

Oak Grove College

The Boulevard, Worthing, BN13 1JX

Inspection dates 11–12 December 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and students

This is a good school.

- Students make good progress in many different subjects. They are very well prepared for their next stage of education, work or training.
- Students' progress in English and mathematics has improved considerably since the last inspection.
- Students make outstanding progress in some subjects, including art, music, physical education and work-related subjects such as gardening.
- Teaching is typically good and sometimes outstanding. Teachers' subject knowledge is good or better. They know their students well.
- Students behave well. They try hard and do their best. They get on well together and say they feel safe and happy in school.
- Sixth form provision is outstanding. The wide choice of subjects offered is tailored to each individual's needs. This means that students make outstanding progress and are very well prepared for the next stage of their lives.
- The college is well led and managed by the headteacher. His vision for high standards is shared by all staff and supported well by experienced leaders and managers. As a result, many aspects of the college, including teaching, achievement and the sixth form, have improved.
- Governors regularly visit the school and hold leaders to account. They have a good understanding of all aspects of the college's work, including teaching and achievement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Some teachers give written feedback to students that helps them to improve their work. This is not yet consistent across the college.
- In Key Stage 3, teachers sometimes assess the English work of a few of the more able students too generously. This means that the activities they plan do not always help these students to make even faster progress.
- New leaders and managers regularly check the school's performance. They do not yet use the information well enough to plan further improvements.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 30 lessons in a range of subjects and year groups, including in the sixth form. They also visited some support sessions for individual students.
- Nine lessons were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors took account of the 11 responses to the online parents’ survey, Parent View, and of the school’s own survey of parents’ feedback. They also took account of two letters from parents received during the inspection.
- They held meetings with various members of staff and with representatives from the governing body and the local authority. An inspector also met with the school improvement partner, an external adviser who supports the college. Inspectors spoke to students and observed behaviour in lessons and around the school.
- The inspectors also looked at documentation about teaching, planning and students’ progress. The school’s documents on safeguarding were scrutinised, together with records of attendance and students’ behaviour.
- Inspectors listened to students reading and looked at their work.

Inspection team

Helen Howard, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Clementina Olufunke Aina	Additional inspector
Andrew Penman	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Oak Grove College is a community special school for students aged 11 to 19 who have a range of special educational needs, including moderate learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties or autistic spectrum disorders. A small number have profound and multiple learning difficulties. Most students are White British.
- Students are taught in groups that are based on their needs.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for students known to be entitled to free school meals and those in care) is above average.
- Sixty-seven students aged 16 to 19 attend the sixth form. Those who follow the one-year transition course also attend Northbrook College, Worthing or Chichester College, Pulborough for two days each week. Other students choose a two- or three-year course at Oak Grove.
- Occasionally, students follow subjects at Durrington High School, Worthing High School or Worthing College, local secondary mainstream schools.
- Since the previous inspection, the college has become part of a federation with Palatine and Cornfield special schools in West Sussex. There is a management committee for the college, which is chaired jointly by two governors.
- The college also works in partnership with the Durrington Family Group, consisting of approximately 13 local primary, secondary and special schools.
- The college has specialist arts college status.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that more is outstanding by ensuring that:
 - in Key Stage 3, all teachers accurately assess more-able students' English work in order to plan work that is at the right level
 - when marking work, teachers consistently give students feedback that shows them how to improve.
- Improve the leadership and management to outstanding by making sure that new leaders make good use of the information they have about how well the school is doing to plan actions for improvement.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher is highly thought of by staff, students and parents. He has a clear vision for high standards and is very well supported by the governors and by strong leaders and managers. Together, they have made considerable improvements since the previous inspection, including in achievement, teaching and the sixth form. This shows that they are able to make further improvements.
- All leaders and managers regularly monitor the quality of teaching across the college. Senior leaders use this information, in addition to work in students' books and progress information, to identify areas for improvement. They ensure that teachers have the support they need to improve or to develop their specialist skills. They show very strong leadership of teaching.
- Middle leaders including subject and other leaders and managers carefully check how well the school is doing in a variety of ways. They generally plan how to make further improvements effectively. Some who are new to their role do not yet use information about teaching or students' progress well enough. This means that they do not always identify areas for improvement or plan actions to deal with them.
- There are sound procedures in place for leaders to make checks on different areas of the college's work. Most evaluate these areas accurately. They recognise the areas for improvement and plan actions to deal with them.
- Leaders use data well to check students' progress. They spend additional funding in a variety of ways to benefit individual students. Consequently, disadvantaged students make similar good progress to that of the other students.
- A strength of the college is its promotion of equal opportunities. Leaders and managers carefully analyse data about students' achievement. These show that all groups of students make good progress, including boys, girls and disadvantaged students.
- Students make especially good progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, in an assembly for older students with profound and multiple learning difficulties, students sat in a darkened room with a lit Christmas tree. Scented candles, music and the teacher's quiet voice as she spoke about the Christian message of advent held students enthralled.
- Systems for managing teachers' performance are robust and closely linked to pay. Leaders tackle underperformance decisively.
- The subjects that are taught meet the needs of every student exceptionally well throughout the college but especially in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Here, courses are offered according to future needs and students' interests.
- There is a good balance of academic and vocational subjects and a strong focus on developing reading, writing and mathematical skills. Additionally, a wealth of visits and trips means that students regularly experience activities in the community. Students are consequently very well prepared for their next stage of work, education or training.
- The college works closely with many partners, including Northbrook College, local schools and other agencies. Together, they plan appropriate courses and support for students. Consequently, students make progress in all areas, including in their communication, personal and physical development. Leaders are working with their partners to consider the best way to assess progress when National Curriculum levels are removed shortly.
- A student council offers students the opportunity to make decisions about the school. All students learn about tolerance, respect and making choices as part of their personal development courses and through the culture of the college. In this way, they are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Almost all parents are very positive about the school and appreciate the progress their children are making. As one wrote, 'My son has grown into a lovely young man.' Parents receive good information about how well their children are doing and are given excellent support and guidance for the next stage of their lives.
- Leaders carefully check that students continue to make good progress, attend regularly and behave well wherever they go.
- Sixth form students and their parents have excellent advice and guidance in preparation for the next stages of learning, other colleges or residential homes.
- The college has fully taken up the support offered by the local authority since the previous inspection. Teachers have benefited from support for the use of data and for English and mathematics. This support has contributed strongly to the improvements made.
- Highly effective safeguarding practice supports the good quality of care and guidance given to students.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors are completely committed to the college and have a wide range of skills and expertise. They regularly visit to see how well students are doing. They have a good understanding of data about the college's performance. They often ask leaders challenging questions to hold them to account. They know about the quality of teaching and make sure that teachers' pay is linked to their performance. They check that any underperformance is tackled quickly. They ensure that the college meets safeguarding requirements. They effectively manage the budget and ensure that additional funding is spent wisely and makes a difference.

The behaviour and safety of students are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good.
- The college motto includes the words, 'Every Child Matters' and this is clear in the way that every student is treated with high levels of respect and dignity by all adults. Across the college, there is a positive atmosphere. Students usually try hard and make their best efforts in their work.
- Students behave well in lessons and around the college. They get on well together and at break times, older students play with and support others. Students say they love coming to the college, where they feel safe and happy. Almost all parents who responded to Parent View and to the college's own survey agree.
- Some students have challenging behaviour as a result of their special educational needs. When they first attend the college, a few are dependent on adults managing them. College records show that over time students learn to manage their behaviour more effectively. Staff are extremely patient and are well trained in how to manage behaviour. Adults are especially effective in setting clear guidelines for students and using college policies consistently.
- The college goes to great lengths to manage individual behaviour. Some students, for example, have their own personal areas to work in, so that they are not distressed by noise or having to be in a group. In each case, they are very well supervised and supported to join in class activities where possible.
- The college has introduced 'family learning', in which students follow some activities in mixed-age groups. This has resulted in improved relationships between students. Pastoral leaders, who help to manage students' behaviour, provide very effective support to staff.
- Discussions with students revealed that they are fully aware of what bullying is, including bullying that happens through social media. They are confident that, when it does happen, they have trusted adults to go to, but that it is rare. They know that adults will deal quickly with any concerns they have.
- Most students attend well, although overall attendance is sometimes affected by some students' unavoidable absences owing to medical conditions. Leaders make sure that students continue to attend and behave well when they attend other schools or colleges.
- Leaders tackle discrimination firmly and take many opportunities to promote tolerance of others through assemblies, religious education and subjects such as personal and social education.

Safety

- The college's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding.
- Leaders and managers, including governors, take all possible care when they recruit staff and make the appropriate checks for anyone who volunteers or regularly supports the college.
- Staff understand safeguarding practice very well. Any concerns are immediately referred to the appropriate agencies and the college carefully follows correct procedures. Staff are kept up to date with child protection training.
- The college takes students on many trips and visits, including residential experiences. Staff make detailed risk assessments to ensure the safety of students. More-able students are fully aware of risks that there may be to their own safety. When outdoors, for example, they use building and gardening equipment safely. They learn about health and safety as part of their study.
- Occasionally, staff have to use physical intervention in order to prevent a student from harming himself or herself, or from harming others. All such incidents are recorded in detail and monitored carefully, with follow-up action taken when required. The number of incidents of such behaviour has greatly reduced in the last two years, as staff become increasingly skilled in matching their responses to individual needs.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is typically good across the college. It is outstanding in the sixth form and in subjects such as art and outdoor education. Teachers know their students well and have expertise in meeting a very wide range of needs throughout the college. As a result, students make good and sometimes outstanding progress.
- Teaching in English and mathematics has improved since the previous inspection. This is because these subjects are now taught by smaller, more specialist teams of teachers who have gained good subject knowledge. As a result, students make good progress in both English and mathematics in every year group, including in the sixth form.
- Teaching in most other subjects is strong. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and have high expectations. They typically plan activities that are matched to students' needs and abilities. They use their assessments of students' progress well to plan what students will do next. They are especially skilful in assessing the very small steps of progress that most students make.
- The focus on literacy across the whole college has made a difference. The literacy half hour that teachers provide every day is helping students to develop a love of reading. The college has developed an approach to teaching reading that matches letters and combinations of letters to the sounds they make (phonics). This supports students, especially those with moderate learning difficulties, in making good progress.
- Teachers and teaching assistants give very effective verbal feedback to students as they work in lessons. This tells students how well they have done.
- Teaching assistants work exceptionally well with teachers. Some work with individual students, giving intensive support and others provide more general support to small groups. In every class, they make a valuable contribution to students' progress.
- Teachers mark students' written work regularly and praise good achievements. Some teachers also give comments about how students can improve their work and students use these to make corrections or add extra details. However, this approach to marking is not consistent across all subjects.
- Recently, the college has admitted a few students in Key Stage 3 who have higher levels of attainment. Not all teachers are yet confident in accurately assessing the work of these more able students in English. Staff are sometimes too generous in the grades they award for reading and writing and consequently they do not always give work that is at the right level.

The achievement of students is good

- For the vast majority of students, attainment is typically below that expected for their age when they join the college. This is due to their special educational needs. Almost all students make good progress in English and mathematics when compared to those nationally with similar starting points. This is a considerable improvement since the previous inspection. The majority of students now leave college with functional skills in English and mathematics.
- The college has achieved specialist status. Students do particularly well in subjects such as performing arts, art and design and music.
- The college has increased the number of qualifications that students can achieve, including academic and vocational subjects. Consequently, the proportion of students gaining five or more national qualifications has significantly increased in the last two years.
- All groups of students, including boys, girls and disadvantaged students, make similar good progress to that of others in the college.
- Students with moderate learning difficulties and severe learning difficulties make good progress because their tasks are broken down into small steps. They are given many opportunities to apply the skills they have learnt in a range of situations. For example, sixth form students are planning to build an outdoor cooking area. They were applying their mathematics skills in construction tasks. In a mathematics lesson, younger students were estimating and then measuring liquids. They could say when they might use these skills in future, such as in cooking or boiling water in a kettle.
- Students with profound and multiple learning difficulties make good progress because each stage of their learning is carefully planned and based on detailed observations and feedback. Teachers provide many experiences that include smell, touch, sight and hearing. External support such as physiotherapy and speech therapy help in students' other areas of development.
- Students with autistic spectrum disorders achieve well over time. Many use symbols to support communication and they are encouraged to work together, take turns and practise social skills. In this

way, most students can increasingly take responsibility for their own behaviour so that they can achieve well.

- Students make good progress in communication skills. This is because adults use a range of methods to support speaking and listening tasks, including symbols or signs. In this way, teachers and other adults ensure that all students can join in.
- More-able students are offered the opportunity to gain the highest possible qualifications in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Last year some attained GCSEs in mathematics, science, geography, music, and art and design. The college is particularly successful in matching students' abilities to the appropriate level of qualifications, so they make the best possible progress.
- Leaders make sure that students who attend courses at other schools or at Northbrook College continue to make good progress. Sixth form leaders work in partnership with Northbrook, Chichester and Worthing colleges staff to make sure that, each year, courses meet the students' interests and needs.

The sixth form provision

is outstanding

- Students make exceptional progress in the sixth form, whatever their abilities, because programmes are tailored to meet individual interests and abilities. As a result, the sixth form caters for students who are working well below the levels of attainment that are typical for their age, through to students who can achieve GCSE or AS level in particular subjects.
- Since the last inspection the range and number of subjects offered to students have greatly increased. The breadth of subjects now includes a range of GCSE and BTEC awards in addition to cookery, photography, horticulture, the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme and the Prince's Trust Award. Last year, in addition to GCSE passes, 40 students gained Duke of Edinburgh Awards, with four achieving gold, the top award. This represents remarkable achievement.
- One of the college's strengths is its work-related learning. Students attend work-experience placements and can follow outdoor courses at Oak Grove, including horticulture, gardening, building and carpentry. Last year, sixth form students built a large wooden 'ranch' from scratch that is now used as an outdoor classroom. Others attend work experience in a local garden nursery before they apply their skills to growing plants to raise funds for the college.
- Teaching in the sixth form is typically outstanding. Teachers' enthusiasm and passion for their subjects rub off on students. The students try hard to do their best. As one said, 'I absolutely love photography.' Teachers are providing excellent opportunities to give students the life skills they need so that they are well prepared for their next stage.
- Students and their parents receive excellent advice and guidance about the available choices when leaving the college. The one-year course that is jointly supported at further education colleges and Oak Grove reduces students' anxieties about leaving. They spend two days a week at local colleges, studying the types of courses that they are likely to choose in the following year. Students are also supported well to make the move from Oak Grove to other placements, including residential care.
- Sixth form provision is well led and managed. All safety requirements are met well. Consequently, students behave well, are happy and feel safe.

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 students' needs. This ensures that students 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 students' needs. Students 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 students 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	126161
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	453438
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community special
Age range of students	11–19
Gender of students	Mixed
Gender of students in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of students on the school roll	231
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	67
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Co-Chairs	Liz Cook and Christine Chalmers
Headteacher	Phillip Potter
Date of previous school inspection	29–30 January 2013
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