

The Orchard School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119058
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	291301
Inspection date	4 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Mike Kell

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	84
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Everett
Headteacher	Nikki Mason
Date of previous school inspection	20 May 2002
School address	Cambridge Road Canterbury CT1 3QQ
Telephone number	01227 769220
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

At the time of the last inspection the school provided education for secondary-aged pupils with moderate learning difficulties. The local authority has since designated it as an all-age school for pupils with behavioural and more complex learning difficulties, such as autism. All of the pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The school has a large catchment area, with some pupils travelling long distances. The vast majority of pupils are boys. All of the pupils have a White British heritage and a few of them are in public care.

The school became a specialist arts college in September 2005. The headteacher, her deputy and the assistant headteacher have all taken up their posts since September 2006. A major redevelopment of the premises is under way. This involves new buildings, such as the music and drama studio and specialist accommodation for subjects such as science, and the refurbishment of other areas. Although the local authority's redesignation of the school requires it to admit primary-aged pupils, the secondary premises cannot be enlarged and so there are currently no primary-aged pupils attending the school. A primary department is being developed on a nearby site, and is likely to admit its first pupils in January 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the pupils' attendance, attitudes and behaviour and features of teaching and learning in order to raise the rate at which pupils learn and make progress.

The school does not provide a satisfactory standard of education, and has not made adequate progress since the last inspection. Nevertheless, the improvements brought in by the new leadership team show that it has adequate capacity to make the necessary improvements. Many staff have responded well to the challenges posed by the changed school population. They manage the pupils' behaviour successfully and present work that stretches them academically. Other members of staff have found it far more difficult to develop the required skills quickly. This means that the pupils receive different messages as adults vary in their expectations of the pupils' work, behaviour and attitudes. Inconsistent practice is a feature of much of the school's work. This has an adverse effect on the pupils' academic progress and personal development.

Although new to the school, an experienced leadership team has acted swiftly. Leaders have identified accurately the more ineffective aspects of the school and are beginning to put in measures to promote consistency and to raise colleagues' expectations of their pupils. Overall leadership and management are satisfactory. Governors and subject managers are not as well informed as leaders and are not working with the same urgency. Consequently, while leaders' influence is beginning to reshape the school's work, their efforts have not had any real impact on raising standards. Leaders' work is supported by the majority of parents.

The pupils' standard of work is exceptionally low in national terms because of their learning difficulties. Pupils' progress is inadequate for a number of reasons. Although teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, there are some lessons in which teachers' expectations are too low and some activities that they provide are not inspiring. The new school leaders have introduced effective systems to measure how well pupils are performing and staff now use the information to help raise standards. The curriculum is satisfactory but short-term planning lacks rigour. There is an excellent programme of enrichment activities and the school's specialist status has enabled it to forge strong links with partners. The pupils receive satisfactory care, guidance and support. Pastoral support and guidance are strong but the school does not involve the pupils sufficiently well in their own learning. Marking is not always as informative as it could be and other assessment procedures are not used to their full effect. Consequently, a small number of pupils are not motivated to learn and so they sometimes lose interest, causing disruption or truanting internally. Others simply do not go to school. Attendance is inadequate. Overall, the pupils' personal development is satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Always provide pupils with challenging and interesting activities that raise the quality of their learning.
- Improve pupils' attendance and ensure consistent staff expectations of their behaviour and attitudes in lessons and around the school.

- Implement procedures for assessing pupils' work accurately and share this information with them to show what they need to do in order to improve.
- Analyse assessment data to ensure that all pupils and groups of pupils are achieving as well as they can.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

The nature of the pupils' learning difficulties means that their standard of work is exceptionally low in national terms. The pupils have not made sufficient progress from their starting points when they entered the school because not enough was expected of them in the past. This underachievement means that pupils have not acquired the key skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) that they will need when they leave school as well as they should have.

The overall situation is now improving. For instance, the school is using its specialist arts status to plan more creative opportunities for the pupils to learn and make progress. In addition, leaders are encouraging all staff to throw down the challenge so that they can determine the pace at which their pupils are capable of making progress and whether they are achieving as well as they can in the accredited courses that they follow in Years 10 and 11. This is becoming evident in increasing numbers of lessons as teachers have higher expectations of pupils' behaviour and attitudes and so learners are beginning to catch up and make more sustained progress. However, this is not happening all of the time as in some lessons pupils are still not fully challenged. Even when pupils learn well in individual lessons their progress over time may not proceed at the same rate. This could be because of non-attendance or because of other events that happen during the day, such as at break or between lessons, that disturb their behaviour and result in them not going to lessons. School leaders recognised that internal truancy was impeding pupils' progress and that the situation was not being viewed with sufficient seriousness. They have put into place procedures for monitoring these instances and analysing the causes, which are beginning to have a positive effect.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

The pupils have a good understanding of remaining healthy. They choose healthy meal options and join physical education activities enthusiastically, including an army cadet force outreach project at weekends. They have a good awareness of remaining safe. They know that bullying is unacceptable and report such instances, and through the girls' group they know how to deal with situations in which they might be vulnerable. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. The pupils make a good contribution to the community. They help to improve the school through Pupil Voice, and contribute to the local community by working on a sensory garden project at a special school and ground clearance at Hambrook Marshes. The pupils are prepared satisfactorily for leaving school. The usefulness of a good work-related learning programme is reduced by the relatively slow rate at which the pupils have developed their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.

Although there is truancy and examples of poor attitudes, this does not apply to all pupils. For example, almost half the pupils have an attendance rate in excess of 90%, behave well and clearly want to be at school. However, the overall high level of non-attendance indicates that the pupils do not enjoy their education. Pupil support coordinators are working hard with the

education welfare service to involve parents in improving their children's attendance and senior leaders are focusing on raising the pupils' enjoyment of learning. Although behaviour is satisfactory overall, a minority of parents are correct in believing that the pupils do not behave well.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

In a number of lessons teachers promote their pupils' learning well. At these times, staff's high expectations of behaviour and attitudes are made clear and so lessons begin promptly with pupils enthusiastic and in a positive frame of mind. Teachers build on this by providing activities that challenge and motivate the pupils. Consequently, the pupils remain interested and enjoy the success that this brings. On these occasions they learn well. However, this is not consistent practice. A small number of pupils are reluctant learners and some teachers are not assertive in outlining their expectations. When this combines with activities that do not enthuse them, the pupils may opt out. Their learning suffers as a result.

Assessment procedures are not fully effective. The pupils' work is marked regularly but not in a way that routinely indicates to them what they can do, what they are capable of doing and what they need to do next to raise their standards, such as how they can move from one National Curriculum level to the next.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum has some strong features. The school has deployed its specialist status in using the arts effectively to enrich the way in which many subjects are taught and to forge very strong links with its education and business partners. For instance, a history project on World War I was 'brought alive' as the pupils worked with local university students to re-enact some of the events through drama. More contemporary media are used equally well, such as when pupils worked with a digital photographer to record a day in the life of a local community. Such practical approaches provide good learning opportunities. Good links with partner schools enable the pupils to learn alongside their mainstream pupils, which makes a good contribution to their personal development. Their work with primary aged pupils also gives them the chance to 'teach' others and does a great deal for their self-esteem.

In terms of meeting its conditions of being a specialist school, whole school curriculum planning is comprehensive. However, there is a degree of inconsistency in the way that subject managers break down their subjects into schemes of work that show how pupils' knowledge and skills will be developed in a progressive and structured way. This reduces the effectiveness of some pupils' learning and subsequent progress.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school provides a high level of care and welfare. There are robust child protection procedures in place and secure systems for ensuring that the pupils are safeguarded. Adults provide good role models and in many contexts the pupils have good relationships with the adults who work with them. For instance, the very well attended breakfast club is a very pleasant event that

prepares pupils for the day and gives them an opportunity to talk through any problems that they may have. These relationships only deteriorate when learning activities cease to interest the pupils.

The school provides good pastoral guidance. A pupil counsellor, play therapist and links with other agencies provide high levels of individual support. Pupil support coordinators manage these links and monitor the pupils' progress in acquiring credits. These are given at the end of lessons depending on how well the pupils have worked and been involved. However, this token system is not as effective as it could be because teachers do not award points consistently. The procedures for promoting the pupils' academic support and guidance do not have the same impact as those for pastoral guidance because of the limitations in assessment procedures.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

School leaders were faced with a difficult task when they took up post. The changed pupil population had had a significant effect on the school, especially on staff who were used to working with pupils with moderate learning difficulties. Leaders work well as a team. They provide good behaviour management guidance and general staff support, leading by example and modelling how they expect staff to deal with situations. However, they have still not been able to establish routine whole school practice. They have had to oversee a major building project and plan for the primary school development. These commitments and day-to-day work have reduced the time available for leaders to establish a clear direction for the school through formal strategic planning. The situation has improved since the team got to full strength with the assistant headteacher's appointment at Easter. For instance, they have established some good procedures to monitor different aspects of the school's performance, such as the quality of teaching, the outcomes of which are evaluated well. School leaders work hard at promoting equality of opportunity for all pupils and have achieved a satisfactory degree of success. While all pupils have the same opportunity to participate in everything that the school offers, the quality of learning in some lessons prevents some pupils from benefiting fully.

Governance is satisfactory. Governors are very supportive of the school but they do not have a planned and structured cycle of visits into school and so they are not in a position to question and challenge what is going on armed with detailed first hand knowledge. The capacity for school improvement is satisfactory. The school's leaders have a good ability and knowledge to bring about change but in order for them to be wholly effective, governors and subject managers need to work at the same pace if the required improvements are to take place quickly.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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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?	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	4
How well learners enjoy their education	4
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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

5 July 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Orchard School, Canterbury CT1 3QQ

I enjoyed my visit to your school yesterday. I enjoyed talking with you and watching in some lessons. Thank you for making me feel welcome. I hope those of you who went to France enjoyed the day.

At the moment, your school is not giving you a satisfactory education because there are some important things that it needs to do better. Lessons are satisfactory and teachers give you a satisfactory range of things to do. However, you do not make enough progress during your time in school. Sometimes this is because you are given things to do that are too easy but some of you do not help yourselves either. Too many of you do not go to school as often as you should. Some of you can help in another way too. Too often, some of you argue with adults, refuse to work or even leave the room. If you do not go to school or leave lessons you will not learn as much as you could.

The school takes good care of you and you make satisfactory progress in developing as young people. All the adults want to help you to be ready for leaving school. You understand a lot about being safe and staying healthy and have good opportunities to help in the community.:

- All lessons should be as interesting and challenging as the best ones.
- All staff should have the same high expectations of your behaviour.
- Teachers need to tell you how well you are doing with your work and exactly what you need to do to get better.
- The school needs to check that every one of you is doing as well as you can.

I hope that you want to contribute to making your school better. That will help everyone. I wish you all luck in the future.

Mike Kell Lead inspector