

Oaks Park High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133405
Local Authority	Redbridge
Inspection number	316113
Inspection date	3 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Glynis Bradley-Peat

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 (total)	1525
Sixth form	314
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Neil Pendrigh
Headteacher	Mr Stephen Wilks
Date of previous school inspection	6 October 2003
School address	45–65 Oaks Lane Newbury Park Ilford IG2 7PQ
Telephone number	020 8590 2245
Fax number	020 8590 2246

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues.

- What action have leaders taken to ensure that standards rise and that students' achievement improves?
- How effectively are leaders at all levels ensuring that teaching has maximum impact on students' achievement?
- What are the key factors in students' personal development and well-being which would make them outstanding?

Evidence was gathered from the analysis of school documentation, observation of lessons, conversations with learners and discussions with teachers and senior staff. Other aspects of the school's work were not inspected in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The school is much larger than average. It has been designated as a specialist music college. It has a larger than average percentage of boys. Approximately two thirds of its students are from minority ethnic groups and almost half speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students with specific or moderate learning difficulties, or who have behavioural and emotional difficulties, is just above that usually found. The proportion eligible for free school meals is higher than that usually found. The school has 'Healthy School Status' and 'Sportsmark'.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Oaks Park High is a good and improving school. Much has been achieved since the school opened in 2001 and it has already built itself a reputation worthy of note. The strong leadership of the headteacher has ensured that a recently reorganised senior leadership team, including a new deputy headteacher, has become immediately effective. As a result, leadership and management are good. Senior leaders are an enthusiastic and able group of individuals who give clear direction and share their vision for the future with all staff. The line management of subjects has become tighter and consequently dedicated and hard working subject leaders do a good job. The monitoring of teaching, planning and students' work is rigorous and ensures improvements are made to practice which lead to better achievement. A real strength of leadership and management is the way the school develops and trains its staff to build capacity for the future. Good improvement has been made since the last inspection. For example, the school now monitors the work of its staff thoroughly and has a firm grasp on evaluating standards. The impact of measures taken to raise standards further are accelerating achievement. This is a school that knows itself well. Governors are skilled and challenge leaders by asking questions which help to drive forward school improvement. In light of all these elements, and the ever-increasing expertise of leaders at all levels, the school has excellent capacity to improve further. The parents are overwhelmingly supportive and praise the school highly for its work. One parent's comments represent the words of many, 'Three of my children have gone or are still at Oaks Park and I have always been very happy with the school and the team of great staff that work there.'

The school plays an important role in the local community. It has extended opening hours so that a variety of activities can take place, which involve large numbers of students from the school and members of the local community. The school works closely with the local police and both the headteacher and head boy are members of the local 'Safer Neighbourhood Team Management Board'. The school is also a pilot school for the London Schools Safety and Cohesion Programme.

Students enter the school with below average standards and leave with standards that are above average. Achievement is good. There are pockets of excellent achievement, for example in mathematics and science at Key Stage 4, and learners meet particularly challenging targets. The data for the school show that students make good progress overall and in mathematics progress is outstanding. This is because teaching is excellent and the leadership of the mathematics subject leader is dynamic and forward looking. Provisional results of assessments in 2008 show improvement on 2007 at both Key Stages 3 and 4, especially in mathematics and science. Particular improvements are in the percentages of students who gain 5 A* - C at GCSE including English and mathematics. This year the figure is 56%, 9% above last year's national average. This has improved year on year. In English, the subject leader has identified some underachievement in boy's writing. She has begun to implement a plan of action to combat this, which is beginning to have some impact. Further initiatives are ready to be implemented.

Students' enjoyment of school is obvious and this is demonstrated by their good attendance and excellent behaviour. Clear boundaries and high expectations let students know where they stand. They say, 'Sometimes we cross the line but we get a fair punishment.' Students are polite, mature and considerate of others. They are very positive about the school but extremely positive about the way the specialist status has enabled everyone to benefit from being able to, '...have a chance to do something musical.' Music status contributes well to students'

enjoyment of school. Enrichment and extra-curricular activities contribute very well to students' achievement. Students feel they have a voice in the school and give many examples of improvements they have helped to make. For example, they have contributed to school policy on drugs and to the discipline plan. Students know how to live healthy lifestyles and adopt healthy choices at lunchtimes. They say, 'The food looks really nice, we can choose what fillings we want in the wraps.' Students say there is relatively little bullying in the school and have helped develop the anti-bullying policy. They know how to keep safe and students praise the way the school promotes a safe environment for them. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. Pupils are able to celebrate their diversity through a number of events during the school year; for example, through an African Caribbean evening, celebration of Black History Month and visits to New York and Poland. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme, assemblies and the school council ensure that students are aware, not only of their rights, but also of their responsibilities. Economic well-being is excellent. This is because students possess above average standards of basic skills, they have exceptionally good collaborative attitudes to working and they make the most of the outstanding work-related learning opportunities offered to them by the school.

Why is the personal development and well-being of students outstanding? It owes much to the outstanding care, guidance and support the school provides. Heads of Year and teachers ensure that students know their targets and understand how to reach the next level of attainment. Students were very clear about this and gave excellent examples of how the target setting process had helped them to move forward and achieve well. The way the school ensures that struggling students are identified and then helped to catch up is highly effective. This results in those students with a variety of learning difficulties making as much progress as their classmates.

Teaching overall is good with some outstanding teaching observed during the inspection. Teachers plan their lessons thoroughly and cater well for students of all abilities. They make the learning interesting by organising motivating lessons where students can debate and give their opinions. Electronic whiteboards are used well across subjects. Students appreciate this and say it helps them to learn. In an excellent geography lesson, students discussed eco-tourism and sustainability. Because the teacher had prepared well, she was able to facilitate students' learning and ensure that they made rapid progress. Teachers' high quality questioning skills were seen at work in history, psychology, English and mathematics. A real focus in all lessons on speaking and listening helps students make good progress. Music is super. The quality of singing observed during the inspection in assembly was excellent. The enjoyment was simply obvious. Teachers' subject knowledge is secure and students say, 'All our teachers are good at teaching and know their stuff.' Occasionally, lessons are overly teacher-directed and students spend too much time listening rather than actively learning. Then, the pace of progress slows. On the whole, marking is regular, but there are some inconsistencies across subjects. Although there are some good examples of marking which help students to improve their work, this is not always the case.

The reflective and purposeful way the school approaches its students' learning has evolved a curriculum that is outstanding. The four pathways offered at GCSE include a number of BTEC qualifications, a link with the local college and a vocational inclusion programme. Several initiatives within the four pathways offered to students have yet to show the impact they are having. However, early evaluation shows students are enjoying their experiences and progressing extremely well. These personalised pathways go a long way to meeting the needs of all students.

The strong partnership with the local college ensures that all students enjoy their education and experience success.

A comprehensive range of experiences organised through the curriculum contributes outstandingly well to students' personal development. For example, assemblies, visits and enrichment activities involving external partners all broaden students' horizons. Students receive extremely good careers guidance and support to inform their choices for further studies. They appreciate and enjoy a wide range of extra-curricular activities. These are significantly enhanced by the school's specialist music status with close to a third of students involved in the choir, orchestra, bands or instrumental tuition. The choir, the orchestra and individual students perform for school and local community audiences. Music status is having a positive impact on the academic and personal development of students across all subjects. Through the curriculum and a wide range of musical opportunities, students are developing their self-esteem and enjoying school. Music and mathematics are amongst the subjects students talk about most positively. The specialism ensures that the school works extensively with primary schools and a local special school. Joint projects with other subjects increase the creativity of students' experiences, adding to their enjoyment of learning.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Although the school sixth form has only been established for two years, it is making a very positive contribution to the education of students at Oaks Park. Students achieve well and make good progress in their academic and vocational studies. The popularity of the school is increasing locally and more students from outside the school are joining the sixth form. Teaching is good and improving, leading to students enjoying their lessons and developing good independent learning skills. The curriculum in the sixth form offers students a wide range of academic choices, but the vocational options are still somewhat limited. Sixth formers contribute positively towards many aspects of the school culture. All Year 12 students contribute through an enrichment programme, which sees them helping the school and wider community. Sixth formers act as prefects, peer mentors and reading buddies for younger students. This, alongside a comprehensive PSHE programme and a wide range of educational visits and events, contributes to their outstanding personal development. Students in the sixth form receive good support and guidance for their future careers, leading to all students securing a place for higher education or work. Good systems and processes have been set up to monitor students' progress through one-to-one tutor sessions. The overall effectiveness, and leadership and management of the sixth form are good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching from good to outstanding so that all practice matches that of the best.
- Raise achievement amongst boys through making improvements to their writing.

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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	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	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which 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	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	2

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 eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

14 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Oaks Park High School, Ilford, IG2 7PQ

Thank you very much for the warm welcome you extended to us when we inspected your school recently. It was great to see so many smiling faces. You greeted us with courtesy and good manners. We are of the opinion that your behaviour is excellent. You are brilliant ambassadors for your school. Those of you who took the time to speak to us in and out of lessons were helpful. You enabled us to gain a clear picture of the school from your point of view. Even the youngest pupils were able to give their opinions confidently.

We think your school is a good school that is continuing to improve. The headteacher and his team of senior leaders and teachers want the best for you and work hard to achieve that aim. Teachers teach you well and they continually seek new ways to make lessons interesting, but sometimes they talk for too long in lessons rather than letting you learn independently. We have asked the school to ensure that the quality of all teaching matches that of the best so that your progress improves and you achieve even more. You are doing better in tests and examinations each year and that is highly commendable. Greater percentages of you are gaining 5 A* - C grades at GCSE. Whilst at your school we found that boys do not achieve as well as girls. We have asked that the school finds more ways to help improve boys' writing, so that their achievement in all subjects improves.

Thank you again for making our day an enjoyable one and we wish you all the success you deserve in Oaks Park.

Yours sincerely

Glynis Bradley-Peat

Lead Inspector