

Oakwood Park Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118894
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	326920
Inspection date	19 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Christine Jones HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	995
Sixth form	253
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mike Stevens
Headteacher	Kevin Moody
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2006
School address	Oakwood Park Maidstone ME16 8AH
Telephone number	01622 726683
Fax number	01622 721210

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector. During a one-day visit, the inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following: improvements in the overall effectiveness of the sixth form; improvements in personal development and wellbeing and care, guidance and support; and the leadership and management of middle level managers. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation, nationally published assessment data and the school's own assessment records, curriculum and planning documents, observation of the school at work, interviews with staff, governors and pupils, and scrutiny of the parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated 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

Oakwood Park is a large school that draws students from a wide area around Maidstone. Few students come from minority ethnic groups or speak English as an additional language. Girls are admitted to the sixth form. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is low. Only a very small number of students are eligible for free school meals. The school is a specialist mathematics and computing college and has a second specialism in applied learning.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

'My son has developed throughout his time at Oakwood into a well-rounded and conscientious individual who enjoys school and works hard.' This quote from a parent encapsulates the outcomes of this inspection. Oakwood Park is a good school with an excellent sixth form, where students are extremely well cared for and know the importance of their community. The school provides a good quality of education that is improving rapidly, and students' achievement is continuing to rise. This is due to the excellent leadership of the headteacher, and good leadership and management at all other levels, introducing effective change through identifying and prioritising key areas such as improving learning. Students join the school with levels of attainment that are well above average, although they are higher in mathematics than in English. They make very good progress in Key Stage 3, particularly in mathematics. In Key Stage 4 progress continues to be good as achievement in English improves. Standards in Year 11 are very high. Un-validated data provided by the school show that in 2008, as in previous years, 98% of the students gained five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, a level that is consistently well above the national average. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs including English and mathematics was also very high. The proportion of students attaining A* and A grades improved and was over 40% of all total grades. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are more vulnerable receive excellent guidance and support. This is improving their achievement and the progress they make is at least as good as that of their peers. Students make good progress because teaching and learning are good. Teachers are expert and enthusiastic in their subject areas. Most reflect on the impact of their classroom practice and focus strongly on improving the learning experiences of their students. Students learn well when teachers encourage them to think for themselves and they thrive on a variety of activities that capture and keep their interest. They learn less well when teachers talk too much and provide them with limited opportunities to be active and independent learners. Students are aware of their current and target attainment levels. They are less clear in some subjects about exactly what more they have to do to improve, as the marking and feedback they receive on their work do not always give them enough useful and positive guidance. The school educates some impressively confident and assured young people. A climate of mutual respect and sensitivity towards others reflects the students' outstanding personal development. Their enthusiasm for school is reflected in high rates of attendance and participation in the wide range of extra-curricular clubs. Students act responsibly and courteously to each other and behaviour is excellent. Their moral and social development is outstanding, and spiritual and cultural development is good. Students are encouraged to reflect on the needs of others and are careful with their own and each other's safety in lessons and around the school. They are very aware of the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle and understand what constitutes a healthy diet as well as the importance of physical activity. Students enjoy very happy relationships with their peers and confirm that they feel very safe. A few parents raised concerns about bullying but students themselves are certain that this is not an issue, reporting that any problems that may arise are dealt with quickly and effectively. Students are very appreciative of the opportunities available to them at school and want to take on responsibilities that contribute to the school community, to work hard and do well in their studies. The dynamic school council gives good opportunities for their views to be heard and acted upon. Positive relationships flourish among students and they develop strong social and personal qualities necessary for their future adult working life. Sixth formers' mature and responsible attitudes are an excellent model for younger students. The good and improving curriculum has been

subject to a major review recently that highlighted the need to introduce a greater emphasis on thinking and learning skills. Students, staff and parents welcome the fortnightly enrichment days that add considerable depth to the curriculum. These days allow greater opportunities to expand provision in individual subjects through activities such as trips or bringing in external speakers, as well developing themes such as environmental issues that include aspects of different subjects. The school offers an extensive range of extracurricular activities that are closely linked to students' interests and are much appreciated, particularly the sporting activities. Specialist school status permeates all areas of the school and has a significant impact on teaching in some subject areas, particularly through the development of information and communication technology (ICT) and the introduction of new courses such as the GCSE in statistics. There is a wide-reaching and very successful programme of work with local primary schools in the specialist subject areas. Many parents rightly praised the 'excellent system of pastoral care' the school has developed. Staff really know their students well and they provide outstanding care, guidance and support for them. The school pays careful attention to every student, respecting their individuality and showing by example how to care for others. Students experiencing difficulties, or at risk of underachieving, are identified and supported through effective work with individuals and their parents. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are vulnerable receive excellent support. Good systems are in place to record students' academic achievement, giving staff the background they need to plan future learning and give students guidance on their performance. Not all staff are as yet using this information consistently and regularly to fully inform students how they might improve the quality of their work. Health and safety and child protection procedures are firmly in place and excellent contact between the school and partner support agencies adds significantly to the breadth of students' learning experiences. The school makes the best possible use of some poor quality accommodation that hinders provision in areas such as sports, the library and the sixth form. The headteacher has a clear vision for moving the school forward based on a strong focus on learning. High expectations of staff are supported by a system of professional development that encourages new and innovative approaches to teaching. Managers and leaders at all levels are empowered to take greater responsibility for the quality of education within their areas and many are taking a creative approach to this opportunity. Governors are fully involved and committed to the life of the school. The headteacher and senior staff have a thorough understanding of the school's strengths and a very clear view of how they would wish to improve, which create an excellent capacity for continuous improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Parents spoke very highly of this outstanding sixth form. As one commented, 'The sixth form encourages the students to become independent thinkers and academic learners in preparation for higher education. The social aspects... also encourage students to improve their social and communications skills.' Standards in the sixth form are well above national averages and students make outstanding progress. Students' personal development and well-being are excellent. Students are mature, responsible young people. They are keen to take on a range of responsibilities, both in school and in the wider community. For example, they mentor younger students and engage in local voluntary work. A strong and well-supported prefect system encourages a strong sense of their own identity in the school as well as developing their leadership skills and abilities. Teachers work in close partnership with the students and this generates an atmosphere of trust that encourages learning. Most teachers have high expectations of the students, and work is demanding but appropriate to their needs and abilities. Students

work hard and make very good use of study time, coping well with the restricted study facilities. The good curriculum is enhanced and extended through the collaborative arrangements with other local providers. Care, guidance and support from teachers are outstanding and students appreciate the approachability and helpfulness of staff. Students coming into the sixth form from other schools are particularly well cared for as staff work hard to help them settle into the new environment and different ways of working. Students are well prepared for the world of work and higher education through very good careers advice. The excellent leadership and management of the sixth form has had a positive impact on students' academic guidance and the development of their individual talents and outcomes.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure lesson activities are consistent in encouraging students' independence and active involvement in their learning, with feedback and marking that gives clear guidance on what they need to do to further improve the standard of their work.

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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	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?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
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	1	
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?	2	2
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?	2	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
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**

20 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Oakwood Park Grammar School, Maidstone, ME16 8AH

After our visit to Oakwood Park, we would like to share our findings with you and thank you for your friendly welcome and for taking time to talk to us. You tell us that the school is 'great' and we agree with you. Oakwood Park is a good school and you all make good progress in your exams, reaching very high standards. We are very pleased that you all enjoy school so much and make the most of the wide opportunities available to you through the good curriculum. You are very appreciative of not only the good teaching but also the sporting opportunities and wide range of clubs.

The school takes excellent care of you. You tell us that you feel very safe and that there is always someone to turn to when you need help. You speak highly of your teachers' readiness to assist you. The school leaders and teachers work hard to make sure you all reach your potential and learn as well as you can.

Because you co-operate so well with what your school is trying to do for you, we are convinced that you will continue to support your teachers' efforts and go from strength to strength in developing your personal skills as well as your academic prowess. To help you with this we have asked your teachers to give you more opportunities to be independent and contribute more in lessons, and more consistent guidance on the best ways to improve your work and so make it easier for you to reach your targets.

We wish you and your school a very successful future.

Yours faithfully

Christine Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector