

Oaklands School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111504
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	310609
Inspection dates	16–17 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael McDowell

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	117
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Aileen Parry
Headteacher	Mr Kevin Boyle
Date of previous school inspection	10 January 2005
School address	Montgomery Way Winsford Cheshire CW7 1NU
Telephone number	01606 551048
Fax number	01606 861291

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Introduction

The school was inspected by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Oaklands provides secondary education for pupils from the whole of Cheshire who have statements of special educational need because of moderate learning difficulties. A minority have other difficulties and/or disabilities including social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, speech or communication difficulties, or severe learning difficulties. All pupils are of White British heritage and English is their home language. There are approximately twice as many boys as girls. A small number of pupils are looked after by the local authority.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with outstanding features in pupils' personal development and the care, support and guidance provided. Parents hold the school in high esteem. Many comment that it has helped their children accomplish far more than they expected.

Because of their learning difficulties, the standards of pupils are well below those expected nationally. However, through skilful teaching and the secure and happy learning environment the school provides, pupils soon begin to make and sustain good progress. From Year 7 to Year 11, achievement is consistently good. All pupils in their final year gain accreditation in a range of subjects.

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers know their pupils well and choose methods that build on their strengths. Pupils are happy and try hard to do their best. Teachers tell their pupils how well they are making progress towards their individual targets. They work well with parents and carers and keep them fully informed.

Personal development is outstanding. Pupils say that they love coming to school. There has been an excellent improvement in attendance over recent years and attendance is now good. Pupils are confident. They are sure that they are safe and explain that they are well cared for by adults that they trust. They are fully committed to healthy lifestyles and greatly enjoy the opportunities for physical activity that the school provides. They think of others, including those who are less fortunate than themselves. They are very helpful around the school and passionate about protecting the environment.

The curriculum is good, meeting statutory requirements and pupils' individual needs. It provides many opportunities for personal development. It promotes literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills well.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The school takes great care to keep its pupils safe and healthy. It provides them with excellent chances to mix socially with others of the same age in mainstream schools. Strong support is given to help them succeed as learners. Safeguarding arrangements are rigorous and meet requirements. The school works exceptionally well with other schools and external agencies. Exemplary care is taken to help and protect vulnerable pupils.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher is an exceptional leader. Since his appointment, all aspects of the school have steadily improved. He knows what must be done to improve the school further. The new leadership team share his view. The school's self-review is satisfactory. It is largely accurate in its grading of provision and outcomes. However, the school does not use assessment information to compare the achievement of its pupils with that of pupils with similar difficulties in other schools. This deprives it of an important means of measuring its overall performance and identifying how outcomes for pupils may be improved. Use of resources is effective and efficient. Governance is good. All plans for improvement and expenditure initiated by the leadership are thoroughly scrutinised and if necessary modified. The school has improved well since the last inspection and has a good capacity to continue to improve. It provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Compare pupils' achievement with that of learners with similar difficulties in other schools so as to measure the school's performance more fully and improve pupil outcomes.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils make continuous, good progress. They are very willing to learn and because their confidence is boosted by good teaching they develop useful speaking and listening, literacy and numeracy skills. These help them to achieve well in all areas of the curriculum. They are successful in externally accredited entry level courses in English, mathematics, science and physical education. In 2007 all pupils in Year 11 were entered for these examinations and all passed. In mathematics and science in particular, many gained the highest grade. Achievement in English, while good, was less marked and, while all pupils passed, a smaller proportion gained the highest grade. Higher achieving pupils also gained grades in the GCSE foundation level examinations in mathematics, science and art. Performance was best in science in which more than two thirds of Year 11 pupils gained a GCSE pass grade. The school sets ambitious overall targets for pupils' achievement and is highly successful in reaching these. There are no notable differences in achievement between boys and girls.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Parents strongly agree that their children enjoy school. They say that their children cannot wait for the weekend to be over to get back to the, 'friends and teachers that they love'. Pupils' exceptional enjoyment of their education is confirmed by high attendance. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exemplary. Behaviour and attitudes are excellent. Pupils are always ready to help their community run smoothly by carrying out simple, essential tasks. The school council is proud of its work, particularly its part in drawing up the school's anti-bullying policy. Pupils are greatly interested in the lives of children from other lands. Through a link with a school in Soweto they know much about young people in South Africa who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities similar to theirs. Pupils enjoy healthy meals and are keen on keeping fit and taking part in sport. They behave safely and expect others to do the same. Pupils state clearly that they will not tolerate bullying. They prepare well for their future economic well-being by working hard to improve their basic skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers and classroom staff are skilful at reaching pupils who have previously found it difficult to retain what they have been taught. By choosing methods well suited to their needs, teachers help their pupils to understand and to improve their learning skills. Over time, pupils' confidence and self-belief develop well. Lessons are happy and orderly. Behaviour is managed effectively. Possible difficulties are anticipated and pupils are gently guided to try their hardest and do their best. Pupils enjoy their work and the praise they are given for their efforts. Teachers' knowledge of their subjects is good. They broadly assess pupils' progress against the benchmark of National Curriculum levels. They tell them clearly how well they are doing and what they must do to improve. Individual written targets are also set in literacy and numeracy. However, a minority of these lack the sharpness and clarity of the points for improvement that the teachers make in conversation with their pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Good opportunities are provided to develop pupils' literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills. There are broad opportunities for pupils to have their achievements recognised by national awards. Work is taking place to ensure that these involve all aspects of pupils' work. As well as entry level courses in English, mathematics, science and physical education the school now offers GCSE foundation level courses in mathematics, science and art. This considerably opens up pupils' opportunities for achievement. The school has also recently added English to the list of GCSE foundation courses, which helps current pupils. Provision for education about health and safety is strong. Pupils' personal development is greatly enhanced by the wide range of activities and learning opportunities with which the curriculum is enriched.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school is fully committed to the well-being of its pupils. There is exemplary emphasis on their health and safety. Risks are thoroughly assessed and sensible steps taken to minimise these. Pupils' personal development is closely monitored and their needs are very well known to staff. These are fully taken into account when activities are planned. Pupils are given the help that they need to achieve success in learning and high standards of personal development. The school is innovative in promoting the sociability and confidence of its pupils. It has, for example, introduced ballroom dancing as a leisure activity. It has taken a lead in sponsoring dances at a central venue in the town. These are happily attended by boys and girls from most of the mainstream and special schools in the area. Effective support helps pupils move on from school confidently. The school's policy for child protection is well known to all staff and it is regularly reviewed. The school is exceptional in providing care and support for its most vulnerable pupils. It brings the needs of pupils or families in difficulty to the attention of relevant agencies and works with these agencies to give the help that is needed.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher expresses great pride in pupils' achievements. In turn, pupils are proud of their school and confident that they will succeed. After a period of adjustment the new leadership team is now working effectively to maintain and improve standards and provision. All staff support the leadership in seeking to make the school even better. The school monitors pupils' progress in relation to National Curriculum levels of attainment. However, it does not compare the achievements of its pupils with those of similar learners elsewhere. This omission limits the scope of self-evaluation, which is satisfactory overall. The school is strongly committed to inclusion and has been very innovative in helping its pupils to have a great deal of social contact with pupils in mainstream schools. Safeguarding procedures meet current requirements. The governance of the school is good. Governors know the school well. While they are supportive they are rigorous in holding the school to account.

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Annex A

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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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 very much for your friendly and kind welcome when I came to inspect your school. You were very helpful and I will long remember your cheerful faces and your willingness to talk to me about how much you like your school. Many of you were very keen that if I found that your school was good I should describe it in your own special phrase. I did find that it was good and that some things were outstanding so I am happy to say, in your words, that Oaklands is, 'Tip-Top'!

The school council told me that pupils really enjoy their lessons and coming to school. They said that all pupils felt safe at school and would not tolerate bullying. They said that pupils know a lot about healthy living and like the meals the school provides and also enjoy the chances it gives them to take part in physical exercise. Most of the council think that the work you are given is challenging but not too hard.

In my time in your school I found that you achieve well in your work because you are well taught and are given interesting things to do in the classrooms and outside the school day. During your time at school you become very likeable young people. Your behaviour and attitudes to work are excellent and you think of others. You do as much as you can for your community and for people less fortunate than you. The school takes excellent care of you and gives you the help and guidance you need. Your school is well led and managed.

To improve your school further I have asked the headteacher and staff to compare the progress you make with that made by girls and boys in schools similar to yours. This will help them to gain a very good idea of how well your school is getting on and help them guide you to do even better in your work.

Thank you once again and good luck in the future.