

Melksham Oak Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126448
Local Authority	Wiltshire
Inspection number	360085
Inspection dates	23–24 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Ian Hodgkinson HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
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	1114
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	128
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Christine Deadman
Headteacher	Mr Stephen Clark
Date of previous school inspection	2 December 2009
School address	Bowerhill Melksham Wiltshire SN12 6QZ
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 31 teachers and 34 lessons, and dropped in briefly on many other lessons and activities. Discussions were held with senior and middle leaders, staff, governors, and students. Inspectors looked at documentation, including students books, the school development plans, records of assessment and tracking of students progress, plans and monitoring information for the support of potentially vulnerable students, records of the schools arrangements for the safeguarding and protection of students, and policies and procedures for promoting equality and countering discrimination. In addition, inspectors considered 194 questionnaire responses from parents and carers, together with those from students.

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

- The learning and progress made by all groups of students, especially those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The quality of teachers planning to engage students in lessons and adapt work sufficiently to help all students make good progress.
- The quality of the curriculum and whether it offers all students enough challenge to allow them to make good progress, especially lower attainers and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The effectiveness of leaders and managers at all levels in ensuring greater consistency in the quality of provision across the school and in closing gaps in the attainment and progress for different subjects and groups of students.

Information about the school

Melksham Oak Community School, known at the last inspection as The George Ward School, has relocated to a brand new site and buildings on the outskirts of Melksham. Numbers on roll have risen steadily over recent years and entry to Year 7 was oversubscribed for the first time in September 2011. Most students are White British. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. Most pupils come from local wards where the proportion of adults who have been in higher education is low. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and the proportion with statements of special educational needs, are above average. Most of these students have specific learning difficulties, and some have behavioural, social and emotional needs or autistic spectrum disorders. A small number of students have physical disabilities or hearing impairments. There is a higher proportion of boys than girls in all year groups.

The school has been designated as a specialist technology school since 1997. At its last inspection in December 2009 the school was given a notice to improve the attainment and progress of its students. A subsequent monitoring inspection in July 2010 judged that the school had made satisfactory progress in making improvements.

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

In accordance with Section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. The school provides its students with a satisfactory quality of education. The headteacher and governing body have demonstrated much energy and strategic vision in leading the school successfully into its new building, and have established a positive ethos and effective environment for learning. The senior leadership team has been strengthened to bring about more effective self-evaluation processes, making better use of monitoring information on teaching, learning, and student progress to give a sharper focus on key areas for improvement. Successful action has been taken to improve the quality of teaching through better planning of lessons, which has yielded improvements in students learning in many subjects, although some weaknesses and inconsistencies remain. The school has demonstrated a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

The proportion of students who gained five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, improved considerably from 31% in 2009 to 46% in 2010. This pulled the school well beyond the National Challenge minimum benchmark and closed the gap significantly on the national average. GCSE results in English and mathematics improved strongly at grades A* to C, reflecting the school's focus on improvement in these subjects at that level, and higher-attaining students made broadly satisfactory progress. However, results elsewhere were more variable, and overall attainment remained low. Lower-attaining students, students with special educational needs and/or disabilities at school action and school action plus, and students known to be eligible for free school meals made significantly less progress than expected. The school has taken decisive action to overcome such underachievement by ensuring that the curriculum offers an appropriately challenging range of courses for students of all capabilities, by strengthening intervention when students are making poor progress, by improving its engagement with families of more vulnerable children, and by improving teaching and learning for students in lower-attaining sets. As a consequence, while there remains a legacy of underachievement for some students in Year 11, learning and progress in other years are securely satisfactory and in all years are improving quickly in most respects. The school is acutely aware of where variations remain, for example in performance between subjects. Sixth-form attainment has improved steadily, especially at the higher A-level grades of A* to B, and outcomes for sixth-form students are satisfactory.

In subjects where attainment has lagged behind in the recent past, such as science and modern foreign languages, teaching and learning are now often engaging and academically rigorous. In both subjects, inspectors saw instances of exemplary practice in teachers planning and management of lessons to ensure that students across the attainment range were fully engrossed in their learning. Such teaching is helping to encourage students independence and overcome the passive reliance on the teacher and

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distractive behaviour which had constrained learning in the past. These weaknesses are still evident in a small minority of lessons. However, the increasingly widespread and effective encouragement of students to assess their own work and that of their peers against clear success criteria is helping students to develop a clear recognition of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. The schools curriculum places an appropriate emphasis on promoting students enterprise skills, although planned opportunities for students to apply their literacy and numeracy skills across subjects are less well developed. The wide use of technology by teachers and students to support learning in and out of the classroom reflects positively on the impact of the schools specialism.

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?

- Raise students attainment and improve their academic progress by:
 - reducing the variation in students attainment and progress between subjects
 - ensuring that all groups of students consistently make at least the progress expected given their starting points
 - promoting students literacy and numeracy skills more consistently and effectively across the curriculum.
- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching and learning in lessons by:
 - ensuring that teachers set tasks which are consistently challenging and well matched to students capabilities
 - developing further opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning
 - sharing the very strong practice which already exists within the school to promote the most effective learning for students.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Students join the school in Year 7 with attainment that is generally below average; there are fewer higher attainers and more lower attainers than found in most schools. Too many students have underachieved in recent GCSE examinations, but actions have been taken which are successfully overcoming these shortcomings. Students have a well-developed understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Their attitudes to learning are positive in the large majority of lessons. In the minority of lessons where the pace of learning is slow or where students find work is either too difficult or too easy, students disengage and some distractive behaviour occurs. More often, though, students across the attainment range are keen to develop their understanding through discussion with teachers and their peers and take pride in making progress. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress overall, and benefit from some well-planned and skilled support from teaching assistants where this is available. These students also benefit from an increasingly acute recognition of their

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needs in teachers planning of lessons and grouping arrangements in class. The school recognises that achievement remains very weak for the small number of students known to be eligible for free school meals in Year 11, and that this is tied to their poor attendance. Progress is much improved for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals in Year 10 as a result of closer engagement with their families and changes to the curriculum.

Most students feel very safe in the school, and students behave well around the school site. Students attendance is broadly average and their punctuality is good as a result of the sharper monitoring facilitated by the single point of entry into the new building. Students work well together on collaborative tasks. Their enterprise awareness is sound and their capability to use information and communication technology (ICT) across subjects is well developed, but their literacy and numeracy skills less so. They are making an increasingly effective contribution to shaping provision in the school, although they take relatively few active leadership roles in the wider community. Students have been actively involved in developing healthier options in the school canteen, and their healthy lifestyles have been further promoted by increasingly good participation rates in physical activities.

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	4
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	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
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	3

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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How effective is the provision?

Teachers planning of lessons is often detailed and features well-considered means of capturing students interest by setting learning in contexts which are topical or of immediate relevance to the students. Pupils are made clear about the purpose of each lesson and what they are expected to learn by the end. Lessons typically look to ensure teaching and learning are varied, active and practical. Thus, an outstanding applied science lesson on radioactivity for a low attaining set in Year 11 prompted searching questions from the students on the effects of radioactive leaks from nuclear reactors in Japan. Teachers questioning of students is often well distributed to ensure the full participation of all. The use of assessment, through marking as well as peer- and self-assessment, is a growing area of strength, enabling students in most subjects to gain a clear understanding of how well they are doing and how to improve. Teachers recognise the varying needs of students in their classes, and in the best lessons adapt tasks according to those needs. However, in the minority of lessons where the teaching is no better than satisfactory, assessment information is not used well enough to adapt the challenge of tasks, so that some students find work too easy while some find it too difficult. In a few lessons the pace of learning is slowed because students are too reliant on the teacher for direction and are not encouraged to seek solutions for themselves.

The Key Stage 4 curriculum has recently been strengthened to ensure that students across the attainment range are now offered pathways which suit their academic, vocational or skills needs and interests, and which offer a suitable number of fully accredited courses. The quality and range of the courses on offer are broadened by the schools active partnership with local schools and colleges, and monitored by effective quality assurance procedures. The school has fallen short of its targets in its specialist subjects of technology, mathematics and science, although substantial improvements are now evident here in the quality of provision and in students learning. The Key Stage 3 curriculum offers more time to English and mathematics to develop students literacy and numeracy skills, but there is little formal planning to develop these skills through other subjects. A focus from Key Stage 3 on developing students key learning skills appears to be contributing to students improved approaches and aspirations in the classroom.

Pastoral care is very effective, especially for students in the most vulnerable circumstances. The school has developed close links with outside agencies, and strengthened its capacity to engage with students families in tailoring the most appropriate support. Persistent absence has, however, been reducing only slowly, and remains a source of underachievement for some. Behaviour management strategies are now consistently implemented by teachers and well understood by students, who value the rewards offered and increasingly understand the consequences of their actions. Instances of bullying are dealt with swiftly. The school offers good advice, guidance and support for students when they join the school from primary schools and when they choose their pathways for Key Stage 4 and beyond.

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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	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Self-evaluation has improved at all levels in the school because of much sharper use of performance data on the progress of individuals, groups and classes than was evident at the last inspection. This has enabled leaders and managers at all levels to identify areas of weakness and plan coherent actions to overcome these. These actions have yet to have full impact in all areas, so some groups, especially in Year 11, continue to underperform, and there is some variation in the quality of learning across and between subjects.

However, such gaps are closing, confirming that the schools actions to promote equality of opportunity are satisfactory. A comprehensive programme for the monitoring, support and development of teaching is having a significant impact on improving teachers planning, classroom management, and use of assessment to support learning. The school has made engagement with parents and carers a key area of focus this year and a good start has been made by improving the flow of information and developing the programmes of activities to work with families.

The governing body has been very successful in recruiting governors with a breadth of skills to help, together with school managers, to lead the school successfully and manage its move into new premises. Governors have recently received training in the analysis of school performance and have begun to hold the school more sharply to account for its academic performance, which has been a key area for governors development. They have monitored the schools progress against its notice to improve in monthly meetings, and are involved with subjects in school self-evaluation days in September and October after GCSE results. Procedures to secure the safety and well-being of staff and students are effective and safeguarding requirements are fully met. The school is actively promoting community cohesion within the school and local community. The impact of its work can be seen in a largely cohesive school community and improving local perceptions of the school, evident in a large demand for admissions to Year 7. However, the school recognises the need to engage more actively with the wider national and global communities to broaden the horizons of its students and deepen their understanding of cultural diversity.

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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	2
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	2

Sixth form

Students join with grades which are generally lower than those found in sixth forms nationally, and largely follow academic courses at level 3. Pass rates are broadly average but attainment overall is below average because fewer students pass at the higher grades of A and B than is the case nationally. Students progress is satisfactory overall. There is clearly an improving trend in attainment over three years, especially at the higher grades. There have been some marked variations in students attainment and progress between subjects over time, but their current performance suggests that many of these inconsistencies have been overcome. Retention in-year on AS-level and A-level courses is generally good, although a high proportion, nearly a third, leave after their first year in the sixth form and do not move on from AS level to A level. Students mostly enjoy the sixth form and particularly value the high quality of pastoral and academic support and guidance they receive from teachers, tutors and sixth form leaders. Nonetheless, opportunities for involvement in the school and wider community are limited, as are opportunities for extra-curricular sport.

There is much good teaching in the sixth form which provides students with appropriate challenge and gives them the opportunity to take responsibility for their learning and to work independently. Assessment is mostly well used to show students how to improve their work. However, as in the main school, assessment information is not always well used to adapt tasks to suit the sometimes wide range of abilities in the class. Through detailed monitoring of teaching, learning and students progress, sixth form leaders have undertaken thorough self-evaluation and produced an ambitious improvement plan which is already yielding improving attainment and closing gaps in progress between subjects. A clear vision has been established for an ethos of high quality in all aspects of the sixth form which is shared by staff and students alike.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

The response to the parents and carers questionnaire on this inspection was three times as high as for the previous inspection a little over a year ago. This reflects the schools generally stronger engagement with parents and carers, and responses suggest that parents and carers generally have a favourable view of the school. A few parents and carers wrote in praise of the schools provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, although a similar number wrote with criticisms centred on the lack of appropriate provision in class and a reduction of teaching assistant support. Inspectors found that the level of teaching assistant support had been reduced through a combination of budget constraints and decisions about the quality of provision. Where teaching assistants were present they provided good support for students. Generally teachers were very much aware of the needs of students in their classes, although the quality of teachers planning to meet students various needs in lessons, while improving, continues to be variable. A very small number of parents and carers raised concerns over students behaviour and instances of bullying, and although most acknowledged that the school dealt quickly with bullying not all agreed with the actions taken by the school. Some took issue with aspects of the schools behaviour management policy. Inspectors found that students behaviour has continued to improve in the school, partly as a result of clear and consistent implementation of the schools behaviour policy. There remain instances of inconsiderate behaviour which distract students from their learning. The school has clear procedures for dealing with bullying, and appears to implement these quickly and effectively in most cases. A small number of parents and carers felt that communication between home and school was not good. Inspectors found that the school had made improvement in this area a key priority for this year, and was introducing positive changes. Some parents and carers felt that not enough homework was set. Inspectors found that homework levels did vary, and that there was not a regular homework timetable because the school wants teachers to set purposeful rather than routine homework. Students do not always use their planners well enough to record the homework they have been given.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Melksham Oak Community 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 194 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1114 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	44	23	130	67	15	8	4	2
The school keeps my child safe	55	28	132	68	5	3	2	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	63	32	120	62	8	4	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	56	29	116	60	16	8	4	2
The teaching is good at this school	39	20	138	71	5	3	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	35	18	126	65	21	11	3	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	18	9	135	70	28	14	1	1
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)	37	19	130	67	12	6	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	41	21	130	67	11	6	4	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	31	16	107	55	37	19	10	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	25	13	121	62	27	14	3	2
The school is led and managed effectively	46	24	128	66	10	5	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	53	27	121	62	16	8	2	1

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.



25 March 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Melksham Oak Community School, Melksham SN12 6QZ

Many thanks for the welcome you gave to me and my colleagues when we visited the school for its recent inspection. You have an impressive new site and building, and you are clearly responding well to your new surroundings. We found many aspects of the school to be improving, and judge the school to be providing you with a satisfactory quality of education.

Your achievement is now satisfactory. Attainment in GCSE examinations and in the sixth form is below average but improving. You learn well in the majority of lessons because teachers often plan lessons which are relevant and interesting, and keep your learning active and varied. You know your targets well and have a clear understanding of how to improve your work. You are well looked after, and most of those who we spoke to or who completed our questionnaire said they feel very safe in the school. School leaders keep a close eye on the quality of education you receive, and have taken effective measures to improve the general quality of teaching across the school.

While the school has made significant improvements, our inspection report indicates a number of areas for further development. Firstly, students attainment and progress have not risen evenly, and there remains some variation in performance between subjects and groups of students which the school needs to address further. Secondly, the quality of teaching still varies between lessons. We have asked the school to ensure that best practice is shared widely among teachers, and that teachers plan lessons which adapt tasks to meet the full range of abilities in their classes. We have also asked that you should be given further opportunities to take responsibility for your own learning, as you do in the best lessons, and to develop your literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum.

I am sure that you will all make your contribution to the schools improvement by continuing to display positive attitudes to learning. I wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson

Her Majestys Inspector

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