

Great Oaks School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116621
Local Authority	Southampton
Inspection number	357993
Inspection dates	24–25 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Sarah Mascall

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	136
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Len Mockett
Headteacher	Andy Evans
Date of previous school inspection	5 March 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 15 lessons and observed 15 teachers. Meetings were held with members of the governing body, staff and students. Students' work, information on their progress, safeguarding policies and other documents were evaluated. Questionnaires from 29 parents and carers, 47 staff and 79 students were scrutinised.

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

- How well data about students' progress is being used to bring about improvements in students' achievements.
- How well teachers are using assessment to ensure work is matched to students' abilities and in enabling students to know what they have to do to improve.
- The impact of the school's specialist and Trust status in enhancing students' experiences and achievements.
- How effectively the governing body challenges the school to bring about improvements.
- How effective the school has been in improving provision in the sixth form.

Information about the school

Great Oaks caters predominantly for students with moderate and severe learning disabilities. Many have additional needs including autistic spectrum disorders, communication and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. All have a statement of special educational needs. A very small number of pupils are in the care of the local authority.

The school is a specialist arts college and has achieved awards for Healthy School, Artsmark Gold and Sportsmark.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Great Oaks School is a satisfactory school. Its strengths lie in the excellent care and support that is provided for its students. Staff know students well and are committed to ensuring that they are well cared for. This ensures students feel safe and enables them to gain a range of skills that support their independence and self-confidence well. Students' progress and achievement are satisfactory. This is because there are weaknesses in the management of English, mathematics, literacy. English, literacy and mathematics are managed by separate teachers and the lack of coordination between them has resulted in these subjects not being coordinated effectively. As a result, students' skills are not built upon in a systematic way and students make satisfactory progress in these aspects of learning. The specialist arts status contributes greatly to the good curriculum. It has had a very positive impact on many aspects of the school, particularly in art and design, drama, music, physical education, design and technology and information and communication technology (ICT); students achieve well in these subjects.

Students clearly enjoy school and talk positively about all that goes on. They are proud of their contributions to the school and the local community. Their knowledge of healthy lifestyles is excellent and they participate in all the different activities available with great enthusiasm. Students have confidence in staff; students say that if they have concerns there is always someone they can talk to. The quality of teaching is satisfactory and has a number of strengths. However, the use of assessment is too varied. Teachers do not always use their good knowledge of students to ensure work is matched to each individual student's ability or to ensure that students know what they have to do to improve their work.

Provision for the small number of students in the sixth form is unsatisfactory. There have been a number of problems in developing the sixth form, including issues with building work, which have prevented it from being effective. The school is well aware of these and has put in effective measures to enable it to improve. These are beginning to have a positive impact, particularly in supporting students' progress and the quality of teaching. As a result, there are signs of gradual improvements.

The headteacher is well supported by a strong senior leadership team. There is a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development and self-evaluation is broadly accurate. Action has been taken quickly when weaknesses have been identified. For example, the appointment of a specialist science teacher has resulted in raised attainment in science. The lack of clarity in the leadership of literacy, numeracy, English and mathematics has meant that planning for what is taught in these subjects is not always ensuring that students make good progress in developing their skills. The governing body is supportive of the school and developing its role in challenging senior staff to bring about improvements. The positive changes that have been made since the last inspection,

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particularly in the development of the specialist status and the impact this has had, not only within the school but in the local community, together with the commitment of staff to bring about continued improvement, ensures the school has a satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the provision in the sixth form by embedding the good practice that is being developed to ensure that achievement, teaching, the curriculum and leadership and management are of high quality.
- Improve progress in literacy and numeracy by:
 - ensuring there are clear roles and responsibilities in the leadership of English, mathematics, literacy and numeracy
 - ensure that planning is better coordinated so that students' skills are developed more effectively.
- Ensure teachers make better use of assessment to:
 - match work more effectively to the needs of all students
 - provide more effective feedback to students that enables them to understand what they need to do to improve.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

The vast majority of students achieve well in those subjects linked to the school's specialist arts status. In an excellent physical education lesson, Year 9 students showed a very good understanding of how to improve their fitness and extend their skills in using the equipment. They have a good awareness of the levels they are working at and pay particular attention to using the equipment safely. In art, Year 7 students used a range of ICT to produce work in the style of Rousseau that resulted, in some cases, in outstanding work that was full of colour and movement. Students' achievements are very evident in the good-quality displays around the school and students are rightly extremely proud of their work. Progress in literacy and numeracy lessons is often good in individual sessions but because students' skills are not built upon in a planned and systematic way in conjunction with their work in English and mathematics, their achievements overall are satisfactory.

Students' behaviour is good overall. There are occasions when behaviour is challenging because of the nature of students' special needs, but these situations are handled well and ensure students are safe. Over time, students gain a good range of skills that will support them in the world of work. They develop into confident young people who know how to behave sensibly in a range of situations. Their skills in ICT are good and they use a variety of resources, such as communication aids well. However, their skills in literacy and numeracy are not as effective and, as a result, their preparation for the world of work is satisfactory rather than good. Students' attendance is above average for the vast majority, but there are a few students whose attendance is not as good and overall attendance is

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broadly average. The school council plays an important role in the life of the school and students take full advantage of the many roles and responsibilities they are given within school. They enjoy the opportunities to be involved in the community and to work with students from mainstream schools. Students often show awe and wonder, whether celebrating works of art or listening to a prayer read by a student. The captivated silence and complete concentration in assembly by all students, while they listened to a teacher play the cello, was impressive to see.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	*
Pupils' attainment ¹	
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
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	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
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

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

How effective is the provision?

Teaching has many qualities, not least the very strong relationships between staff and students that enable students to have the confidence to try new experiences. Teachers' subject knowledge is particularly good and is used effectively, through good questioning, to check students' understanding. Resources are used very well and staff are confident in using the interactive whiteboards to support learning. In an excellent science lesson, Year 8 students were able to handle different rock forms and to see on the interactive board how these formed the earth's crust. Students were confident to use technical terms and identify the different rocks they held. Although there are examples of good practice in the use of assessment, this is not consistent across the school. In some lessons, teachers

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ensured, through group work or different activities, that work was matched to different abilities within the class. However, on occasions, students were all given the same task to complete, regardless of their ability. This resulted in work that was too easy for some or students reliant upon staff to help them complete the tasks. The quality of marking is too variable and not all teachers provide students with a clear understanding of how well they have done and what they need to do to improve. The use of teaching assistants is generally good. Where it is most effective, support staff are used to record students' responses during lessons and these are used to build a detailed record of students' achievements.

The curriculum contributes greatly to students' cultural development through the very good promotion of art and music. It does much in supporting students' excellent knowledge of healthy lifestyles through the very good opportunities for physical activities. The very strong curriculum in the arts, ICT and physical education enables students to make good progress in all these subjects. The range of accreditation is being extended to ensure it is more challenging and this year will include GCSE art. A recent change to the curriculum has been the use of tutors to deliver literacy and numeracy for the first lesson each morning. Activities have been planned and these sessions enable students to develop a good range of skills. However, because there are insufficient links with English and mathematics, this prevents students' skills being developed systematically across the school. The range of clubs and activities are very good. Students clearly value the very good range of visits to museums, art exhibitions and performances that support the curriculum extremely well.

The care and welfare of students is given the highest priority. The strong partnership between all agencies ensures that the care of each student is of the highest quality. Students are well supported by specialists, such as speech and language therapy, occupational therapists and physiotherapists. Such expertise contributes effectively to students' well-being. Staff take very good care of students and ensure their physical needs are well catered for. Links with parents and carers are generally good and there is regular feedback to parents and carers about how their children are doing. Considerable importance is placed on the student voice so that in annual reviews students are able to express their likes, dislikes and future plans.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

There is a clear focus on developing the school. Many new initiatives have been put in place and the school has achieved a number of awards in recognition of its work. The

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senior leadership team has been extended to include strong practitioners who are very involved in developing staff expertise. This is very evident in the mentoring of leadership and management in the sixth form. The school has identified the need to develop the roles of middle managers and involving them more effectively in monitoring provision. Senior staff are very clear about the strengths in teaching and are quick to support staff where there are areas for improvement. There is a good range of data about students' progress and the school is in the process of refining systems for analysing this. Data are used appropriately to ensure students all have equality of opportunity and that there is no discrimination. Too much though is dependent on one person in analysing and using the data to promote good progress and plans for involving middle managers more effectively are appropriate.

The governing body is vigilant about safeguarding arrangements and, at the time of the inspection, these were good. The governing body is developing its ability to challenge more effectively through improving systems for monitoring, such as in receiving more detailed reports about student progress. Community cohesion is satisfactory. Links with local schools, outside agencies, as well as the local community, are very good. The school has established contact with a school in Ghana and has appropriate plans in place to develop its national and international links further.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
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	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Provision for the small number of students in the sixth form is gradually improving through high-quality support and monitoring from the senior leadership team. Progress in improvements has been affected by the very slow pace of building work that has prevented the school from having access to enough classrooms and resources. There is

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still building work to be completed but the situation has improved through the interventions of the headteacher.

The range of students' special educational needs has changed considerably in the last year. The school was quick to recognise the need to improve leadership and management and has put in place training and monitoring to ensure senior leaders have the skills to meet the needs of the students. There is now a better understanding of the levels students are working at and systems in place to track their progress. A weakness has been the planning of the curriculum. This is improving. There are programmes of study in place linked to accreditation in ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network). Planning for activities has improved and is generally satisfactory but still lacks detail and sufficient information about how students will make progress. Plans are in place to develop opportunities for the world of work and transition from the sixth form to the next stage of education.

At present, the quality of teaching is unsatisfactory and results in students' progress being unsatisfactory. There are examples of improvements and aspects of teaching are good. The positive relationships between students and staff are very evident and support staff work well with individuals. Resources are generally used well although, on occasions, the pace of lessons is slow, with students watching while each takes a turn, for example in hitting a drum in music. Activities are not always well focused and staff are still developing their understanding of matching tasks to the needs of each individual. The care, support and guidance of students are good and a strength of lessons is the relationships of staff with students and the considerable care they show in meeting students' needs. Good attention has been paid to students' health and safety whilst building work has been in progress.

Leadership and management, although unsatisfactory, has with the support of senior leaders, identified appropriate areas for improvement that will support the sixth form to move forward.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	4
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	4
The quality of provision in the sixth form	4
Leadership and management of the sixth form	4

Views of parents and carers

A number of parents and carers were positive about the school and what it has done for their children. Their comments can be summed up by one parent who commented that her daughter had been in the school for four years, 'It has been very helpful. If they say they will ring you they do, if I call in someone will see me. This school has been very good for her.'

However, a small minority of parents and carers raised concerns about the progress their children were making and were unhappy about their children's experiences at the school.

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A few did not feel that their children were well prepared for life when they left school and expressed concerns about leadership and management. The inspection team recognises that, while there are strengths in all these aspects, there are weaknesses and judge the provision to be satisfactory rather than good overall. A larger number of parents and carers expressed concern about support for their children's learning and assessment for learning is identified in the report as a key issue for the school to work on.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Great Oaks 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 29 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 136 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	15	52	13	45	0	0	1	3
The school keeps my child safe	17	59	10	34	1	3	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	15	52	11	38	1	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	10	34	11	38	5	17	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	13	45	11	38	3	10	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	13	45	7	24	7	24	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	11	38	14	48	3	10	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)	16	55	7	24	4	14	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	15	52	8	28	3	10	1	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	13	45	9	31	3	10	2	7
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	11	38	13	45	3	10	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	13	45	10	34	4	14	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	13	45	10	34	5	17	1	3

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.



26 January 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Great Oaks School, Southampton SO16 7LT

Thank you very much for being so welcoming and friendly when we visited your school. We really enjoyed talking to you and seeing how hard you work. We found that your school provides you with a satisfactory education.

It was good to see how happy you are in school and that you feel safe. The school is very good at making sure you are well cared for. We were pleased that you like keeping healthy and it was good to hear about all the different activities you are involved in. Your teachers know you well and help you learn different things.

We have asked the school to do three things to make it even better. We have asked that teachers make sure that the work set is the right level for each of you and that you know what you have to do to improve. We have also asked the school to help you do better in literacy and numeracy. Finally, the school needs to continue to improve the sixth form so that students can make better progress.

You can help by continuing to support each other and making sure you know what you have to do improve your work. We wish you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Mascal

Lead inspector

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