

Oakley School

Pembury Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN2 4NE

Inspection dates

13–14 March 2013

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Pupils' achievement requires improvement. While rates of progress are generally improving, they are too slow in Key Stage 3.
- Subject leaders do not always make sure that teachers are using up-to-date information about pupils to improve the teaching and learning of reading, writing and mathematics, especially for pupils in Key Stage 3.
- Teachers' marking lacks precision about what pupils need to do to improve their work. Pupils do not know their targets well enough and there are not enough opportunities for pupils to correct their mistakes and to reflect on their next steps in their learning.
- Leaders and managers do not always make sure that the qualifications obtained at the end of Key Stage 4 are the best possible to match the abilities of all pupils.
- Recently appointed governors are not sufficiently trained to hold the school to account in all areas of its work. This includes the difference the use of pupil premium funding is making on the progress of pupils having free school meals.

The school has the following strengths

- Behaviour is good. Pupils are eager to learn and engage well in their lessons. Attendance has improved and is now average. There are few exclusions.
- The school provides well for pupils with communication and motor skills difficulties so they make good progress.
- The sixth form is good. Most students develop independent life skills through a wide range of qualifications that prepares them well for their next stage in life.
- After the previous inspection there was a dip in the school's performance but since the appointment of the new headteacher & senior team the school is moving forward at a significantly faster pace.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 23 lessons, 15 of which were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, the inspection team made short visits to other lessons, looked at pupils' work and heard them read.
- Meetings were held with staff, pupils and seven members of the governing body including the Chair, and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 30 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View), as well as two letters addressed to the lead inspector and 44 questionnaires completed by staff.
- The inspection team scrutinised a range of documentation including nationally published data and the school's own data, the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans, safeguarding policies and records and documents relating to performance management.

Inspection team

Justina Ilochi, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Jackie Blount	Additional Inspector
Peter Hare	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a special school situated on a split site, with the primary and secondary sections seven miles apart.
- About a quarter of the pupils are girls. The rest are boys.
- The great majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has experienced a period of turbulence with major changes. The headteacher had been in post for only eleven and a half weeks prior to this inspection. Many staff are new in post and half the governing body is also new.
- The number of pupils known to be eligible for additional funding through the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, children who are looked after by the local authority and children of service families) is almost double the national average.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. About three quarters of pupils have severe learning difficulties (SLD), moderate learning difficulties (MLD), or are on the autistic spectrum (AS). The rest have complex medical and physical needs. A large proportion of pupils have underlying speech, language and communication difficulties and a few have motor skills difficulties.
- The school offers outdoor learning, advice, support and training through the Woodland Learning Lodge for its pupils, schools and colleges within its community. This is an outreach service.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teaching is consistently good by:
 - making sure that all pupils know how well they are doing and what they need to do next through high quality marking and feedback during lessons
 - making sure teachers involve pupils more in their learning through opportunities for self-assessment and peer learning.
- Improve the rates of progress of pupils by:
 - ensuring teachers use up-to-date assessment information when planning lessons so that they can build effectively on pupils' existing knowledge and skills, and match tasks to the needs of pupils of all abilities
 - ensuring that qualifications obtained at the end of Key Stage 4 closely match the abilities of pupils.
- Improve the quality of leadership by:
 - increasing the involvement of subject leaders in checking and improving the use of assessment information for planning the teaching and learning of reading, writing and mathematics, especially in Key Stage 3
 - ensuring that newly appointed governors continue to improve their skills to enable them to take a more active and challenging role in discussions about pupil progress.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because not enough pupils make rapid progress over time, especially at the end of Key Stage 3. Progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 3 has remained slower than for other key stages.
- Pupils' progress in English and mathematics slows in Key Stages 3, particularly in reading. The school recognises this and, since September 2012, has used a structured reading programme in Year 8 and Year 9 so these pupils are starting to make expected progress. Progress of reading in Year 7 is still too slow.
- Pupils on the secondary school site do not always consistently make the progress they are capable of. This is because a few teachers do not consistently use their knowledge of pupils' previous learning to set appropriate, step-by-step targets.
- Progress by the end of Year 11 improved overall this year. There has been a rising trend in the progress made in mathematics over two years and the proportion of pupils meeting and exceeding national expectations is now broadly in line with the national average. Progress in English is slower and fewer pupils met or exceeded expected progress in the last two years.
- Pupils enter the school, especially on the primary site, with very complex medical and physical needs, including autistic spectrum disorder. They are working on skills well below the expected level for their age. Improvements to teaching and deployment of resources are now ensuring that pupils are beginning to make good progress at the end of Key Stage 2.
- Progress in the sixth form is now good. Pupils are expected to obtain a wide range of vocational qualifications, with emphasis on independence and life skills that include literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology (ICT) and functional skills, as well as opportunities in horticulture and catering which will prepare them well for their next steps in life.
- The range of qualifications suitable for more able pupils in the sixth form, such as those with mild learning difficulties, is currently rather limited.
- Pupils on free school meals and eligible for the pupil premium funding have made similar progress to other pupils in the school. Pupils on the autistic spectrum, especially on the primary site, have made better progress from very low starting points compared with other pupils. Governors and school leaders have ensured that the pupil premium funding is used for increased guidance and help in one-to-one or small groups.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement as it is too inconsistent. As a result, rates of progress are not fast enough for too many pupils. Too many lessons do not provide opportunities for pupils to get involved with their learning through peer or self-assessment.
- Pupils are not always told clearly enough what is expected of them. In the best lessons, pupils are provided with clear and specific aims which set out what they have to do to reach their next learning levels, but these are not routinely referred to when work is marked, or when it is planned.
- The marking of pupils' work is inconsistent and there are not enough opportunities for pupils to correct their mistakes and reflect on how they could improve. Teachers' guidance often lacks precision.
- The quality of teaching is beginning to improve as a result of the strengthened leadership and monitoring by the newly formed leadership team. Actions taken to improve teaching are beginning to boost the progress of pupils who are underperforming.
- Adults who support pupils in need of additional help are effective in meeting their pupils' specific learning needs. Pupils on the primary site who have complex needs, including pupils on the autistic spectrum, benefit from strong teaching.

- A strong team of expert professionals, made up of speech, language and communication specialists and occupational therapists, has ensured that the communication, literacy and motor skills of pupils with complex needs continue to improve.
- Where teaching is effective, teachers set work that accurately meets the needs of all pupils. Pupils with mild learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties and pupils on the autistic spectrum are given suitably challenging tasks.
- The school has recently started to tackle weaknesses in the teaching of phonics (letters and sounds they make). As a result, reading is increasingly well taught and pupils are encouraged to read widely in most year groups. There are now good opportunities for pupils to read and talk about books with other adults, as well as their teachers, every day.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is good overall and sometimes outstanding. In an outstanding sixth form enterprise lesson focused on cooking, pupils wore uniforms and simulated the working environment in a hotel kitchen. They carried out the high expectations of the teacher which were to work in teams to make quiche for sale. Pupils developed excellent independent skills as well as communication and numeracy skills.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. A positive climate for learning is established throughout the school and there are caring relationships established between staff and pupils which promote good attitudes to learning, even where work is not matched to the ability of the pupils. Clear classroom behaviour routines ensure that children are ready to learn.
- Pupils demonstrate good social skills. Most are confident speakers, especially in the sixth form, and engage articulately in conversation with adults and other pupils. Pupils are generally respectful of adults and each other. They are generally polite and courteous to visitors. They are taught how to manage their emotions in particular lessons designed for the purpose.
- Evidence gathered during this inspection showed that incidences of bullying are infrequent and dealt with swiftly. Members of the school council told inspectors that they are aware of different forms of bullying but say it is not a problem and that they feel safe.
- Parents and carers as well as staff have confirmed that behaviour is consistently good and pupils are safe. The school does not tolerate discrimination of any kind.
- Having been below average for some years, attendance has improved and is now in line with the national average. Procedures for dealing with attendance and punctuality are having a positive effect.
- Regular assemblies are used successfully to encourage pupils' spiritual, cultural, moral and social development and their impact is felt in the pupils' respect for diversity and how well pupils treat one another.

The leadership and management require improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because leaders have not used assessment information well enough to ensure that pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Consequently, qualifications at the end of Key Stage 4 and the sixth form were not checked with a focus on the potential of pupils.
- This is an improving situation, however, and systems and procedures for monitoring and checking that assessment of pupils is rigorous, robust and accurate have been developed in the last year. All pupils have now been given appropriate and demanding end of key stage targets.
- Managing staff performance is closely tied to training opportunities for staff and is improving the quality of teaching strongly. Staff benefit from working closely with the local authority to improve teaching. However, subject leaders do not hold the staff to account sufficiently to ensure that planning for lessons takes account of updated assessment information. As a result, some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching remain, especially at Key Stage 3.

- Leaders at all levels are committed to the school's success. There is secure capacity for improvement, as shown in the careful recruitment and deployment of the teaching staff, all of whom have been trained and developed professionally, to make the necessary improvements to the quality of teaching.
- The school's self-evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses is robust and there is a suitably focused action plan to tackle areas requiring improvement, especially in Key Stage 3.
- The curriculum meets the pupils' needs well and there is a good range of extra-curricular opportunities which includes outdoor learning in the Woodland Learning Lodge to extend the learning of pupils beyond the classroom. This excellent resource is used well by schools and further education colleges to promote deeper and more reflective learning.
- The school works well with parents to ensure that they are fully aware of the school's work, including details of curricular provision, and provides training for parents to support their children's learning at home.
- The local authority has provided good support for the school and has been involved with training of school staff and governors.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Members of the governing body undertake relevant training so as to keep the school continuously under review. They have identified what training they need and how to access it. However, half of its members are new and the turbulence of the last two years has led to a focus on the appointment of a suitable headteacher, senior leadership team and staff for the school. The governing body had gaps in knowledge and skills, especially the ability to hold the school to account for the performance of all its pupils. The governing body has a greater understanding now of what the school is doing well and where it could do better. The governors are now getting more involved with checking the school's effectiveness. They keep a close eye on the pupil premium funding and how it is being used, but they do not fully understand what difference it is making to the progress of pupils and whether all actions on behalf of pupils eligible for free school meals are leading to improved progress. The governing body has ensured that the school's self-evaluation and planned actions are linked to staff training and has developed strong links with parents to find out their views about the school. All statutory requirements, including those relating to safeguarding, are met. The governing body holds the school to account for managing its finances and pay is closely aligned to teachers' performance. The governors recognise that teachers' pay should be based on how well their pupils are doing and are working towards that.

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	132148
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	402542

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	174
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	35
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Karen Senior
Headteacher	Gordon Tillman
Date of previous school inspection	25–26 January 2010
Telephone number	01892 823096
Fax number	01892 823836
Email address	office@oakley.kent.sch.uk

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