



Oakwood Park Grammar School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 118894
LEA Kent
Inspection number 280423
Inspection dates 22 February 2006 to 23 February 2006
Reporting inspector Jacqueline White HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)	School address	Oakwood Park
School category	Community		Maidstone
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Kent ME16 8AH
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01622 726683
Number on roll	909	Fax number	01622 721210
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Mike Stevens
Date of previous inspection	31 January 2000	Headteacher	Mr Mike Newbould

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 18	22 February 2006 - 23 February 2006	280423

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Oakwood Park Grammar School recruits students from a wide geographical area around Maidstone. The school has 906 students on roll, of which 199 are in the sixth form. Girls are admitted into Key Stage 5 only and constitute 20% of the sixth form population. The school population has risen significantly in recent years.

The number of students from ethnic minority backgrounds is below the national average, as is the number whose first language is not English. The number of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is well below the national average, with very few students with a statement of special educational needs. The number of students entitled to free school meals is also well below the national average.

The school has specialist status in mathematics and computing.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Oakwood Park Grammar is a good school. The school successfully balances a focus on academic performance with good personal development for students. Parents are supportive of the school and appreciate the level of care given to individual students.

Standards are high and students achieve well, but the school rightly recognises that there are some students who could make more progress. Teaching is good overall but it does not always capture students' interest or stretch the most able. Students are not given enough opportunity to learn independently or through working in groups. Not all teachers use assessment information effectively. Inspectors agree with the school that the standard of teaching across the school needs to be more consistent and that not all subject leaders are giving enough priority to this.

The school has accurately identified its strengths and weaknesses and set appropriate priorities for improvement. Of particular importance is the work being undertaken to track more closely individual students' progress and make sure that every student has sufficiently challenging targets.

Specialist school status in mathematics and computing has had a positive impact on raising standards. It has strengthened the teaching of mathematics and has led to more students studying the subject in the sixth form. The partnership with primary schools, developed as a result of specialist status, has helped to increase the variety of teaching and learning methods. The use of information communication technology (ICT) as a tool for learning in all subjects is in the early stages of development.

The school has improved since the last inspection, demonstrating that leaders have a good capacity to raise standards. The school uses the resources available to it well and provides good value for money. However, the expansion of the school has led to a lack of space that has the potential to impact on students' learning.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school judges the effectiveness of the sixth form to be good and inspectors support this evaluation. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Standards are high and students make good progress. The quality of learning and teaching is good overall but there are some inconsistencies in practice. Consequently, students perform better in some subjects than in others. Sound strategies have been put in place to bring about improvements but it is too early to judge their impact. Most students are well informed about their progress and know how to improve their work. They are well prepared for their higher education and careers. Students value the excellent relationships they have with staff and the support they receive. Girls entering Year 12 settle in quickly and make good progress. There is a wide range of advanced level courses and extra-curricular activities. The partnership arrangement with other local schools is praised by students and extends the choices available to them. Students

enjoy school. They contribute well to the community and are good role models for younger children.

What the school should do to improve further

- Establish the systems in place to set challenging targets for individual students, track their progress and intervene to correct underachievement.
- Monitor and evaluate learning and teaching more systematically and rigorously.
- Develop learning and teaching methods that give students increased opportunities to learn independently and through collaboration.
- Ensure that assessment information is used effectively by all teachers to raise standards.
- Improve the environment for learning by carrying out the planned building programme.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good. Students enter the school with standards well above average and achieve results in national tests and examinations that are well above average. In 2005, the proportion of students in Year 11 achieving five A* to C GCSE grades was very high and the proportion of students in Year 9 achieving the highest levels in national tests was high. The school was close to achieving its challenging targets for both year groups. It meets its specialist school targets.

Students make good progress from Year 7 to Year 9. Progress slows in Years 10 and 11. There is some unevenness in the performance of students across subjects. The school has identified the need to ensure that more students achieve the highest GCSE grades and is putting appropriate strategies in place to address the issue.

Standards in the sixth form are high. Students make good progress. This applies to those who have been in the school since the age of eleven and those who join at 16. Girls joining Year 12 are helped to settle in quickly and achieve well. The school is putting the right strategies in place to increase the consistency of students' performance.

Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development is good. They enjoy school life and appreciate the learning, sporting and cultural opportunities the school offers them. This is reflected in what they say about their experiences and their good attendance. Students are punctual to lessons, well organised and well behaved. They know how to keep themselves and others safe, and contribute responsibly to the school and wider community in a number of ways. For example, sixth formers assist teachers in local primary schools, and there is a strong tradition of involvement in charity work.

Students generally eat healthily and many take part in sporting activities. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is good. This is as a result of

well-planned personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) and the effectiveness of enrichment days. These days add variety to the curriculum and include activities within and outside of school – such as the visit to The Globe Theatre for Year 9 taking place at the time of the inspection. Activities that encourage students to be enterprising support the development of their life skills and ensure that they are well prepared for the future. Students are articulate, polite and tolerant. They contribute to, and benefit from, a supportive, positive school ethos. A feature of students' responsibility and commitment is their expressed wish to be even more actively involved in the life of the school by mentoring younger pupils, for example, or by re-establishing the School Council.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good overall despite some inconsistencies in the levels of challenge and excitement seen in lessons. Most teachers have good subject knowledge and clearly enjoy working with students, who are keen to learn and respond. Students' attitudes and excellent relationships are significant factors in the standards achieved by the school.

Where teaching is effective, lesson activities are engaging and matched to the individual needs of students. Marking helps students to think about their work analytically and sets targets for improvement. Teachers evaluate learning and track progress. This good practice is not shared by all teachers because the monitoring and evaluation of learning and teaching is not systematic or rigorous enough. Students' readiness to think for themselves, take a lead and engage in lively discussion was evident in several good lessons observed. Not all lessons demonstrate these strengths and opportunities for students to work in groups or independently are not fully exploited.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good curriculum which meets statutory requirements. It is kept under review and is responsive to students' interests and potential. Students are offered a good range of examination options. Variety has been increased with the introduction of several new subjects such as film and media studies and psychology. Effective inter-school co-operation gives students access to good work-related learning courses. The school's specialist college status has had a positive impact on the development of the curriculum, although there is more work to do on the use of ICT as a tool for learning in all subjects.

The experiment with a fortnightly enrichment day has proved highly successful. It is one of the most imaginative features of the curriculum, offering opportunities for extension activities of all kinds that are valued by staff, students and parents.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides good care, guidance and support. It has introduced systems for tracking students' progress which involve regular monitoring interviews. Whilst there is some evidence that students' achievement is improving in response to this focused attention, the full impact of these systems is yet to be realised.

Strong links with outside agencies give good support to students with disabilities. The school's provision for vulnerable children and those with learning difficulties is effective and ensures that they achieve well. Arrangements for child protection are secure. Procedures for risk assessment are similarly robust.

Effective guidance helps students to choose courses that match their capabilities and strengths. Good careers advice is readily available. Students are well prepared for further stages in their education and their future life choices.

Parents recognise that teachers know their children well and the great majority consider care and guidance to be strengths of the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Overall, leadership and management are good. There is a shared determination amongst senior leaders and governors to continue to raise standards and eradicate underachievement. The school's understanding of its strengths and weaknesses is accurate. It is based on a range of evidence, including the perspectives of students and those of their parents and carers.

The school improvement plan identifies appropriate priorities and establishes a clear strategic direction for the school. Senior leaders are putting appropriate strategies in place to achieve the objectives that have been set. For example, the curriculum has been greatly improved, students' progress is more closely monitored and there are good plans in place to improve the environment for learning.

The majority of staff are well qualified and committed to the school. Most subject leaders understand that the development of learning and teaching is at the heart of their role. However, some are complacent and have not demonstrated a rigorous commitment to accelerating students' progress through improving learning and teaching. The monitoring of learning and teaching does not involve all subject leaders in a systematic way. Senior leaders are rightly focusing on raising standards through developing effective leadership at every level.

The governing body has a good understanding of its role. It knows the school well and provides appropriate support and challenge to the headteacher and senior leaders.

Improvements since the last inspection, such as the development of the curriculum to offer students greater breadth of experience, demonstrate good capacity for further improvement.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	insufficient evidence

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Students,

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to me and my colleagues during our recent visit. We enjoyed meeting you and listening to your views about your work and the school.

It is our judgement that Oakwood Park Grammar School is a good school. You make a contribution to the success of the school through your conscientious approach to your work and by taking part in school life with enthusiasm. You value learning, and those taking national tests and examinations achieve good results. We were impressed by the positive attitudes which most of you showed in lessons.

Your academic success is matched by the way in which you are developing as responsible young people. We noted the mature way in which you helped and supported each other. You told us that you feel safe and secure in school and well supported by staff. Many of you were very courteous and helpful to us as we made our way around the school.

Your school is determined to keep improving. It has put systems in place to set you challenging targets and check your progress. We want this approach to become an established way of working for all of you. We think that you need increased opportunities to learn independently and through collaboration. Learning and teaching will be checked regularly to make sure that it is always of the highest quality. We agree with your headteacher that your environment for learning should be improved by carrying out the planned building programme.

You and the staff have worked hard to establish your school as a caring place where individuals matter. We are confident that, together, you will continue to improve your school. Yours sincerely,

Jacqueline White Her Majesty's Inspector