

Oakfield Park School, Ackworth

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 133719 |
| Local Authority | Wakefield |
| Inspection number | 316209 |
| Inspection dates | 7–8 October 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Rosemary Eaton |

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

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| Type of school | Special |
| School category | Community special |
| Age range of pupils | 11–19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 117 |
| Sixth form | 0 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mrs B Moharram |
| Headteacher | Ms Wendy Fereday |
| Date of previous school inspection | 16 May 2005 |
| School address | Barnsley Road Ackworth Pontefract West Yorkshire WF7 7DT |
| Telephone number | 1977 723145 |
| Fax number | 1977 723148 |

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|--------------------------|------------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Oakfield Park caters for students with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. Many of the students have additional needs such as autistic spectrum disorders, complex medical issues, and challenging behaviour. All have a statement of special educational need. Students travel to the school from throughout the city of Wakefield Metropolitan District, with a few from other local authorities. Almost half of the students are considered to be looked after by the local authority, for example, because they have respite provision made for them. Most students are White British. In September 2008, Oakfield Park became a specialist school in the area of cognition and learning. It has achieved the Artsmark Gold, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Quality Mark, and Healthy Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school which pays equally close and successful attention to meeting all aspects of students' needs. As a result, they make exceptional progress in learning and personal development. Students give the school their full endorsement, describing it as 'super', 'fantastic' and 'lovely'.

In addition to the immense pleasure they take in their excellent relationships with fellow students and with staff, students report that they really enjoy hard work. They get this in plenty, because teaching is successfully focused on enabling each student to reach their potential. Consequently, although the nature of students' learning difficulties means that their standards are below national expectations, their achievement is outstanding. In Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, students' achievements are recognised through a range of accredited courses. Throughout the school, students make particularly good progress in reading, numeracy and citizenship. Progress, though good, is comparatively slower in writing, which students find particularly difficult. Additionally, teachers occasionally miss opportunities for students to develop and practise writing skills.

Students' impressive progress in skills such as communicating by signing or exchanging symbols helps to equip them for their lives beyond school. Significantly, the carefully designed curriculum gives a heavy and relevant emphasis to work-related learning. For example, in Years 10 and 11, students get to know local employers, paving the way for work experience placements in the sixth form. During these activities, students practise social skills, become firmly established in the local community and grow in confidence. Students relish responsibilities such as delivering registers or being members of the school council. Flexible grouping arrangements for particular activities or courses accustom students to working alongside others who are different to themselves, considering and appreciating what each has to offer. This is just one aspect of the school's relentless drive to promote community cohesion.

Students state emphatically that they feel safe in school. They have full confidence in the staff, so those with profound and multiple learning difficulties relax and cooperate when being repositioned. The arrangements for students' care, guidance and support are exemplary. Outstanding partnerships with a wide range of agencies and professionals, such as therapists, and with students' parents and carers, ensure consistent approaches to issues such as managing challenging behaviour. Whenever possible, students are expected to take some degree of responsibility for their own health and safety. For example, during a recent week to promote road safety, students took part in exciting and meaningful activities such as a cycle assault course and 'accident investigations', reinforcing the reminders and practise the school provides constantly. Students participate enthusiastically in all forms of physical activity, whether hydrotherapy or cycling, the latter being one of the most popular leisure activities offered at lunchtimes.

Pivotal to the school's success is its outstanding leadership and management. Approaches such as team-building days ensure that all staff share the headteacher's commitment to continuously improving the school. For example, the deputy headteacher leads staff in the rigorous assessment of students' learning. The outcomes demonstrate clearly the effectiveness of arrangements to evaluate the school's performance and tackle systematically aspects the school feels it is capable of developing further. Its track record underlines the school's excellent capacity to continue to move forward and the exceptional value for money it provides. The successful bid for specialist

school status exemplifies its sky-high expectations and readiness to go the extra mile in order to achieve these.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form provides outstandingly well for all students. Consequently, their achievement is exceptional. By the time they leave at the end of Year 14, students have followed a range of Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) Towards Independence modules and gained external accreditation in a minimum of three. This involves work in highly relevant topics such as meal preparation and cooking, personal safety and using a computer. Higher attaining students gain the ASDAN qualification Certificate of Life Skills. Additionally, all students gain ASDAN accreditation in literacy and numeracy. The sixth form curriculum has a constant focus on developing students' independence and enabling them to make choices. College-linked courses, leisure options, enterprise activities, and courses in independent living skills contribute to preparing students exceptionally well for their future lives. A programme of work experience, supported by the school's own careers assistant, is challenging but realistic. Every student gains experience of the world of work matched extremely closely to their skills and future destinations. Teaching and learning, and care, guidance and support are of the same outstanding quality as in Years 7 to 11. The sixth form is led and managed exceptionally well. By constantly evaluating and developing the curriculum, the leader ensures that all students have equal opportunities to reach their full potential.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teaching takes full advantage of opportunities to promote students' writing skills.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The school uses a number of systems to track the progress of individuals and groups of students. These show, for instance, that students make significant progress in English, mathematics and personal, social and health education as they move up through the school. Although students' standards are below national expectations, the average levels reached on a national scale measuring small steps in learning (p levels) are increasing year-on-year. Students make good progress in writing but move on faster in other aspects of English. The school checks carefully to ensure that there is no sign of underachievement by any groups of students, for example, boys and girls or looked-after children. Some students with particularly complex medical conditions or learning difficulties demonstrate achievement by retaining skills or transferring them to different situations. During Years 10 and 11, all students gain accreditation through the ASDAN Transition Challenge award in topics such as personal development and independent living skills. The school has only just begun working towards its specialist school targets. These pose a very high degree of challenge.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students learn to appreciate both the fragility of life and how to live it to the full. They regularly take part in the festivals of a variety of faiths and are encouraged to recognise that they are part of the global

community, for example, during assemblies about the International Day of Peace or World Aids Day. The history and culture of their locality is celebrated, for instance, by visits to a mining museum. Students are extremely well informed about healthy lifestyles. They judge, correctly, that school meals are 'good and healthy'. They know that some foods can be enjoyed freely but that crisps and chocolate should be eaten in moderation. Behaviour is good and it is often excellent. A minority of students find it hard to control their behaviour but respond positively to the school's efforts to help them improve. Absence from school is usually linked to students' ill-health. They make an outstanding contribution to the school community. Grotbusters help to keep the grounds tidy and attractive and recycling is the norm.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teachers choose activities with great care in order to motivate students and advance their learning. This approach is successful because they know each student and their needs so well. For example, students with autistic spectrum disorders and very challenging behaviour were willing to explore recycled packaging and follow instructions to build a tower. In this work, staff accurately judged the demands they could make of each student and so learning was outstanding. A display shows how the visit by one group of students to a wood was the successful starting point for writing. Their postcards were written by hand, in symbols using a computer program, or scribed by staff. However, teachers do not always provide such meaningful opportunities for writing. The teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants is a very strong feature of the school. Teaching assistants help to provide continuity for students when teachers are new to the school or are learning to work with a different group of students. Students' personal care needs are always met to the highest standards and with as little interruption as possible to their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is constructed so the needs of all groups of students are met equally well. For example, modifications are made to ensure that higher attaining students work at high enough levels. Outstanding links with the community and other schools often enhance this work. Students in Years 10 and 11 with severe learning difficulties annually follow a course in a mainstream secondary school, working in a science laboratory. Weeks or days are regularly dedicated to particular themes, such as Book Week. 'Super learning days' present a particular aspect of learning such as writing through a wide variety of activities. The exciting curriculum is enriched in a host of ways. Lunchtime clubs are wide ranging and encourage students to use their leisure time constructively. The Artsmark Gold award recognises the quality of the school's provision. Students have worked with a sculptor and all take part in spectacular productions such as 'Oliver!' Residential visits enhance personal development and widen students' experiences. While staying on a farm, students in Year 11 helped to care for animals and practised independent living skills as they enjoyed preparing meals for themselves.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school meets current government safeguarding requirements. School nurses provide expert care, taking responsibility for administering medication for example. A programme of rigorous safety checks minimises the risks posed by resources such as the hydrotherapy pool and positioning equipment. Staff are highly trained and pay extremely close attention to issues of health, safety and hygiene. Excellent systems are in place to support potentially vulnerable students, for example, looked-after children. The learning mentor plays a significant role in students' pastoral care, supporting students who have been bereaved, for instance. There are excellent arrangements to prepare students for leaving school. Oakfield Park organises a 'Moving On' event open to students and parents from throughout the local authority. Students are involved in their annual review meetings and are helped to understand their own targets through the use of simplified language and symbols. Parents appreciate the school's efforts to inform them and involve them in their children's education, for example, through courses in signing.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Lesson observations, meetings to discuss students' progress and audits of the curriculum contribute to the extremely effective systems to evaluate the school's performance. These provide a highly accurate view of the school's many strengths and those areas that offer scope for further development. The work undertaken in these areas forms the basis for the school's plans to ensure that it continues to move forward. Planning is detailed and clear, setting out very challenging targets. For example, the targets linked to the school's specialist status show that students are expected to progress more rapidly, year upon year. Leaders have ensured that as assessment systems have improved in response to the previous inspection report, students' progress has accelerated. Full use is made of the information collected in order to identify anomalies and take any necessary action, such as the current work to raise achievement in writing to the same level as that in reading. Governance is good. Governors are very supportive and well informed. They are increasingly monitoring the school's work by gathering information at first hand.

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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 |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|

Overall effectiveness

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| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 1 | 1 |
| 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 | 1 | 1 |

Achievement and standards

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 1 | 1 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 4 | 4 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 1 | 1 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress | 1 | |

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 | 1 | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 1 | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 1 | 1 |
| The extent to which learners enjoy their education | 1 | 1 |
| The attendance of learners | 2 | |
| The behaviour of learners | 2 | 2 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 1 | 1 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 1 | 1 |

The quality of provision

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs? | 1 | 1 |
| 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 |

Leadership and management

| | | |
|--|-----|-----|
| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 1 | 1 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 1 | 1 |
| How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 1 | 1 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 1 | 1 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated | 1 | 1 |
| How well does the school contribute to community cohesion? | 1 | 1 |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 1 | |
| 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**

Inspection of Oakfield Park School, Ackworth, Pontefract, WF7 7DT

Thank you for making my visit to your school so enjoyable. You were all very helpful and polite. I want to tell you what I found out about the school. You told me it was super. I agree. It is outstanding!

You all learn a great deal, because teaching is outstanding in your school. The oldest students get lots of certificates to show how well they have done. The school has noticed that you don't learn quite as fast in writing as in reading. I have asked the teachers to make sure you get plenty of chances to practise writing.

You grow up to be delightful young men and women, who care about each other and the world around you. The school makes sure that you learn many skills that will be useful when you leave school. You know how to be safe and healthy. The school takes wonderful care of you. It makes sure that all of you have fun. I'm sorry I didn't see the biking club, because you told me how much you enjoy that.

Your headteacher and all the staff work very hard to make your school such a great place to learn in. I want to send them and each one of you my very best wishes for the future.