

Great Oaks School

Vermont Road, Southampton, SO16 7LT

Inspection dates 5–6 February 2013

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Teaching is typically good and has improved over time. Some teaching is outstanding.
- School leaders and teachers nearly always have high expectations of their pupils. This has led to more pupils making better progress over time.
- As a result of better teaching, the vast majority of pupils reach their potential, taking into account their different starting points.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and they settle to work quickly in class. They say that they feel safe at school and they enjoy lessons. Low level disruption to lessons very rarely occurs.
- School leaders, including members of the governing body, know their school well. Their careful self-evaluation has provided them with good information about its strengths and weaknesses.
- The sixth form is good. Standards have risen sharply because of better teaching and more activities which are closely matched to the needs of students. All are very well prepared for the next stages of their education and lives.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In a few lessons teachers' expectations of pupils are not high enough and work is not well planned. As a result, there is a small amount of teaching that requires improvement.
- In these lessons the work of teaching assistants is not well organised.
- The gains made by pupils in some activities, both on and off site, are not always organised in such a way as to provide certificates or other credits for their achievements.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors spent over seven hours in classes observing 21 lessons taught by 17 teachers. The school’s new internet learning platform was scrutinised to see how it contributes to raising standards.
- An inspector met a group of pupils to hear their views about how the school helps them to make progress, to talk to them about their achievements and to listen to their views about how the school could be even better.
- Detailed analysis was carried out of school documentation including its programmes for self-evaluation, its work to improve the curriculum for all pupils and how it helps them to stay safe.
- Meetings were held with school leaders including members of the governing body. An inspector met a local authority representative to gain their view of the school’s performance. Staff views were evaluated by means of the questionnaires returned and through meetings with teachers.
- An insufficient number of parents completed the Parent View questionnaire, but an analysis of how the school gathers the views of parents and carers was carried out.
- On learning walks and during classroom visits, inspectors noted the quality of the displays in corridors and other areas. These illustrate the wide range of activities which are undertaken by pupils in school and in the wider community.

Inspection team

Bob Pugh, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Helen Howard

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Pupils who attend Great Oaks School have either moderate or severe learning difficulties. Some have additional physical or sensory needs such as a hearing or visual impairment. A growing number of pupils have an autistic spectrum condition. Students in the school's sixth form tend to have more complex learning difficulties.
- Pupils are admitted to this school from a number of different settings, including primary and secondary mainstream schools and a primary phase special school.
- Most pupils and students live in Southampton. A few travel to school from other parts of Hampshire.
- There are very many more boys than girls at the school. Approximately 15% of pupils come from backgrounds other than White British. Almost all have English as their home language.
- All pupils and students have statements of special educational needs and the number known to be entitled to receive the pupil premium (which provides funding for children in local authority care, children from service families and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals) is much higher than the national average.
- A few years ago the school gained specialist status in arts.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Extend the range of accredited courses available to all pupils so that they can gain recognition for the work they undertake in school clubs, on residential visits and on activity afternoons.
- Raise even higher the standard of teaching by:
 - ensuring that in every lesson teaching assistants are always fully engaged helping pupils to do their very best
 - making even better use of questioning so that teachers always have excellent information about how well each individual is doing.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- When pupils join the school they have learning levels which are well below the national average. Very many make good or better progress than pupils with similar needs in other schools. As a result, they are well prepared for the next stages of their education or training by the time they are ready to leave.
- Some pupils achieve good GCSE passes in art. Others gain passes in a range of subjects in Entry Level courses or in the ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) programme.
- Pupils read regularly in lessons. They talk enthusiastically about the books they have chosen, whilst others show great pleasure as they describe what is in photographs and pictures using voice production technology.
- Very many pupils achieve well because their behaviour improves over time. A particularly good example of this can be seen in the improved attitudes and achievements of one pupil when his teachers encouraged him to take on a leading role in a city football team.
- There are no variations in the rates of progress made by different groups at the school. Girls achieve as well as boys. Pupils entitled to receive the pupil premium support, and those known to be entitled to free school meals, make gains which compare favourably with others because school leaders have provided additional teaching to boost standards in literacy and numeracy.
- Pupils who have more complex needs, including visual impairment or physical disabilities, fully use the good range of technological resources available to participate in all lessons and activities and, as a result, they achieve well.
- Well presented displays around the school, together with photographs and written work in pupils' and students' files, demonstrate that the pupils and students make great leaps forward with physical skills, in drama and in music. However, their efforts in these activities are not always recognised with suitable accreditation.
- In one particularly strong music lesson, pupils demonstrated great understanding of their task as they very successfully used new technologies to compose and play their own tunes. The depth of their understanding of the task was further demonstrated when they showed appreciation of the work of others in this lesson.
- Students' achievements in the sixth form are good. The students are justifiably proud of the accreditation they gain for the hard work they put into learning to become more independent in school and in the wider community.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is typically good at this school. Teachers have high expectations that their pupils and students will work hard and do well. As a result, pupils are enthusiastic, complete their tasks on time and learn quickly.
- Teachers regularly check how much pupils and students have understood in lessons by carefully questioning them and asking them to talk to others about their achievements. In two good technology lessons, pupils demonstrated that they had fully understood the tasks required of them when teachers asked them to assess their own work and to comment on their friends' achievements. However, in a very few lessons, teachers do not use pupils' good answers to stretch their learning further by encouraging discussion and debate.
- In a highly effective English lesson, pupils read the symbols which the teacher had carefully displayed around the room. Because of the very good planning where resources were closely matched to pupils' needs, the pupils were able to find their way around and work independently to the best of their abilities.
- In almost all lessons teachers use opportunities available to improve pupils' skills in numeracy

and literacy. In an exceptionally strong science lesson, pupils were challenged to estimate distance; whilst in a strong art lesson, pupils' literacy skills were enhanced as the pupils were challenged to read and write words and phrases related to their design task.

- Because teachers know their pupils so well, they plan lessons which prompt each one to do their very best. In a good sixth form lesson, the teacher encouraged one confident writer to list the suggestions made by others to create a shopping list. Each student offered good suggestions about items they would need using signs and symbols.
- Teachers use the school's customised learning platform very well to provide guidance on homework and to keep parents and carers informed of their child's progress.
- In a small number of lessons, teaching assistants do not play an active role in providing information about how well pupils are doing. On these few occasions, teachers are not able to use pupils' ideas or to challenge pupils to do even better.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils, including students in the sixth form, show very positive attitudes to learning in almost all lessons. They are polite to each other and to staff and visitors and form good relationships. They show pride in their achievements and discuss their good ideas for how the school might be even better. Learning is very rarely interrupted by difficult behaviour.
- Members of the local community, including those who work at further education colleges, are very positive about pupils' good behaviour.
- Pupils are ready to learn as soon as they come into class. No time is wasted. For example, in a well-paced information and communication technology (ICT) lesson, pupils settled remarkably quickly to their tasks and worked hard with great concentration to improve a design brief.
- Bullying rarely occurs and, when it does, is dealt with rapidly and efficiently by well-trained staff. Pupils confirm that they know who will help them if they feel worried or concerned. It is extremely rare for a pupil to be excluded from the school for any reason.
- Pupils are given good advice about internet bullying. They have excellent opportunities to find out about staying safe on line when using the school's learning platform. However, sometimes there is insufficient use of sign and symbols to ensure that every pupil has information presented to them in the most appropriate way.
- The school's house system encourages pupils to take pride in their work and in their environment. Pupils respond positively by discussing their good ideas in school council meetings. School captains help other pupils to feel very safe.
- Parents and carers are very positive about the improvements in their children's behaviour whilst their children are at the school, judging from their contributions to annual review meetings.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and his senior colleagues provide good leadership because they have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and the areas in which it must improve. As a result, the school has a good capacity to improve even further.
- Leaders monitor lessons regularly and use the information gained to good effect. Teachers' performance management targets are closely linked to boosting pupils' achievements. This has led to higher standards of teaching, resulting in more pupils making better progress towards their targets.
- School leaders have strengthened the curriculum even further by promoting new technologies very effectively. At the same time they have ensured that in all subjects there is a particular focus on raising standards in literacy and numeracy and developing good communication skills.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is very well promoted. Pupils learn about similarities and differences amongst people who enjoy diverse lifestyles and have many opportunities to take part in music, drama and residential trips as well as to learn about the local

and wider environment.

- As a result, pupils (including students in the sixth form) achieve well. Almost all transfer successfully to further education colleges or to training programmes when they leave school.
- Staff speak highly of opportunities for professional development, including the support they receive from colleagues to build up their expertise and subject knowledge.
- School staff, parents and carers and pupils are united in the view that standards have improved in the recent past.
- The local authority has supported the school by monitoring its progress since the last inspection. It has received reports on pupils' achievements from the headteacher as well as evaluations on overall performance from the school's improvement partner.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - School governors challenge leaders to raise standards even further by careful questioning of the information they receive at meetings, backed up by regular monitoring visits and meetings with staff. This gives them in-depth understanding of the quality of teaching and how well pupils are achieving. Governors have ensured that everyone in the school community is as safe as they can be by ensuring that all statutory procedures are in place and that staff are well trained. Performance management of school leaders is aligned closely to the achievement of agreed targets and governors understand how decisions about staff salaries are linked to their individual targets. Financial management is sound and governors have used the pupil premium well to provide additional support for those pupils who are entitled to receive it. As a result, standards have risen for everyone.

What inspection judgements mean

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

School details

Unique reference number	116621
Local authority	Southampton
Inspection number	405655

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation
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	137
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	10
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Zena Hilton
Headteacher	Andy Evans
Date of previous school inspection	24–25 January 2011
Telephone number	023 8076 7660
Fax number	023 8076 7643
Email address	info@greatoaks.southampton.sch.uk

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