

Oaklands School

Montgomery Way, Winsford, Cheshire, CW7 1NU

Inspection dates 19–20 May 2015

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Although outstanding in its last two inspections, the school remains focused on moving forward, for example in making teachers' marking even more effective. It continues to be an improving school.
- Extremely strong and effective leadership has the full support of governors, staff, parents and students. Leaders at all levels support staff extremely well in the pursuit of excellence.
- Governors provide exceptionally well-informed challenge and support. They hold leaders to account for everything they do, having a detailed understanding of the school and its work.
- Students' achievement is high and all gain success in examinations and awards. A high proportion are at GCSE or an equivalent level. Success is the norm and students share the same high expectations as the staff.
- Students love coming to school and attendance is high. Their behaviour is outstanding, which helps them do so well in their learning. Students say they feel extremely safe and that any problems are sorted out quickly.
- Parents show high levels of support for the school, which works very hard to ensure strong partnership working.
- Teachers and teaching assistants plan work extremely carefully, successfully meeting the needs of every student they teach. Students really enjoy their learning and are inspired to learn. Staff show strong commitment to their students.
- The same high standards of leadership, positive attitudes to behaviour and learning, and outcomes are seen in the sixth form. All sixth form students are on track to succeed.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is reflected throughout the school. Students get on together exceptionally well. Participation in the arts and sporting activities add a very positive dimension to school life.
- Staff are encouraged to develop their expertise and there is a high commitment to professional development. This reflects the continual focus on improvement and providing education of the highest quality.

Information about this inspection

- Eleven lessons were observed, two of them jointly with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and other senior staff with leadership responsibilities. Inspectors met members of the governing body and spoke by telephone to a representative of the local authority and the School's Challenge and Improvement Partner.
- The views of parents were gathered from 24 responses to the Ofsted online Parent View survey.
- Inspectors met with a group of representative students and spoke with students throughout the inspection so that their views could be taken fully into account. A detailed scrutiny was made of samples of work from across the whole school and a small group of students read to an inspector. Two case studies provided detailed evidence of how students are supported in school.
- Staff views were gathered from the 36 responses to the staff questionnaire and from discussions with staff throughout the inspection.
- A range of written information was examined, including information on the progress and achievement of students. Teachers' planning and assessment was scrutinised, together with the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning. A range of policies, including those for safeguarding, were studied.

Inspection team

Martyn Groucutt, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Elizabeth Loftus

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Oaklands is a special school for students with moderate learning difficulties. Many have additional and sometimes complex needs, including speech, language and communication difficulties, and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.
- All students have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- The school is situated in Cheshire West and Chester but also admits students from Cheshire East and, more recently, from Flintshire.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students, those supported by the pupil premium, is well above the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding from the government for students known to be eligible for free school meals and those in the care of the local authority.
- Almost all students come from White British backgrounds.
- Since the last inspection, the school has gained a sixth form and students will shortly be completing their one-year courses.
- There is provision for alternative placement with an organisation that provides vocationally based opportunities called Big X.
- The school does not enter students for external exams before the usual time to take them.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on the quality of the marking of students' work by ensuring total consistency and that:
 - there is clear advice on how pieces of work could be improved, written in language that the student can understand easily
 - students receive good advice on their next steps towards meeting their challenging targets
 - time is allowed for students to make corrections or improvements to their work in the light of a teacher's comments.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher provide dynamic leadership that inspires staff and students to aspire for excellence. Together with the assistant headteachers and the business manager, they make a senior leadership team that constantly strives for continual improvement. The whole school is focused on ensuring the highest possible outcomes for its students.
- Although the school was outstanding at its last inspection in 2013, it has continued to improve. One significant reason for this has been the development of three new management posts, the directors of learning. They have clear responsibilities for the curriculum, for maximising progress and achievement, and for the creative and performing arts. They reflect the school's drive for excellence in their individual area and give strong leadership to each.
- Heads of department for each subject have a clearly identified role, focused on ensuring that every student is able to fulfil their potential. This includes ensuring that extra support is given to students not making expected progress and ensuring additional challenge supports the most-able students.
- At one time, results in English lagged behind those in mathematics and science. An example of development since the last inspection has been the rapid improvement shown in English. This has been inspired by the commitment to improving students' reading skills through phonics. This is the understanding of letters and the sounds they make, and its use has seen standards in English rise to match those in the other core areas. Literacy is reflected in every area of teaching. For example, phonics charts are prominently displayed in every classroom, including specialist rooms such as science laboratories, while students read every day as part of their timetable.
- Pupil premium funding is used imaginatively and its impact analysed carefully to ensure it is supporting accelerated progress for those who receive it.
- There is a constant focus on ensuring that teaching is of the highest quality and the leadership of teaching is very effective. New teachers are given strong support, while all are encouraged to develop their professional expertise.
- Rigorous monitoring of lessons and teachers' planning informs the very effective process of appraisal and professional development. Challenging objectives set annually for staff help the school meet its own priorities as well as supporting individuals in developing their careers.
- Self-evaluation is detailed and effective. This helps the school to identify priorities inspired by its desire for constant improvement.
- The wide range of subjects taught, including a good choice of options in Key Stage 4, meets the needs of students effectively. It inspires them and throughout the school students love their learning. They are proud of the fact that they can gain external accreditation from every course they take, with many getting success at GCSE or an equivalent in Year 11.
- The wider curriculum is remarkable and all students make the most of a range of opportunities to develop interests and enjoy opportunities to expand their horizons. The school choir recently won first prize at an international music festival in Northern Ireland, while its athletes won a wide range of medals at the recent north-west regional special schools athletics festival. Students are encouraged to pursue excellence in everything they do. They also enjoy a wide range of trips and visits, including residential opportunities.
- Students are being enabled to play a full part in life in modern Britain. On the day of the recent general election, the school ran its own mock election which helped students realise the importance of voting. The school is constantly looking for ways in which its students can participate in events in the community.
- The efforts to ensure that the needs of every student are met reflect the strong commitment to equality of opportunity, fostering good relations and ending discrimination. Arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements and are robust in ensuring the well-being of students, many of whom are potentially very vulnerable.
- A few students benefit from alternative out-of-school placement for much of their education. Programmes are chosen to meet identified needs and monitored extremely carefully. This ensures that students attend regularly, are safe and that their learning and other needs are being fully met.
- Students receive good advice on their next steps at the end of Year 11. All remain in education or some form of work. They look forward confidently to the next phase in their lives, well prepared by the school.
- The school is committed to working in close partnership with parents and has their overwhelming support. Similarly strong relationships also exist with a range of other professionals to provide wider help and support to students and their families.
- The school has positive links with the local authority, which is aware of its outstanding provision so only light-touch support is provided.

■ The governance of the school:

- There is a wide range of expertise in the governing body that enables it to do its job extremely effectively and carry out all its legal responsibilities, including those for safeguarding. Governors challenge senior leadership to ensure high quality provision and promote equality of opportunity. They have a good grasp of the information about the progress of the students and ask pertinent questions.
- Governors have a good grasp of finances and the head of the finance committee works closely with the business manager to ensure effective use of resources. They have a strong understanding of how the pupil premium is used and the impact it has on accelerating progress.
- Governors gain a detailed picture of the quality of teaching because they are very involved, coming into school to find things out for themselves and linking up with teachers. They are fully aware of the links between teachers' performance and pay, and what is done to reward good teaching, as well as the procedures for improving teaching. Challenging targets are set for the headteacher each year, which are monitored carefully.
- Governors are extremely proud of their school and the tremendous achievements of its students.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. There is an overwhelming sense of pride from students for the school community to which they belong. Some join the school with challenging behaviour but a clear and consistently applied behaviour policy leads to rapid improvement. They come to take an increasing responsibility for their own behaviour in a community where positive behaviour and care for others is the norm.
- Students love learning and want to do the very best they can. They arrive promptly for lessons and participate with enthusiasm. This means that lessons are totally focused on learning without any disruptions; this helps to explain why they make rapid progress.
- Students are aware of how their behaviour contributes to the success of the school. At the same time, staff act as positive role models and there is a mutual respect that inspires positive relationships and attitudes.
- Behaviour is equally positive throughout the day, in every subject and throughout the school. At break and lunchtimes, students get on together and enjoy each other's company. At the same time, the school provides a wide range of activities for students to enjoy. Discussions with students failed to find any who were not involved in some aspect of school life outside formal lessons.
- Those who attend an alternative provision enjoy their opportunities very much. They adopt very positive attitudes and their behaviour is excellent, helping them make the most of their opportunities.
- A review of the attitudes of parents over several years in the Parent View surveys shows that all, over time as well as currently, believe that behaviour is excellent.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development thrives and inspires the wider life of the school. Students display great creativity and an interest in the world around them. Music and art are prominent, while a recent development has increased the opportunity to participate in a range of sporting activities. Students show great concern for each other and for others, and many are rightly proud of the part they have played in representing their school in different ways.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Safeguarding arrangements are robust and meet legal requirements. Child protection training for staff is rigorous and up to date.
- The school does a lot of work around bullying and why it is so negative. In the school, relationships are so positive that there are rarely any negative incidents between students. If there is an incident, students say it is dealt with immediately and those involved helped to see what they have done wrong.
- The school takes very seriously any incidents of derogatory or aggressive language. It is dealt with effectively and students helped to understand why it should never occur. Students are given positive encouragement to understand what constitutes an unsafe situation and how to take care of themselves.
- Students understand the dangers of misusing the internet and social networking sites. An extremely positive step has been the training by the local police authority of several students to act as e-safety officers. They help fellow students to understand the dangers they could face and carry out their role seriously and to good effect.
- Risk assessments are thorough, covering the school site, venues for trips and visits, and the students

themselves. Health and safety is taken very seriously, reflected in the careful way that fire drills are recorded.

- Those students who have alternative placements are safe because of the care taken by the school to ensure that the provision matches the standards found in the school itself. Such placements prove very supportive, helping students develop positive attitudes about learning and to think about their futures.
- Attendance is high because students love coming to school. It is above average for all schools and well above the level found nationally in special schools. No students have been excluded in recent years.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- In every classroom, there are outstanding relationships between teachers and teaching assistants. They create extremely strong teams who work individually with students, pitching work at just the right level to ensure they are fully challenged. Teaching is outstanding because it enables students to make rapid progress and achieve extremely well over time, often from very low starting points.
- The high expectations of teachers lead to students developing high expectations of themselves. This is equally true of disadvantaged students and those who are the most able. Every individual is well known to staff who work with them and understand their needs, so they are given outstanding support.
- Planning is detailed and the teaching of reading, writing, communication and mathematics is extremely effective. Opportunities are sought to introduce elements of literacy and numeracy into a wide range of lessons. It enables students to learn with confidence. Good questioning enables teachers to check students' understanding in lessons. It also encourages students to think for themselves and, because of positive relationships, they are confident in expressing their opinions.
- Lessons are fun and contain a variety of activities that keep students fully engaged. As a result, there are good levels of concentration, powerful learning and rapid progress. At the same time, students enjoy learning, smile a lot during lessons and are keen to play active roles. There is a constant focus on progress and helping students reach their challenging targets.
- Work is marked regularly and, while much is of a very good standard, there is a little inconsistency in the way that marking is done. In particular, not all gives enough support in language that the students can understand about how work might be improved, or what needs to be done in order to reach a learning target. Similarly, there is not always evidence that time has been given for students to make changes and corrections to show that they have understood and are able to pick up on the teachers' comments.
- However, this does not stop students from being able to show that, as a result of the high quality of the teaching they receive, they make rapid progress in all lessons, including in literacy, reading and mathematics.

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- When students first arrive in Year 7, the school tests their ability and understanding and then rechecks them after half term. This gives the school a clear view of each student's starting points. From the information gained, challenging targets are set across all areas of learning. Progress is measured at the end of each term and a detailed analysis across all subjects is undertaken, which all teachers receive.
- Students who are identified as not making expected progress receive targeted additional support. If the next check of progress does not reveal improvement, the support is reviewed again and, if necessary, outside professional advice sought. No student is allowed to fall behind and rigorous support is effective in supporting those with additional learning needs. Those with needs such as hearing impairment, for example, are very well supported by the school's own resources and through the use of the local authority's specialist teams. They, too, make strong progress.
- The detailed analysis of progress shows that, from individual starting points, the vast majority of students are making expected or better than expected progress in all subjects, including English, mathematics and science. Attainment remains low because of the learning difficulties faced by the students but progress from individual starting points is exceptionally strong across the school. Students' progress and achievement are therefore outstanding.
- This is equally true for disadvantaged students, whose progress from starting points is frequently better than that of students nationally. Sometimes this narrowing of the gap is less pronounced in the school because, overall, all students are making outstanding progress.
- The pupil premium funding is used extremely effectively and its impact on each individual measured carefully. Much of the funding has been allocated to additional staffing to provide further support and for

additional resources to support reading and mathematics. In addition, the funding of trips and visits has a positive effect because it ensures that every student has an equal chance to participate and benefit from the whole range of school activities.

- The extremely positive learning culture and 'can-do' attitude enable all students to leave school with examination or diploma success in every subject they study. For a majority of students this will include a GCSE or an equivalent qualification, and increasingly these are at the higher grades in subjects like art and music.
- The most able are very well supported and they are challenged just as effectively as any other student in order to do the best of which they are capable.
- Careful analysis of progress includes looking carefully at the progress of identified groups of students, such as boys and girls. This shows that because the needs of each individual are paramount, there is no difference in the performance of different groups. This includes the group attending an alternative placement. Because of the care taken in selecting placements, students are able to be successful.

The sixth form provision

is outstanding

- This is the first year of sixth form provision but already it reflects the exceptionally high standards found elsewhere in the school. The students show excellent attitudes to their learning and are now ready to move on to further education.
- The provision is extremely well led and teachers are committed to enabling students to gain success, including those who are disadvantaged. Their progress has been in line with that of the other students, continuing the outstanding achievement reflected as they moved through school.
- Teaching is outstanding over time and, as a result, all the students have made academic, social and emotional progress since they left Year 11. Academically, they are on track to be successful in their vocationally based learning that will support their move to college for the next academic year.
- Students were carefully selected and represent those who may not have been ready for transition to further education at the end of their Year 11, but who were performing at a higher level than those students in the school-based provision to which they would otherwise have transferred. The additional year at Oaklands has seen them grow in confidence, developing skills for independence and now ready to transfer. All will have completed the course successfully.
- Transition arrangements have been managed extremely carefully, including gaining social skills such as being able to travel independently. They have been well supported in developing an understanding of potential risks to their health and well-being. As they move into an environment where they will have much more independence, this will stand them in good stead. Students are, therefore, confident about their futures.

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	111504
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	449990

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–17
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	7
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Aileen Parry
Headteacher	Kevin D Boyle
Date of previous school inspection	17 September 2013
Telephone number	01606 551048
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