

Oakfield High School & College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131530
Local Authority	Wigan
Inspection number	315824
Inspection dates	22–23 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Linda Clare

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	173
6th form	46
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr R Muirhead
Headteacher	Mr John Young
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Close Lane Hindley Wigan Lancashire WN2 3SA
Telephone number	01942 776142
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Age group	11-19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Oakfield was opened in 2006 following a local authority reorganisation of special schools. It provides education for students who have a statement of special educational need owing to their learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most have moderate learning difficulties. A significant minority have either severe learning difficulties or social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. As a result of their learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the standards of students when they start school are well below those of similar age in mainstream schools. Students are predominantly of White British heritage. A small number of students are looked after by the local authority. The school has achieved Leading Edge status, Charter Mark, Sportsmark and Investors in People Awards.

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 where students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students achieve well academically from their individual starting points on entry to the school. Whatever their difficulty, boys and girls make good progress. This is due to good teaching and a high level of individual support. By Year 11 all students leave with some accreditation; over 50% pass at least one GCSE. Effective teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants contributes well to students' success. Teachers make lessons meaningful and relevant, although across the school work is not always tightly matched to individuals' needs.

Students' personal development is outstanding. Students enjoy school and parents reflect this positive view. 'My child absolutely loves and enjoys coming to school; her confidence has improved immensely,' is a comment representative of many. Behaviour is good. Attendance is satisfactory and improving; persistent absence is targeted increasingly effectively by the school. By Year 11 students' economic well-being is outstanding because of their experience of a wide range of work-related opportunities, their enhanced independent skills and their acquisition of good basic literacy and numeracy skills. Relationships are positive, reflecting the good pastoral care. Enterprise education is strong in a relevant curriculum adapted to meet students' needs.

Students' progress is monitored but tracking data are not yet analysed in sufficient depth to give a clear picture of whether students are doing as well as they might. The school takes safeguarding seriously and has robust systems to ensure the health and safety of students. The headteacher has effectively created an enthusiastic and committed staff team while steering the school through the unsettled period of reorganisation. The school is well managed and governors provide good support and challenge. Together the headteacher, senior leaders and governors have a clear sense of direction and high expectations for the school's future development. Because of the rigorous self-evaluation the school has an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses. It focuses appropriately on actions that will make a positive difference to the quality of teaching and learning, and to students' achievements. Much has been achieved since the school was opened, demonstrating the school's outstanding capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Oakfield College promotes students' independence and learning effectively. Students achieve a range of vocational and academic qualifications as a result of relevant activities built into the developing curriculum. Practical courses such as floristry and collaborative activities, including those with external providers, are particular strengths. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Students are well cared for in outstanding accommodation and make excellent progress in their personal development. Tracking students' progress is satisfactory and the school recognises this as an area for future development. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The college sets an impressive example to the school through its friendly and courteous students.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve tracking throughout the school and in the sixth form to ensure that leadership and management have a clear picture of students' progress.

- Ensure that the work planned effectively meets the needs of individual students consistently across the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

As a consequence of students' moderate or severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the standards they reach are well below those of students of similar ages in mainstream schools.

Students achieve well, however, given their own starting points. All older students gain external accreditation and the majority achieve entry level awards, which are equivalent to the early levels of the National Curriculum. By Year 11 a significant minority of students make the progress expected for their age to achieve English, mathematics and/or science GCSEs. College students gain accreditation from an increasing range of national foundation level courses. Students improve their communication and personal development skills to become more confident, independent and self-aware, which parents greatly appreciate. Their performance in enterprise and work-related learning is exceptional. Students of all abilities make equally good progress. Their needs are individually assessed and supported to ensure that no group or individual fares less well than any other overall. Information on students' progress, however, is not always used consistently well in planning lessons to ensure an appropriate level of challenge for all. Most students achieve their individual targets and some exceed them.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students say they like their school and enjoy their lessons. Their good work and behaviour are recognised and celebrated at every opportunity. Whole-school strategies together with the work of a dedicated support officer have resulted in a good improvement in attendance, which is satisfactory and rising. Measures are in place to deal with the very small number of persistent non-attenders. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. There is a calm atmosphere around school, excellent levels of consideration for others and eager collaboration in lessons. A notable feature of the school is the positive attitude students display in everything they do. Students know right from wrong. Their behaviour is good owing to excellent relationships with teachers. Parents say school deals swiftly with issues that arise. Students develop very good spiritual and cultural awareness through a wide range of activities and extra-curricular themed days. Residential experiences in France enhance personal development. Students feel safe, secure and valued. They learn to be thoughtful, empathetic and caring in personal, social and health education (PSHE) and religious education lessons. The school council enables students to develop initiative and social responsibility. Students adopt healthy lifestyles, and lunchtime clubs, which provide sporting options, are well attended. Students enjoy the good opportunities in the community to develop their enterprise and life skills. Older students are well prepared with the basic skills of literacy and numeracy for the world of work and their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching is good overall. The positive atmosphere in lessons is a result of very good relationships between staff and students and the highly effective way staff manage behaviour. Students engage positively in learning and show obvious delight in their achievements. Making learning relevant is a strong feature of most lessons. In best practice staff devise exciting experiences in highly structured learning environments. Tasks encourage students to explore and use all their senses to improve their learning. Planning in these lessons includes clear outcomes for individuals and groups. Where teaching is not as strong, learning activities do not maintain the interest of all students throughout the lesson, as they are not sufficiently stretched. Effective strategies ensure that students meet their targets. Teachers are particularly adept in helping students understand what they need to do to improve their work. Not all lessons, however, are well tailored to each student's ability, nor is all work graded to match individual students' needs closely. Teaching assistants are experienced and highly skilled. They are given a range of responsibilities and make a significant contribution to students' progress and achievement. Good use of resources, such as interactive whiteboards and everyday objects, makes lessons meaningful. There is an appropriately strong emphasis on the teaching of literacy, numeracy and communication skills.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The well planned curriculum meets the needs of all students. It concentrates appropriately on developing the basic and social skills required for adult independence, but ensures that it also meets statutory requirements. The strong emphasis on personalised learning in the core subjects of mathematics, English, science, and information and communication technology is supported through practical and multi-sensory experiences. English and literacy skills are being developed further this year. The effective use of computers enables students with coordination difficulties to achieve high standards of presentation. Accreditation has been put into place for students of all abilities and the school's range of qualifications is still developing. A good system for options has a vocational emphasis in Year 11, which motivates and provides excellent progression routes. Good links with other schools and strong work-related learning opportunities complement a successful enterprise programme. Pupils are given excellent support to enhance their personal development, health and well-being. Out-of-hours clubs and lunchtime activities greatly contribute to improving students' self-confidence and independence.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

All staff are strongly committed to students' care. Links with outside agencies are outstanding and well targeted intervention supports vulnerable students effectively. The school has good procedures to promote and safeguard students' welfare. Procedures to ensure health and safety,

including those for child protection, are in place. Pastoral support is particularly strong. It is organised effectively by the headteacher and key stage managers. Students benefit from the individual attention they receive from their form tutors and key workers who guide and support their personal and social development. Tracking students' progress and the use of assessment data to raise achievement is at an early stage of development, in part because of the school's recent reorganisation. It is not yet as effective as the pastoral support. Careers information and work-related knowledge and skills are developed well through work experience, PHSE and support from Connexions. The annual report provides parents with a comprehensive picture of their children's progress. Parents especially value the level of care their children receive and the ways in which independence is encouraged.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and has built a strong, committed and cohesive staff. Staff have achieved much in the short period that the school has been open including two Leading Aspect awards for enterprise education, Healthy Schools and Charter Mark awards, and Investors in People status. Staff development is valued and this has effectively improved the quality of subject and pastoral leadership. Equal opportunities are promoted strongly to ensure the well-being of all students including the most vulnerable. All statutory requirements in relation to safeguarding children are met. The school monitors and evaluates its work but this is not sufficiently consistent or systematic. Analysis of tracking is limited and data available are as yet insufficient to indicate patterns and trends in progress. As a result, leaders and managers do not have as clear a picture of students' progress as they could. Managers are tackling this as more information about students' progress is recorded. The opinions of parents and students are sought regularly and valued as part of the decision-making process. Governance is good; in developing their role as critical friends governors are linked to aspects of the school improvement plan. This is providing increasing levels of challenge. The school has excellent accommodation and staff have made good use of the buildings. The school makes efficient use of resources and provides good value for money.

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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	NA	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	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	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?	2	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?	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	2	
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	2	
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

Thank you for your kind welcome when we inspected your school recently. Thank you also for talking to us and telling us how much you enjoy going to school.

There were lots of things we liked about your school. You attend a good school, which is a happy place to be. You work very hard in your lessons and learn about many different subjects. We liked all the activities that you can choose from at lunchtime. You behave well and are very kind to each other. Everyone that we met was very polite and well mannered. Your teachers and support staff help you learn well, no matter what your difficulties are. They know how you like to learn and how to help you to improve.

They take good care of you at your school. Your class teachers and key workers are there to help whenever you need it and you know that you can talk to them.

Your very good headteacher runs the school well. He makes sure that he and your teachers know about you and your work. He has done a lot to make your school and its classrooms very attractive. Your parents and carers are right to think that you go to a good school. You have good reason to be very proud of it.

We thought your school could be even better if:

- the teachers plan work that always meets your individual needs
- the headteacher and governors improve the tracking of your progress throughout the school, to give them a clear picture of how well you are doing.

We hope you continue to enjoy your learning and make even better progress in the future.