

Great Oaks School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116621
Local Authority	Southampton
Inspection number	312349
Inspection dates	5–6 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Jacque Cook

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	130
6th form	15
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Len Mockett
Headteacher	Mr Andy Evans
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Vermont Close off Winchester Road Southampton SO16 7LT
Telephone number	023 8076 7660
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

A school that caters for pupils with learning difficulties including moderate (MLD) and severe (SLD). Eighteen pupils have autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), nine have behavioural, social and emotional difficulties (BSED) and a further nine have speech, language and communication difficulties. A few pupils have physical difficulties or profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). The Post-16 provision currently has students with SLD or PMLD. The nature of the learners' difficulties means they are all working below national expectations.

There are three times as many boys as girls and 13 pupils are looked after. Most pupils are of White British ethnicity. There are, however, a small number of pupils from Asian or Caribbean backgrounds. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is high. In 2006, Local Authority reorganisation and the closure of the local school for pupils with SLD and PMLD has led to a significant broadening in the range of pupils' needs and the addition of the Post-16 provision. The headteacher was also appointed at this time. There has been extensive new building work and the school has changed its name.

The Artsmark Gold award was gained in June and Sportsmark in December 2007. The school is working towards a submission for specialist school status in the arts.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Great Oaks is a satisfactory school with a number of clear strengths. Most importantly, the pupils say they really enjoy coming to school and are very proud of their work. This is partly due to the very positive atmosphere where staff use praise and encouragement effectively. The headteacher and senior management team have managed the amalgamation of the two schools, staff and pupils, well through difficult circumstances on split sites. They have set a clear direction for the school and have accurately identified the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. The behaviour of some pupils was identified as a concern. Quite rightly, this was established as a priority and staff training and new systems have already made a difference so that behaviour is improving and is now generally satisfactory. This demonstrates a clear track record that shows a good capacity to improve further. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory and most make appropriate progress towards their targets. They do well in English, art and design and music which reflects the, often outstanding, quality of teaching and learning in these subjects. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory because although there is good teaching, it is not consistent. Many changes in staffing, a lack of adequate subject leadership and, at times, inadequate teaching and learning have contributed to pupils' inadequate achievement in mathematics. There are instances where the quality of teaching and learning in humanities and science is also inadequate.

Pupils' personal development and well-being is good. Due to very good food technology and physical education provision, they have, as far as possible, developed healthy lifestyles taking exercise and eating sensibly. Targeted work in the personal, social and health education programme has contributed to pupils increasing awareness of how to stay safe. Pupils' care guidance and support is good. There are robust arrangements for safeguarding pupils and for involving appropriate support services where needed. The curriculum is satisfactory. There are not sufficient opportunities for all pupils to gain a range of awards and the school is working on increasing the number of occasions where pupils with different needs work together. There are strengths in the enrichment activities such as lunchtime and after school clubs. The Friday afternoon activities work very well. Pupils like them because they are 'able to make new friends' from other year groups and can choose 'fun things' to do. Work is underway to review what is being taught so that pupils can all achieve well. There are many opportunities for pupils to contribute to the school and to the wider community. The school council is very effective and Year 7 pupils appreciate their older 'buddies'. Many charities are supported throughout each year. Pupils develop work place skills well through improving their key skills. Older pupils learn a great deal from work experience and going to college. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good.

Recent appointments have increased the size of the senior management team and are already having a positive effect on the work of the school. This has freed up the headteacher and deputy headteacher to use the results of monitoring and evaluation and set challenging targets to improve pupils' achievement. In seeking to improve the role of middle managers, key skills coordinators have been appointed. However, they have not been in post long enough to make a difference. Overall leadership and management are satisfactory. Governance of the school is satisfactory.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The effectiveness of the Post-16 provision is satisfactory. The students follow a good curriculum, which has appropriate accreditation. The good opportunities to use the local community and many practical elements of their work helps students prepare well for when they leave school. As a result of the high level of care, guidance and support, their personal development is good. Students make satisfactory progress towards gaining modules on their ASDAN courses. The quality of their teaching and learning are satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase pupils' achievement in mathematics.
- Improve the consistency of the quality of teaching and learning so that all teaching is of a high standard.
- Improve the curriculum to help raise standards.
- Develop the role of middle managers so that they evaluate pupils' progress and have a more effective role in raising standards.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Most pupils enter the school with low and at times, very low, levels of attainment. From this base, the majority make satisfactory progress. Although it is clear that some pupils make good progress there are no measurable differences in the achievement of the various groups of pupils in the school. Pupils' success in English, art and design and music is partly due to the teachers' skill in making the subjects enjoyable. Also, what is taught is stimulating which leads to high levels of achievement. In mathematics progress is markedly slower with too many pupils achieving less well than expected. Pupils make satisfactory progress towards meeting challenging targets.

More able pupils gain awards including entry level and unit awards in several subjects in Year 11. In the Post-16 provision, students achieve modules of the Award Scheme and Development Accreditation Network (ASDAN).

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils develop good social skills through helping others in school and in the wider community. They take responsibilities very seriously whether helping their teachers or as members of the school council organising a school disco. They enjoy raising money for charities such as 'jeans for genes' and some of the Post-16 students help to keep a local church clean. Many pupils who initially find it difficult to work with others begin to cooperate well. Pupils' attendance is good because they enjoy their lessons. They like meeting their friends and there is much laughter, for instance, when a bottle of deodorant rather than a prize is pulled from the reward

box. Pupils know who to go to for help in school and in the community. They take care in practical subjects, although some may need to be reminded and helped. Most have a clear understanding of the difference between right and wrong. They know what food is 'good for you' and many make sensible choices. They exercise regularly in school enjoying the hydrotherapy or the swimming pool, team games and nature walks. Pupils are developing a good understanding of the diverse world in which they live through cooking and sampling different foods and studying a broad range of cultures in art and design and music. Pupils are well prepared for when they leave school: Their communication skills improve and they know what work is like from participating in work experience. Many gain the confidence to mix with others in the larger college environment and choose to continue their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality of teaching and learning varies from outstanding to inadequate. In all lessons staff use rewards effectively and pupils respond well to being 'caught doing something good'. Teachers have good levels of subject expertise, which, in subjects such as music and art and design, leads to good achievement. This is because pupils rise to challenges. A Year 7 group learned a new action song and played the melody in one session. In an art examination during the inspection, Year 11 pupils worked for three days creating and perfecting their work including some spectacular three-dimensional pieces. Staff use signs, symbols and pictures appropriately when working with pupils with communication difficulties. This helps pupils' understanding and begins developing their speaking and listening skills. Support staff are generally used well, particularly to provide one-to-one intensive support for pupils with PMLD. However, they do not work often enough with groups of pupils. Many lessons have a variety of activities that grab and maintain pupils' interest: A short video clip from *The Diary of Ann Frank* led to high levels of concentration as pupils sought to answer the teachers' questions. They then explored what made posters, shown on the interactive board, successfully including one written in Russian! Finally, they produced excellent posters themselves designed to help the characters in the film. Where pupils do not learn well, it is usually because their work is not pitched at the right level. This occurs in mathematics and occasionally in subjects such as in science and humanities. It is either too hard, or too easy. Assessment of pupils' progress has improved since teachers have worked together to gain a clearer understanding of levels of attainment. However lesson plans do not always show clearly what is to be learned which sometimes hampers the accuracy of judgements made about pupils' progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Great care has been taken to ensure changes are introduced gradually, particularly for the more vulnerable pupils who have already experienced the upheaval of transferring from one school to another. The curriculum is rightly being reviewed at this stage to provide continuity across the school and give more opportunities for pupils with different needs to work together. An appropriate range of provision includes specialist subject teaching for the more able and largely class based teaching for the less able with some specialist provision. At present, there is a

satisfactory range of examination courses for pupils in Year 11. However, as last year some pupils only gained one award, this is being expanded. Additionally, in Year 9 in textiles and information and communication technology (ICT) awards are planned. In Post-16, the curriculum is well matched to the needs of the current students. Good use is made of the community, for instance to increase financial skills through shopping for food. 'Taster' college courses are popular with the more able Year 11 pupils and the Post-16 students enjoy their weekly sessions. These courses include activities such as motor mechanics, painting and decorating and bakery. There is a good opportunity for all members of the school to work together in the Friday afternoon activities. Pupils talk enthusiastically of their favourites that include the gardening club, model railways and the 'Rock Challenge' dance and music club. Lunchtime and after school clubs such as rugby, ICT, art, reading and guitar are well attended and enrich the curriculum further.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Regular meetings with the support services ensure that looked after children receive the support they need and their progress is monitored closely. The introduction of key stage leaders has strengthened the tutor system so good links with parents are fostered. The home-school diaries are particularly effective in maintaining communication. Daily lesson-by-lesson comments and records of targets are included. This keeps parents informed and helps pupils know their goals and work towards them. Recently the format and focus for individual education plans has been changed. It is, however, too early to assess their impact on pupils' progress. Greater consistency in the application of individual behaviour plans is helping pupils to manage their behaviour. The adults' use of rewards similarly encourages good behaviour and positive attitudes because pupils enjoy collecting merits and gaining certificates and prizes in the celebration assemblies. Safeguarding arrangements are a priority and the supervision of pupils at break and lunchtime is good. Good links with the Connexions service complements well the guidance offered to support pupils make the right choices for the next stage in their lives.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Much of the work of the, initially small, senior management team has been taken up with successfully bringing together pupils and staff from one school into another. Data on pupils' progress has been collected, analysed and evaluated. Although relative strengths and weaknesses are identified accurately, judgements about the performance of the school are too high. Targets set are challenging, but progress towards them is not reviewed regularly enough in order to raise standards. The school improvement plan shows a clear direction. Priorities established such as enlarging the senior management team and tackling behaviour difficulties are having a positive effect on pupils' achievement. There has been a dramatic decrease in the number of pupils out of lessons this term as effective strategies are consistently used by staff. Improved behaviour, good links with parents and the high profile of the community support officer in school have contributed well to community cohesion. The monitoring of teaching and learning has led to general training needs being identified including assessing attainment accurately.

Also specific needs, such as expertise and subject leadership in mathematics, are being tackled through the appointment of a numeracy coordinator and providing relevant courses for staff. The role of the middle managers is developing since the appointment of skills coordinators but they have not yet taken over from subject coordination. At present, there is a gap and leadership and management, for example in mathematics, is weak which contributes to the inadequate progress made by pupils. As a result, self-evaluation at subject level is inadequate to raise standards. The governing body are supportive and now have links with subjects. However, they do not yet have sufficient first-hand knowledge of the work of the school to enable them to act fully effectively as critical friends.

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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	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?	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	3	
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?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	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 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	3
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	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	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	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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

19 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Great Oaks School, Southampton, SO16 7LT

Thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave me when I visited recently. I enjoyed seeing you in school and looking at your work. I would like to give a particular thank you to the members of the school council and other pupils who talked with me and told me about the school. Overall, your school is satisfactory and there are a number of things that are good.

This is what I liked about your school.

- You clearly enjoy coming to school and your attendance is good.
- You make good progress in English, art and design and music.
- Your behaviour has improved to satisfactory overall.
- Teaching is sometimes outstanding.
- Your personal development is good.
- Many of you have adopted a healthy lifestyle, taking exercise and eating wisely.
- Friday afternoon activities are good.
- Your headteacher and senior staff have joined the two schools together well.
- There are good plans to make the school even better.

This is what I have asked your school to do now.

- Help you to do better in mathematics.
- Ensure all the teaching is good.
- Improve what you are taught.
- Help subject and key skill coordinators to be effective.

With best wishes

Jacque Cook

Lead Inspector