



Oakwood School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 125273
Local Authority Surrey
Inspection number 293245
Inspection dates 27–28 February 2007
Reporting inspector Christine Jones HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Balcombe Road
School category	Community		Horley
Age range of pupils	11–16		RH6 9AE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01293 785363
Number on roll (school)	1393	Fax number	01293 786465
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs S Tuffield
		Headteacher	Mr A S Thompson
Date of previous school inspection	26 November 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–16	27–28 February 2007	293245

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Oakwood School is larger than other similar schools and draws its students from a wide range of both socially advantaged and disadvantaged areas. Few students come from minority ethnic groups or have English as an additional language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties or disabilities is higher than average. The school is a leading member of the local Horley Learning Partnership and was awarded specialist status for Technology in July 2004.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness of the school is satisfactory. Students are now making adequate progress after a recent decline in both standards and progress in all year groups but especially older students. Key reasons for this were inconsistencies in teaching and the use of information on students' progress.

In both 2005 and 2006, Year 11 students, boys in particular, did not make enough progress. The school has put a lot of effort into working with the students to improve the progress they make; this work is now impacting on current levels of achievement in the school. Inspection evidence showed that progress is now satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. In 2005 and 2006 the standards reached and progress made by younger students improved rapidly. They made good progress and standards were above average. This improvement is continuing.

The school takes good care of its students, and this is appreciated by the parents who are very positive about the way their children develop in the school. The inspection evidence agrees with this opinion and care, guidance and support were found to be good. Specialist provision and behaviour management strategies are improving the attitudes to learning for students with learning difficulties and disabilities so they are now making better progress.

Students' personal development is satisfactory. The school works well with a wide range of partners and outside agencies to look after the well-being of learners. The school strongly promotes healthy lifestyles and was nominated for a Teaching Award in 2006 in the 'Healthy Schools' category. The school holds the 'Sports Mark' award and students are keen participants in the wide range of sports activities and health projects. Students are also encouraged to be involved in the wider community, and participate in many local activities with groups ranging from Senior Citizens to reluctant readers in an infant school. Attendance is monitored robustly and is satisfactory overall. However, some boys in Year 11 are missing too much school to the detriment of their learning. In many lessons students work hard and enjoy learning. There is a persistent problem with low level disruptive behaviour in some lessons, and this interferes with the learning of other students. A significant minority of parents rightly complain about this.

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The headteacher and the supportive governing body are well aware of the issues to be addressed regarding progress, and are working hard to remedy the situation. In particular a more focused approach to improving learning is starting to raise standards, especially in Years 7-9. Although teaching is satisfactory, there is still a wide variation in quality. While many teachers know and understand the needs of their students, in too many lessons they do not make enough use of what students already know to plan the next steps in learning. The school does not make enough use of data on students' performance to gain a clear overview of the progress they make in all subjects over time.

Curriculum provision is satisfactory, and the school's specialist Technology College status is helping to develop skills that will be useful in the workplace. The school

recognises the need to develop more alternative courses as a priority to further motivate and involve students in their learning, especially boys and some students with learning difficulties and disabilities.

In the past the school did not have a consistent analysis of its strengths and weaknesses. This has improved recently and, although achievement is not as good as at the last inspection, the senior managers now know what they need to do and understand how the school must improve. This is impacting on raising achievement and shows that the school has satisfactory capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that lesson planning and teaching focus more tightly on students' learning needs.
- Put further strategies in place to stop low level disruptive behaviour in lessons and prevent this from interfering with the learning of other students.
- Use information on students' overall performance more accurately and consistently to track improvements in the progress they make.
- Improve the attendance of boys in Year 11.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Overall students achieve satisfactorily and standards are improving. In 2005 and 2006 GCSE standards declined and were below local and national levels. Year 11 students made insufficient progress and this built on underachievement in previous years. Boys in particular, and some students with learning difficulties and disabilities, did not make enough progress. As a result of the efforts made by the school to raise achievement, standards are beginning to rise and students in Years 10 and 11 are now making satisfactory progress.

After a period of underachievement, standards reached by younger students in 2005 were above average, and they made good progress overall due to strong English results. In 2006 standards in English declined slightly but improved in mathematics and science. Overall, standards were again above the national average. Students make satisfactory progress.

As with other students, those with learning difficulties and disabilities did not make enough progress in past years, but recent initiatives introduced by the school mean that this situation is changing and progress is improving.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory aspect of the school's work, with several good features. Students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural (SMSC) education is satisfactory. This is particularly strengthened by the good range of extra-curricular activities. Students exercise their moral and social responsibilities through involvement with charities and the support

given by older students to the younger ones when leading school clubs. Students' relationships with teachers and each other are good. Limited evidence was found that SMSC was embedded in lessons.

Most students enjoy coming to school, and attendance is satisfactory. Punctuality to lessons is sometimes a problem, and a few students still take too long to reach their classrooms. Most students have positive attitudes to school and behave well in lessons and around the school. Students of all ages feel very well supported and act safely around the school. They are confident that, should they be bullied, teachers will take appropriate steps to intervene. Students understand the importance of healthy lifestyles and enjoy a wide range of food in the canteen, including a promoted salad option. The Student Council is very proud of its involvement in choosing the new caterers. Students feel that their views on all subjects are listened to and, in most instances, acted upon. Students willingly take on responsibilities within the council, prefect and house system. Involvement in issues such as a recycling project heightens pupils' awareness of environmental and community issues.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. There has not, in the past, been a sharp enough focus on what students are actually learning in lessons. As a result, students did not make appropriate progress. Many teachers are now working hard to improve learning. Where this is successful lessons are briskly paced, stimulating and challenging. Good humour is used to create a happy, positive learning atmosphere that helps students feel confident about expressing their own views, crystallizing their thoughts and improving debating skills. Lessons often start well with clear learning objectives shared with students. As lessons come to an end, final summaries are often too rushed leaving little scope for consolidation of the objectives.

Students themselves spoke about the disruption to their learning that sometimes happens through the failure of others to concentrate in lessons. They feel this is a particular problem with the younger students and that some teachers could do more to help them learn.

Previous information about students' progress is not always used consistently when teachers plan future lessons. Although the school is aware that the best learning takes place in lessons where students of different abilities are challenged in different ways, often teachers do not specifically plan to meet different learning needs.

Students' work is sometimes not marked regularly and the quality of advice given is variable. Too many students' workbooks show incomplete work, missed pages and poor presentation. Most students know and understand the target grades or levels they are working towards.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory although the school recognises that it tries to cover too much in the lower school, putting pressure on the time allocated to subjects.

The majority of students are pleased with the range of GCSE subjects and option choices offered in Years 10 and 11 and feel that they are well suited to their abilities and aspirations. There is still a need to improve further the alternative courses that are designed to engage and interest disaffected boys and some students with learning difficulties and disabilities so that they make better progress.

Technology College status has considerably improved curriculum opportunities. The impact upon the key subjects is more noticeable in the lower school and Design Technology courses for older students. There has been less impact in areas such as mathematics and science GCSE courses.

Students are very appreciative of the large number of extra curricular activities which are offered and these are well attended.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides good care, guidance and support for the students.

The pastoral system ensures that teachers respond well to students' personal needs. The school has good procedures for risk assessment and child protection. The personal, social, health and citizenship education programme places appropriate emphasis on the development of safe and healthy living styles. The quality of advice and guidance relating to courses and career choices is good. Students are able to make well informed choices about the courses they take in Key Stage 4, and are clear about progression into further education, training or employment.

The school provides many opportunities for students to take positions of responsibility in the school through the house and prefect systems. Students appreciate that this gives them valuable experience in taking management roles. Parents are kept well informed about their child's progress through regular reports and newsletters. Teachers know the students in their classes well and give valuable individual guidance on how to improve their work. However, the school does not make enough use of overall information on progress in order to gain a clear overview of achievement across the school.

The curriculum support department provides good support and guidance at an individual level for students with learning difficulties and disabilities. However, there are currently no clear procedures in place for tracking the overall progress of these students.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher provides determined leadership with energy and enthusiasm. He has created a caring school that successfully promotes the personal development and well being of learners, and this is appreciated by parents and students. Middle managers work well together as a team and have the potential to bring about improvements through an increasing focus on raising standards and progress. There is some sharing of good practice in relation to addressing boys' underachievement, but this is not consistent throughout the school.

The programme of monitoring and evaluating the work of the school is starting to include more use of data on students' achievements. However, this is not supported by the consistent use of the data collected to gain a clear overview of the progress and attainment of students.

The quality of teaching and learning is monitored through systematic observations by senior members of staff. These observations do not give clear messages about the impact of teaching on students' progress and do not accurately identify associated strengths and weaknesses.

The school has worked hard to overcome staff shortages in key areas in recent years. Staffing and other resources are well deployed and used efficiently to secure satisfactory value for money.

Governors actively support the school and have a growing understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Under clear leadership there has been a restructuring of governors' roles to reflect fully the school's current focus on learning and achievement.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

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	3
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	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?	2

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.

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	3
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?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. We enjoyed speaking to you and finding out your views about your school. We think your school gives you a satisfactory standard of education. We were impressed by the good working relationships that many of you have with your teachers and are pleased that so many of you enjoy attending school and taking part in the different activities the school provides. It is clear that the school helps you develop as individuals during your studies and we agree with you that the school helps to build your confidence. Your Student Council is working hard with the teachers to improve your school and is proud of its success.

At the moment, your school does not keep a close enough eye on the progress you make in all your different subjects. There is a need to make sure that the systems used to record your progress are used more carefully to track the improvements in your work. The school needs to help you monitor your own progress.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, although there does need to be more emphasis in lessons on different ways for you to learn. Your teachers need to make better use of the information they have on how well you are doing in order to plan for your future lessons. Some of you, especially older boys, need to come to school more regularly and turn up to lessons on time. We noticed that a few students do not concentrate enough in lessons and their behaviour stops other students learning.

The school takes good care of you, especially when you have problems, and makes sure there are lots of people to help. Many of you are very involved in the wide range of sporting and other activities the school provides for you outside of lessons.

My team and I would like to thank you for your help and cooperation during this inspection, we wish you well for the future.

Christine Jones HMI