

Oakmeeds Community College

Station Road, Burgess Hill, West Sussex RH15 9EA

Inspection dates	4–5 November 2015
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- This is an improving school, which needs to improve still further. Senior and middle leaders recognise this and are adequately promoting the current improvements. However, there remain inconsistencies in the quality of leadership at all levels.
- School improvement planning does not identify sharply enough how some key aspects of teaching that require improvement should be developed.
- Consequently, although teaching is improving well, it is not yet consistently good in all subjects and respects.
- Pupils do not make enough progress in all subjects. GCSE results have improved but still need to be better.
- Attendance is too low for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs.
- Pupils do not always concentrate well enough in lessons, particularly when the teaching is less engaging. The presentation of their work and the pride they show in it are of mixed quality.
- Pupils with disabilities or special educational needs are making better progress than at the last inspection but this is not yet good.
- The school's newly developed procedures for assessing pupils are not fully embedded. As a result, pupils are not always sufficiently challenged. Teachers' expectations are not consistently high enough.
- Governors do not challenge school leaders as robustly as they should.
- The school's self-evaluation is sometimes over generous.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils enjoy an interesting and broad curriculum. They can choose from a wide range of relevant GCSE options.
- Pupils make stronger progress in some subjects, including English and art, because teaching is better.
- Pupils usually enjoy coming to school and feel well looked after. Parents appreciate this.
- Disadvantaged pupils are starting to achieve much better.
- The school has well-organised management systems. It runs smoothly.
- The school has good, well-understood, procedures for keeping pupils safe.
- Pupils are polite and helpful. They wear their uniforms smartly. Many take on valuable responsibilities.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development continues to be good. The school promotes British values well.
- The school is developing a positive vision for its future, well linked to its improvement plan.
- The governing body is managing the move towards possible academisation astutely.

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve further the consistency in the quality of leadership at all levels so that leaders' actions make a greater positive difference on outcomes for pupils. This includes ensuring that governors ask more searching questions of school leaders when holding them to account.
- Improve the quality of teaching and pupils' learning across the school further. These improvements should be targeted sharply and evaluated within the school improvement plan and include the following aspects:
 - ensure that assessment of pupils is used well and precisely in lessons to provide challenging work at the right levels, and that pupils' target grades are clear and well understood
 - continue to improve pupils' learning in historically weaker subjects, such as science, mathematics, geography and modern foreign languages
 - improve the provision and day-to-day teaching in lessons for pupils with disabilities and those with special educational needs
 - raise teachers' aspirations and expectations for all pupils further.
- Ensure teaching consistently engages pupils so that the good levels of concentration and enthusiasm pupils show in many lessons are seen in all lessons.
- Improve the rate of attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- The headteacher accepted the school's special measures designation nearly two years ago, taking the difficult inspection findings on the chin. He has, within a reasonable timescale, forthrightly led improvement and built the school's capacity so that the school is no longer inadequate. He also recognises that further improvement is needed.
- The deputy headteacher contributes very well. One of his key responsibilities is leading the development of the school's future vision successfully. He does this in partnership with others; for example he is rightly about to consult all parents on this. This is important as the school now moves into a new phase of its development.
- Senior leaders have put in place, or improved, many management systems. For example, the performance management of staff is organised appropriately. Policies on teaching and lesson planning are clear. Staff follow these policies but not yet with consistent quality or success.
- The senior leaders' evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the school is broadly accurate. However, in some respects they over-estimate the school's level of success. This is often because they emphasise the clear improvements and note that staff follow school policies, but they consider less effectively how well the school is faring against national and other benchmarks in terms of pupils' achievement.
- School leaders know many of the key strengths and weaknesses in teaching. They have worked usefully to improve weaker aspects, especially for individual teachers or subjects. However, some of the common weaknesses (such as provision for pupils with special educational needs) are not given sufficient focus as whole-school priorities in the school improvement plan. This reinforces the current uneven practice in the quality of teaching.
- In most other respects, school improvement planning is effective and clear. The school is taking many well-considered actions to move forward. These are increasingly well linked to the school's emerging '2020 vision'.
- Middle leadership is improving, but is of mixed quality. Some subject departments are performing notably better than others. English is particularly well led, as are the visual arts. Leadership in mathematics, science, humanities and modern foreign languages shows recent improvement. Heads of subjects are aware that they are held less accountable for pupils' progress in Key Stage 3 than they are for Key Stage 4. This is unhelpful, as for many subjects most of the teaching is in Key Stage 3.
- A small number of staff who returned questionnaires did not agree that the school is well led and managed. Governors and senior leaders are aware that morale amongst some staff has dipped and are working to improve this situation.
- The school's curriculum is broad and relevant to pupils' needs. It is reviewed effectively. The school provides a range of useful visits out of school and beneficial after-school activities. There are some exceptions to this which the school is aware of. For example, not enough time is allocated to music lessons in Year 9 for pupils to be well prepared to take the GCSE in that subject. In recent years, some of the wide range of GCSE subjects have not run, although offered to and opted for by pupils. This has caused some frustration to pupils and parents.
- Pupils' careers education is suitably managed. All pupils have useful work experience opportunities.
- The local authority's support is systematic and beneficial. It funds the valuable support from the local teaching school, which is of great benefit. Officers ensure rightly that the people supporting the school are not the same as those who monitor it. However, although the local authority monitoring reports on the school are thorough, they do not evaluate some aspects of the school sharply enough. This has been unhelpful to the school in making its own evaluations fully robust.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The governing body is well organised and active. It has improved its work considerably since the last inspection. Governors make frequent, well-targeted visits to the school. This means that their thinking and decisions are made on the basis of relevant, first-hand information, as well as on information in reports. Governors ensure that the performance management of staff and pay progression decisions are arranged correctly.

- Governors are managing the discussions and processes related to the school becoming an academy carefully and astutely. They have ensured that these discussions, as much as possible, are not becoming a distraction from improving the school as it is now. However, governors are not, in all cases, sharp or incisive enough in the questions they ask of senior leaders. This has led to the school being slightly generous at times in its self-evaluation.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. There are thorough, up to date and well managed procedures for keeping pupils safe. Staff are appropriately trained and know what to do in different situations that could arise.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- The quality of teaching across the school is improving, but it is mixed. Pupils themselves have clearly noted the improvements. However, they also rightly point out that the quality of lessons varies between subjects and teachers. Parents are generally pleased with the teaching at the school.
- Teachers commonly follow whole-school policies in lessons. For example, they tell pupils what they should be learning and expect pupils to check their own work. However, they do not do this with consistent success. Not all lessons are as effective as others at ensuring pupils learn well.
- Where the teaching is less effective, it is often because lessons lack enough challenge. Too much time is given to routine tasks or activities with too little meaty and challenging learning. Teachers accept poor-quality responses from the pupils.
- The school has changed and developed its processes for checking how well pupils are making progress. However, this remains an area requiring considerable further improvement. Teachers often set work for the whole class without paying enough attention to the assessed needs of the pupils or stretching their thinking enough. In GCSE courses, there is occasional confusion about which grades pupils are aiming for. Sometimes, the targets for pupils are too low or are unrealistically high.
- In a Year 10 GCSE drama lesson, for example, pupils engaged well together to develop and refine a mime task. However, while pupils improved their work because of the teacher's feedback and support, they were not stretched enough, given their increasingly strong performance.
- In too many lessons, there is too little specific, effective provision for the needs of pupils with special educational needs. Too often, all pupils carry out much the same tasks, without necessary adaptations.
- However, the school is just beginning some work to try to improve this. A local authority adviser has started working with the heads of some subjects and teaching assistants to map out the provision for pupils with special educational needs and to learn from best practice.
- Teachers demonstrate good knowledge of their subjects. They encourage pupils to use and develop appropriate technical vocabulary and skills. They answer pupils' questions clearly.
- Some lessons really inspire and challenge the pupils. For example, in a Year 10 history lesson, pupils worked with real gusto and thoughtfulness when using evidence to think hard in pairs about a difficult question: whether the German government in the 1920s was trying to 'solve or paper over the cracks'. The teacher catered well for pupils' different learning needs. One pupil commented, 'I really love history'.
- Teaching assistants, who work in particular subject departments, often support pupils' learning very usefully. This is particularly the case when teachers tell them precisely which pupils they are supporting and what specifically it is expected that the pupils will learn.
- Teachers usually set homework regularly and usefully.
- Teachers' marking of pupils' work and their verbal feedback to pupils have improved considerably. However, these vary in quality. Pupils and teachers generally have good relationships, which lead to a constructive dialogue between them about the learning. However, teachers' comments to pupils are not consistently sharp or incisive enough and do not always lead clearly to the pupils improving their work.
- The school's teaching of reading is developing well. Pupils enjoy and benefit from the daily 'drop everything and read' sessions. Staff are good role models for reading.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The school looks after and supervises the pupils well. Pupils feel safe and happy. Parents noted this clearly in the online questionnaire. Pupils show pride in their school, wearing their uniforms smartly and happily.
- Pupils are clear about how they can keep safe, online and physically. They put their understanding into practice. For example, in trampolining lessons, pupils followed the basic rules carefully with self-discipline, and enjoyed the physical activity in safety together.
- Many pupils take on real responsibilities willingly, such as being prefects, year councillors, peer mentors, sports leaders or message runners.
- Pupils receive useful guidance about their future career and educational options. Older pupils consider their futures carefully and their aspirations are rising. Almost all pupils progress from the school into appropriate further education, an apprenticeship or employment.
- The school promotes fundamental British values well, including those of tolerance and democracy. It is appropriately mindful of its responsibilities to avoid prejudice and promote respect between people of different cultures and faiths. Pupils understand these values and generally live them out. They are caring and respectful of each other.
- The school works well to help pupils when they may become particularly vulnerable. For instance, staff show a sound understanding of health issues that can affect young people, including mental health problems. The school engages with other agencies and public services appropriately to support pupils.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- In lessons, pupils' behaviour is influenced considerably by the quality of teaching. In lessons or assemblies that are not very engaging, pupils lose interest. They then stop paying attention, make less effort and sometimes start chatting or fidgeting. Occasionally, they become disruptive by shouting out for example, although this is uncommon. More often, they simply 'switch off'. This leads to time being wasted.
- In a Year 11 lesson, for example, the teacher needed to deal with a number of behaviour problems and had little time to attend to pupils who had completed the task and needed more challenge.
- In more engaging lessons, conversely, pupils often try hard at practical and academic tasks, producing good work or end-products.
- Pupils' attendance is about in line with the national average overall. However, it is too low for pupils with disabilities and special educational needs and disadvantaged pupils. Despite assiduous work by staff, and some improvement, the school has not yet been successful in eradicating this problem.
- The rate of fixed-term exclusion is above average but reducing.
- When moving around the school, and at break- and lunchtimes, pupils behave well. They meet the school's expectations. Pupils are friendly and polite. They walk in corridors, walkways and staircases sensibly and safely and queue up appropriately. Occasionally, there is some noisy and slightly boisterous behaviour around the school, but this reflects youthful high spirits rather than anything more significant.
- Pupils are generally punctual to school and the start of each lesson. Despite having to cross roads near the school's large car park, they arrive at and leave the school safely without needing disproportionate levels of supervision.
- Pupils and parents say that bullying is rare. They add that any incidents are dealt with well by staff. The school's records support this. Similarly, recorded incidents of racist or homophobic behaviour are very few.

Outcomes for pupils require improvement

- GCSE results improved in 2015. More pupils than the national average gained five good GCSEs, including in English and mathematics. However, given their starting points, some did not do as well as they should have done. Too few pupils exceeded the expected progress. More pupils than in the previous year reached the higher grades of A*, A and B, but the school accepts that more still could have done so. Results in a number of subjects were not as good as they should have been, for example, in mathematics, modern foreign languages, geography and in BTECs in sport and business.

- The progress of current pupils, right across the school, is clearly improving but in an inconsistent and complex pattern across subjects and year groups.
- In some subjects, such as English, art, photography and textiles, GCSE results in 2015 were strong. There continue to be many examples of effective learning in these and other subjects. For example, in a Year 9 art lesson, pupils planned their own work based on Cubism creatively and with good understanding. In a Year 10 lower-set English GCSE lesson, pupils drew evidence from the text together well when they concluded that a character from *Jane Eyre* was 'brave, patient, humble and kind'.
- Pupils with special educational needs make too little progress, particularly in mathematics and science. However, there are pockets where these pupils do well. For example, in a Year 8 English lesson which involved pupils planning to write at length, the teacher and teaching assistant provided a range of support to pupils with special educational needs. This included a word bank and ideas for structuring their writing. This helped the pupils concerned to practise their skills confidently and learn quickly.
- Pupils' presentation of their work, including the care they take in practical tasks, is of varied quality. The presentation of some work is very good indeed and shows real pride. However, some work is untidy or somewhat casual. This depends largely on what individual teachers require and will accept.
- Teachers' expectations of pupils are not always high enough. This leads to pupils not learning as quickly as they could. For example, in an upper-set Year 8 science lesson, all pupils defined a compound and could name (for example) sulphides and sulphates. This was useful learning, but the pupils were clearly capable of more. Their books also showed that this was also the case in lessons over time. Inspectors found similar examples in other subjects and year groups across the school. Lesson planning, which is too tightly constrained, leads to pupils' learning going 'so far but no further'.
- The academic progress of disadvantaged pupils is improving. The gap between their achievement and that of other pupils in the school and nationally is generally reducing. However, this is a mixed picture across different subjects and year groups. The gap is less pronounced in English than it is in mathematics. Of the disadvantaged pupils who left the school in 2015, two received scholarships to an independent school. Many went on to suitable academic and vocational courses at local colleges.
- The Year 7 pupils who read to an inspector demonstrated good achievement. They applied their knowledge of phonics (the sounds made by letters) accurately, sounding out potentially tricky words such as 'obeisance' and 'separate'. They pointed out, however, that this was learned in their primary schools. The particular contribution of Oakmeeds to their successful reading is in further encouraging their enthusiasm for books and their development of library and comprehension skills.
- Pupils progress from the school to suitable post-16 courses and are appropriately guided in this.

School details

Unique reference number	126084
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	10005239

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	805
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Fry
Headteacher/Principal/Teacher in charge	Colin Taylor
Telephone number	01444 241691
Website	www.oakmeeds.w-sussex.sch.uk
Email address	office@oakmeeds.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	30 January 2014

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average-sized secondary school, close to Burgess Hill station, whose roll has fallen in recent years.
- Most of the pupils are White British.
- About an average proportion of pupils have disabilities or special educational needs.
- A much lower than average proportion of pupils is deemed to be disadvantaged and entitled to the support of pupil premium funding. However, the number of pupils concerned, more than 100, is significant.
- The school met the government's minimum requirements for pupils' progress and GCSE results in 2014, known as the floor standard. Unvalidated data indicate it will do so again in 2015.
- At its previous full inspection, the school was deemed to require special measures.
- The school uses no alternative provision based at other sites for its pupils.
- The school expects to become an academy during 2016, sponsored by the University of Brighton.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed many lessons across a range of subjects in all year groups. Some of these observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders.
- The inspectors looked at samples of pupils' work in different subjects. They heard pupils read in Year 7. They observed in assemblies and around the school before, during and after the school day.
- They evaluated key documents, including the school's improvement plan, vision document and self-evaluation, lesson- and curriculum planning, minutes of meetings and information about pupils' progress. They looked at information on the school's website.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and many members of staff, governors, pupils and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors also took account of the views of staff from the 57 questionnaires returned to them confidentially by individual members of staff. They considered the opinions of parents from the 163 responses on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.
- During its period in special measures, the school received Ofsted monitoring inspections. The inspection team took account of evidence from the previous monitoring inspections.

Inspection team

Robin Hammerton, lead inspector

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Her Majesty's Inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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