulfilling their roles. Sixth form leaders have improved the quality of advice and guidance given to students before they enrol, and of systems for monitoring students' progress and for intervening effectively if they identify potential underperformance. This has resulted in improvements in staying-on rates within the sixth form, as well as in achievement. The newly constituted governing body includes a good range of expertise, and is prepared to challenge as well as to support senior leaders. The school's effective promotion of equality of opportunity is demonstrated by the school's success in closing gaps in performance between different groups of students, including those who are eligible for free school meals. There is no evidence of any discrimination.

The school takes good care of students, and its arrangements for safeguarding them meet all statutory requirements, including procedures for ensuring the suitability of

staff appointments. It has improved its systems for communicating with parents and carers about school events, for example through newsletters and the school website. The school has succeeded in working with them to improve students' attendance and their behaviour. It has been less effective in helping parents and carers to support their children's learning, and ensuring that they feel fully consulted and involved in the school's work.

The curriculum meets most students' needs, interests and abilities effectively including those who are disabled or who have special educational needs, and the small number who are learning English as an additional language. The curriculum promotes students' spiritual and cultural development well. They have good opportunities to learn to appreciate and to participate in music and drama, and to develop their creative skills in art and design. Students increase in self-confidence and resilience as they progress through the school. At present, however, relatively few of them, including in the sixth form, have the chance to develop their leadership skills by taking on positions of responsibility within and helping to improve the school.

Leaders and managers at all levels, as well as the governing body, are strongly committed to improving the school still further. They have established clear priorities for future development. This, together with the school's success in raising students' achievement and the quality of teaching, indicates its strong capacity for further improvement.

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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.

10 February 2012

Dear Students



Inspection of Orchards Academy, Swanley BR8 7TE

I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to thank you all for being so welcoming and helpful to us when we recently visited your school. The purpose of this letter is to tell you about what we found.

Orchards Academy is a good and improving school. Your achievement is good, and you make good progress in reaching the standards expected of you by the end of Year 11 and in the sixth form. Most of your teachers plan lessons that keep you interested and help you to learn successfully. Some teachers do not always mark your work often enough or give you enough written advice about how to improve it.

You told us you feel safe in school and that you are not worried about bullying because the school deals with it quickly and effectively if it happens. You behave well in lessons and around the school, and you say that behaviour has improved a lot. Your attendance and punctuality have also improved considerably. The good curriculum gives you plenty of opportunities to learn. You get on well with each other and with your teachers. However, there are not enough chances for you to take on responsibility and help organise activities. Orchards works well with other local schools to improve the quality of the education you receive. Your parents and carers are now much better informed about school events but they could be more involved both in supporting your learning and the work of the school.

The headteacher, all the staff and the governing body want to make the school even better. To help them do this, we have asked them to: make sure all the teachers mark your work often enough and tell you what to do to improve it; give you more chances to take on responsibility in the school; and give your parents and carers more opportunities to get involved in the school's work and to help you learn.

You can help by continuing to attend regularly and punctually, helping to organise activities and telling the senior staff what you think they could do to improve your learning.

We wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Robin Gaff
Lead inspector

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