

# The Oaks Secondary School

Rock Road, Spennymoor, Durham, DL16 7DB

**Inspection dates** 18–19 April 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>1</b>
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an outstanding school.

- The inspiring headteacher provides a clear vision for the school with a leadership team sharing her drive for improvement. Together, with the skilled and effective contribution of governance, the school has excellent capacity for continued improvements.
- Management of the teaching quality is highly effective and this has ensured that students have made ever-increasing progress following the last inspection. However, leaders in all subjects do not always ensure that monitoring improves the consistency of assessment of students' work.
- Students make outstanding progress, particularly in their personal development. This means they are exceptionally well-prepared for the next stage in their education or training.
- Students also make outstanding progress in English and mathematics. They apply these subjects extremely well to all lessons leading to credible achievements in other subjects.
- The outstanding teaching provides well-planned lessons and relevant activities which constantly challenge students' thinking and understanding. However, there is not always consistency from teachers with feedback in students' books and files on how they can improve their work.
- Excellent systems are in place that ensures that students' progress is tracked rigorously and consistently across the school.
- The sixth form is providing high quality teaching and preparing students extremely well for applying their skills in an adult situation.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and behaviour is exemplary. Students work hard and live up to the high expectations set for them to ensure that their behaviour is outstanding. Students are happy being in school and say they feel safe, secure and well cared for.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 24 lessons and part-lessons taught by 22 teachers.
- The headteacher conducted one joint observation of teaching and a learning walk with inspectors.
- The inspectors carried out four learning walks to observe behaviour, curriculum, spiritual, moral and social and cultural provision and the sixth form.
- The inspection team had discussions with the headteacher, senior leaders, teachers, members of the governing body, students and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspection team looked at the work of the school including students' behaviour and analysed documentation in relation to attendance, safeguarding, students' work, self-evaluation and the school's system for checking on students' progress.
- Twelve responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) were available to help plan the inspection. The inspectors formally met a group of parents during the school day for their comments.

## Inspection team

Ann Muxworthy, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Pauline Pitman

Additional Inspector

Sally Hicks

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The Oaks school is a larger than average secondary special school. All the students have a statement of special educational needs.
- The large majority of students has moderate learning difficulties. There are small minorities of students with severe learning difficulties and autism and a very small minority with profound multiple learning difficulties.
- A well-above average proportion of students is known to be eligible for the pupil premium funding. The pupil premium is additional funding for those who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children that are looked after by the local authority.
- A below-average proportion of students is from minority ethnic backgrounds and a similar proportion speaks English as an additional language. Most students are of White British heritage.
- The school holds the Healthy Schools Award, Investing in Children Award and Rights Respecting School Award.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the assessment of learning, by:
  - ensuring that teachers regularly provide comments in students' books and files on how they can improve their learning
  - ensuring that subject leaders monitor the quality of feedback to students to get greater consistency across the school.

## Inspection judgements

### **The achievement of pupils** is outstanding.

- All students who attend the school have a statement of special educational needs to meet their learning difficulties. As a result of the highly skilled approach of staff to meeting students' needs, all groups, including those with autism spectrum conditions, those of White British origin, those eligible for the pupil premium and those known to be eligible for free school meals make outstanding progress.
- The overwhelming majority has knowledge and skills well below those expected for their age. A significant number also lacks the behavioural skills required for learning. Teachers are exceptionally skilled at behaviour management and, as a result, students make excellent progress socially, emotionally and academically.
- Students achieve equally well in English and mathematics because staff are outstanding at matching activities to meet their needs. For example, in a lesson for students with a high level of need, they were excitedly practised number bonds through physical exercise, chanting numbers in sequence forwards then backwards. Following this, a well-planned engaging activity using carefully chosen objects showed how well they had understood the value of money.
- Each student's skills and aptitudes in English and mathematics are developed carefully as they progress through the school. From Key Stage 3 onwards the ability of students to utilise these skills in real situations develops rapidly, with the result that the majority leaves with a qualification in the functional use of both English and mathematics which is extremely valuable. Further, some gain GCSE qualifications in a range of subjects including English, mathematics, science, art and history.
- Parents agree that their children make exceptional progress and were keen to share their views with the inspection team. The view of one summed up the feelings of many: 'The school has helped my child get back to school. When he has a problem they ease him back, give him a lot of time and consider his needs. This is a very caring professional school and all staff help. He is doing well here.'

### **The quality of teaching** is outstanding.

- Teaching across the school is outstanding because teachers and support staff are exceptionally good at meeting the diverse needs of all students. Monitoring shows that it has improved year on year following the last inspection.
- Teachers monitor students' progress carefully and check their learning regularly in lessons using a good variety of strategies. However, there is not consistency in giving pointers to students on how they can improve their work in their books and files.
- Teachers and support staff plan together to ensure that teaching meets the needs of each student. As a result, each student learns exceptionally well.
- All staff are excellent at meeting the communication and physical needs of all students. The well-trained staff use highly effective strategies to enable students to access their learning. This was demonstrated in an extremely successful lesson where students, whilst carrying out energetic physical exercise collecting cones, then practised numbers to support their learning.
- Students enjoy their lessons enormously because they say their teachers challenge them to work hard. One student in a lesson proudly showed a reading log and commented on the score of two million words read saying, 'I'm doing well aren't I?.'
- Teachers use questioning effectively to check understanding systematically as the lesson proceeds. Subsequently, they adjust their teaching based on their assessment to ensure each student is achieving their best. For example, in a lesson on St. George's Day a student gave an example of English culture as Shakespeare who wrote Romeo and Juliet, and then elaborated with an example of Dickens.
- Students learn exceptionally well through inspirational approaches with a focus on achievement.

Excellent opportunities are provided for students to take responsibility for their own learning, working independently or with a partner.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils is outstanding.**

- High expectations, positive staff role models, consistent approaches in managing behaviour and effective use of praise, all contribute to students feeling exceptionally safe at all times.
- Students show a high level of respect and caring attitudes towards each other and staff. This is encouraged through the school's strong focus on 'Rights and Respect'. Students are thoughtful and calm as they move around the building, holding doors open for staff and visitors without prompting. In discussions, parents, staff and students speak extremely positively about the excellent standard of behaviour in school.
- School leaders' philosophy on emphasising positive behaviour is clearly reflected in the implementation of the behaviour policy. All staff use the same consistent approach and, as a result, students respond to the high expectations of them managing their own behaviour. One student said, 'I come here for head space and time out,' as he elected to work in a small room next to his classroom.
- Conversations with students reveal that they are fully aware of what constitutes bullying. They report that there are very few incidents of bullying and harassment. Students speak confidently about how staff are always on hand to help them if they have a worry or upset. They demonstrate an excellent grasp of how to avoid risk and danger.
- The school has worked extremely diligently to improve attendance which is now above average. This has included highly effective work with specialist support agencies and families, in addition to the benefits of meaningful rewards for students' improved attendance.
- The vast majority of students say they, 'love coming to school'. Staff relentlessly and successfully focus on supporting students' personal and social development. For example a group of older more-able students was encouraged to assist a group of students with autism to support their learning. Further, a student described the school as, 'It's a perfect school for the disabled, it is a Utopia.'

### **The leadership and management is outstanding.**

- The exceptional leadership of the headteacher has moved the school on significantly since the last inspection. Together with her able leadership team and governance of the school they provide a clear vision for the school's continuous improvement.
- Self-evaluation processes are clear, concise and insightful, demonstrating leaders' excellent understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement within the school.
- The continuous and relentless focus by the leadership team on improving the quality of teaching has resulted in a significant improvement in the quality of lessons and students' achievement since the last inspection. However, there is some lack of consistency in monitoring assessment in students' books and files to ensure that students understand how to improve their learning.
- School leaders' clear and explicit belief that every child should make as much academic progress as possible is reflected in the diverse and bespoke approach taken to planning the curriculum, which is matched very well to the needs of all students.
- Students, staff and parents feel they are highly valued in the school community. The school's atmosphere promotes equality of opportunity extremely well and tackles discrimination promptly.
- The diverse and extensive range of enrichment activities including visits, visitors and after-school activities adds to the richness and enjoyment of students' learning. This has a very positive impact on students' emotional well-being and contributes exceptionally well to their excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Safeguarding meets requirements with much effective practice strengthening the high quality of

care and support for students and their families.

- The clear picture of sustained and exceptional improvement within the school is recognised by the local authority which provides light touch support.
  - **The governance of the school:**
    - the governing body offers excellent support and challenge to school leaders to have high quality provision. This has led to additional funding being accessed from the local authority to improve accommodation and maintain high quality provision for the sixth form.
    - makes highly effective use of performance management to improve school outcomes for students continuously, including for those known to be eligible for the pupil premium.
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## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	134662
<b>Local authority</b>	Durham
<b>Inspection number</b>	403825

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	243
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	32
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Clive Hubery
<b>Headteacher</b>	Andrea English
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	24 May 2010
<b>Telephone number</b>	01388 827380
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