

Oxted School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125253
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	315213
Inspection dates	11–12 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Sean Hanan HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	2102
6th form	418
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs M McNaughton MBE DL
Headteacher	Mrs M Hawley
Date of previous school inspection	15 September 2003
School address	Bluehouse Lane Oxted RH8 0AB
Telephone number	01883 712425
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Age group	11-18
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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

This is a large secondary school serving Oxted in Surrey and the surrounding towns and villages. It is a largely rural area, but students also travel from urban areas in Surrey and Kent to attend the school. The large majority of students are White British and most are materially advantaged. The number entitled to free school meals is low. The proportion of students with learning difficulties is around the national average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Oxted School provides good education for its students. It is one of the largest schools in the country and yet there is a strong sense of community based on a clear and inclusive ethos and on the outstanding care, guidance and support that are provided for students. The school enjoys strong support from parents. The 'house' system is used effectively to break down barriers between year groups and, consequently, students work well together in an orderly atmosphere based on trust and mutual respect. They attend regularly, behave well and feel safe in the school environment. Most enjoy coming to school and understand well the importance of a healthy lifestyle.

Students contribute particularly well to school life and to the wider community. The school council and the sixth form council are effective forums for issues to be raised and discussed with school managers. Older students support younger students, and sixth formers take on an unusually wide range of responsibilities. Considerable sums are raised for charities, and activities that promote cohesion in the school community are arranged, including innovative curriculum projects overseas. The vast majority of students mature into responsible and articulate young people by the time they leave the school.

Standards are high and students achieve well overall. However, progress is slower in Years 7 to 9 than in later years. Those with learning difficulties make progress at the same rate as their peers. The curriculum is outstanding and is enhanced by an excellent range of extra-curricular activities. Teaching and learning are good and most lessons are characterised by a varied range of activities in a purposeful atmosphere. The school's lesson observation scheme, however, does not provide a consistently accurate assessment of students' learning.

Leadership and management are good both in the main school and in the sixth form. The Governors make an outstanding contribution to the school. The school knows itself well and its self-evaluation is a broadly accurate assessment of the relative strengths and the weaknesses in provision. However, as managers have identified, targets are not used effectively enough to drive improvements in standards. The school has developed well since its last inspection and there is a good capacity for it to improve further. It provides good value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Provision for students is good. Most students continue from Year 11 into the sixth form. Retention in the sixth form is high; the large majority complete the courses they started. Results at A level have improved steadily over the past few years, although they fell slightly in 2007. The pass rate in 2007 was 93%, below the national average, although the percentage of passes that were at grades A and B was above the national average. Students make good progress compared to their starting points at the end of Year 11.

Students choose from a very wide range of courses at AS and A level that includes subjects that are unusual in a sixth form, such as Latin, classical civilisation, philosophy and ethics, and science for public understanding. The opportunities for enrichment are outstanding. Alongside a wide range of options in areas such as drama and sport, the school offers an unusually broad range of accredited enrichment activities. These include, general studies, critical thinking, sports leaders awards and short courses in four modern languages and accountancy. Plans are in place to extend the provision in 2008 to include four vocational choices for students who do not

have the qualifications necessary to begin A level courses. Students are given good advice about appropriate courses and are very effectively supported to progress to university or to employment. Students' personal development is outstanding. The sixth form council is a very effective 'student voice' and organises a number of charitable and social events. Students take on significant leadership roles in the school that provide good support for younger students. Their excellent behaviour provides a strong role model. They value the excellent guidance and support they receive from staff. Minimum target grades are used well to monitor and improve performance. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise students' achievement in Years 7 to 9.
- Improve the rigour in the lessons observation scheme by focusing on students' learning.
- Make more effective use of targets to raise standards.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards at the end of Year 9 have remained above national averages over the last five years but the gap between national standards and those in the school has narrowed. Standards at the end of Year 11 have been well above national averages over the last three years. The percentage gaining five or more A*-C grades at GCSE in 2007 was significantly above the national average. Between Years 7 and 11, students make good progress, particularly in English. The school confirms a dip in the progress of the students who sat national tests in Year 9 at the end 2006. However, their progress has improved since and is now at least satisfactory in these earlier years. During Years 10 and 11, students make good progress when compared to similar students in similar schools. Students with learning difficulties achieve as well as their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school is a friendly and supportive community. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, and is reflected in the harmonious and inclusive relationships that prevail. Students enjoy school, do their best to be on time for lessons and have positive attitudes to learning. They behave well, feel safe, and are clear about how to stay safe in the wider community. Students know their boundaries and the consequences of inappropriate actions. They appreciate the importance of a healthy lifestyle. High numbers take part in sports and other physical activities during daily enrichment sessions. Students know how to choose healthy lunches and snacks and are aware of the implications of poor nutrition. Attendance is good; it is monitored rigorously and has improved steadily over the past few years. There are clear and effective anti-bullying strategies in place.

Students take on responsibility willingly. Sixth form students act as peer-mentors for younger students and assist in the smooth running of the school. There are many opportunities for older students to take on roles of responsibility and there is stiff competition for the posts. Students undergo a rigorous selection process including interviews, training and regular feedback. In the wider community, students make an outstanding contribution through a range of activities

including fund raising, charity events, concerts and innovative curriculum projects, such as establishing links with students in Ghana. The support provided for students to extend their education and to celebrate their success is a particular strength of the school. There are good opportunities for students to develop skills that will help their future employment.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Relationships between staff and students are good and often excellent. Teachers have good subject knowledge, plan their lessons well and share the aims of the lessons with the students. Students have positive attitudes and behave well. A wide range of learning styles and good teaching capture students' attention and enables them to make good progress. Skilful use of challenging questions encourages students to think for themselves and to develop their own ideas. In many lessons, the work is challenging yet attainable. The pace is fast, activities varied and the enjoyment of students is evident. Students take pride in their work and are keen to succeed. Teachers use praise well to motivate them. They create a climate where it is acceptable to make errors and then use these errors to develop students' understanding. In the less successful lessons, there is insufficient challenge and the pace is too slow. Lesson plans show how the differing needs of individuals will be met, but they are not implemented consistently across the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The 'pathway' system offers an outstanding choice of subjects that meet the interests and needs of the students. Links with a local FE college enable the school to offer both vocational and work-related choices. More able students are supported very effectively by early entries for GCSE, after school subjects, such as Latin, and other targeted activities. The curriculum is reviewed regularly and updated. Recent changes include the introduction to Year 10 of an understanding of preferred learning styles and, in Year 9, an innovative way to deliver citizenship through outdoor education workshops. The school offers an outstanding number of extra-curricular activities. These include additional opportunities such as sporting and artistic activities and clubs. An impressive feature is the large number of trips including a project to create teaching materials in Antarctica.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The 'house' system is used very effectively to promote students' personal, social and academic development. Harmonious relationships and clear structures ensure that students feel safe and well cared for at school. The school works extremely well with partner primary schools to ensure that new students settle quickly and happily into Year 7. A strong feature is the support for different groups of students with diverse needs. One parent of a child with learning difficulties

commented, '...after leaving primary school with significant difficulties, Oxted School changed my child into a positive student, enjoying school and making really good progress'.

Students with more complex social, emotional and behavioural needs are particularly well supported and have positive and productive relationships with staff. Safeguarding procedures are robust and students requiring specialist support are identified early. Support and monitoring are very effective. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress, particularly because of additional help to improve their literacy skills. Additional support, where appropriate, is provided swiftly by a number of external agencies. Health and safety, and risk assessment procedures are robust.

Most students know their target grades. However, they are less clear about what they need to do in order to progress to the next level. The school recognises the need for more rigour in setting appropriate targets allied to more precise use of information by staff. The good assessment procedures and practice observed in areas such as English and the sixth form, need to be used consistently across the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school is well led by the headteacher and the senior leadership team. There is a clear, shared vision about the direction in which the school should be moving. Self-evaluation is good and a strong focus on ensuring equality of opportunity is evident throughout the school. Managers know the school well and are aware that there are some inconsistencies in practice that mean that the pace of improvement is not always as fast as they would like. The school recognises that it has not had a reliable process for deriving consistently challenging and robust whole school targets for raising standards in Years 7 to 11. A new process has been introduced but is yet to be fully embedded in practice. Though there is systematic monitoring and evaluation of lessons, there is a tendency to focus on teaching rather than on learning outcomes and the variables that directly contribute to the progress made by students.

Governance is outstanding. The governing body is a skilled and effective force that is highly committed to helping the school develop and improve. The governors know the school very well and they have an impressively accurate view about its strengths and areas for development. Though they are strongly supportive of all the work undertaken, they function very effectively as 'critical friends' and this level of monitoring is a key factor in promoting improvement.

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

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	1
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	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	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	1

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?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	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	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	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
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	1	
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 October 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Oxted School, Oxted, RH8 0AB

I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to let you know the judgements we have made about your school. You told us many positive things about your school, particularly about the wide range of extra-curricular activities available and how the school is a safe and cohesive community.

- We believe your school provides a good education for you.
- Most of you enjoy coming to school, feel safe and make good progress in lessons.
- Staff and governors at the school make decisions in your best interests.
- Through the student council and the sixth form council, you contribute significantly to improving the school.
- You have a particularly good choice of subjects both in Year 10 and in the sixth form.
- The 'house' system helps to break down barriers between age groups and contributes to outstanding care, guidance and support that the school provides for you.
- Sixth formers do a lot to help younger students.
- You contribute particularly well to the life of the school and the local community.

In order to improve further, your school needs to:

- improve the progress you make in Years 7 to 9
- do more to check the quality of your learning in lessons
- use targets more effectively to help you improve your work.

Thank you for taking part in the inspection and by talking to us openly and honestly about your work and your life in school.

Yours sincerely,

Sean Hanan HMI

Lead Inspector