

Overton Grange School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131104
Local Authority	Sutton
Inspection number	328552
Inspection dates	13–14 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Alan Taylor–Bennett HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1259
Sixth form	211
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Brenda Morley MBE
Headteacher	Mr Gerry Bennett/Mr Keith Stride
Date of previous school inspection	21–22 September 2005
School address	36 Stanley Road Sutton SM2 6TQ
Telephone number	020 8239 2383
Fax number	020 8239 2382
Email address	overtongrange@suttonlea.org

Age group	11–18
Inspection dates	13–14 May 2009
Inspection number	328552

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out at no notice by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 43 lessons and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work and looked at the school's planning and self-evaluation documents, policy documents, risk assessments, minutes of governors meetings and budget statements, and analysed the 180 parent questionnaires that were returned.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the current progress made by all groups of students in lessons
- the degree to which self-evaluation informs development planning
- the extent and success of the governing body's support for the school.

Information about the school

Overton Grange is a comprehensive school in the London Borough of Sutton, an area served by grammar schools and faith schools. It hosts a local authority unit and resource centre that serves the needs of up to 22 students with hearing impairment. The school is a specialist humanities college. It holds the Investors in People Award and has Healthy School status. Following the departure of the previous headteacher in December 2008 the school is being led by the two deputy headteachers, who are designated joint interim headteachers. A new headteacher has been appointed to take up post in September 2009.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

- Overton Grange provides a good quality of education for its students.
- The sixth form is outstanding and the achievement and well-being of students in these year groups are excellent.
- Students in Years 7 to 11 achieve well and enjoy their learning. All groups of these students make good progress. As a result levels of attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 are above average.
- Safeguarding procedures are excellent. Students feel safe in the school, understand the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and work well together to support their successful and happy school community.
- There is a strong and successful accent on equality of opportunity in the school.
- The school is well led. Staff share the joint interim headteachers' passion to do their best for students. The school's use of self-evaluation procedures is good, and it uses the quality of outcomes as a basis from which to drive further improvements.
- Governors work well to support the school. They have the best interests of the students at heart in all they do.
- The school's capacity to make further improvements in provision and outcomes is good. This is because governors and senior staff currently work successfully and cooperatively towards clearly communicated and understood strategic objectives. Self-evaluation is thorough and the outcomes of previous plans are used well as indications of future priorities. The rapid and impressive rise in standards in the sixth form is evidence of the capacity of the leadership of the school to drive improvement at a striking rate.
- The school has begun to use its new specialism to good effect in the curriculum and across the school. Work in other schools and in the community has also started strongly.
- Teaching is good because staff know students well and have high expectations of them. Students' behaviour in lessons is good and contributes significantly to their progress; however, at times they do not play a very active role in their own learning. There are relatively few outstanding lessons because there is often a lack of sufficiently varied provision for students of different levels of ability.
- Verbal feedback given to students about their work is very good. The quality of written feedback is excellent in some areas, but is of variable quality overall.
- The curriculum is satisfactory. It meets all statutory requirements but does not provide a sufficiently wide range of courses to provide well for the needs of all

students in the future. The school is aware of this and has plans to improve its partnership work with other local providers to address this issue.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the opportunities for students to make outstanding progress in lessons across Key Stages 3 and 4 by doing the following:
 - plan more carefully to provide for the particular learning needs of students of different levels of ability. This can be done by setting different tasks for more-able and less-able students, providing different types of resources, and building in different starting points in a task to suit the interests and ability of the individual
 - ensure that the very good practice in assessment seen in some subjects is applied consistently across the whole school. This will involve all teachers in providing high-quality written feedback to students about their work, and providing clear information about how to improve or how to maintain already excellent standards.
- Improve the curriculum in Key Stages 3 and 4 by providing a wider range of opportunities for students. This will involve working with other providers in the area, such as local schools and colleges, to establish shared provision for vocational and academic courses over the next two years.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

The quality of learning in lessons is good because of students' positive attitudes and the interest and willingness to learn that they show in response to the good teaching. This means that students currently attain good standards in lessons. Many are ambitious to do well and obviously enjoy much of their learning. As a result, despite standards on arrival at the school being quite near to national averages, over the last three years results in examinations at the end of Key Stage 4 have been significantly better. Students make consistently good progress in mathematics. There are no significant differences in the achievement and enjoyment of students from different minority ethnic groups, backgrounds or abilities, although students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and are supported by staff from the facility for students with hearing impairment make particularly good progress. This is because of the skilful assistance provided by these staff in lessons which enables the students to play an active role in class discussions. The most-able students, and some students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are not always asked to undertake tasks that are suited to their particular needs and their overall progress is satisfactory as a result.

Students' behaviour is good, and the school is a safe and happy environment. Students show consideration and courtesy for others, and incidents of bullying and racism are infrequent. The majority of parents are positive about behaviour in the school but a few are concerned about misbehaviour in some lessons. Where teaching is insufficiently challenging or interesting some students' behaviour can sometimes deteriorate, but this rarely disrupts learning. Students show empathy for others. For example, in a citizenship lesson they clearly recognised the relative advantages the

United Kingdom has compared to other less well-developed countries.

The food available during the lunchtime break encourages healthy eating. Students respond well to the wide range of after school activity clubs as well as the two-hour sessions of physical education they receive each week. Some are involved in the school council, which gives students a good opportunity to express their views. There have been some productive outcomes of discussions between students and the school management, including the provision of retractable seating in the assembly hall and a TV screen in the school's mall. There are few other opportunities for students in Key Stages 3 and 4 to take responsibility within the school. Students contribute to the wider community by raising funds for charity and, as a part of the school's specialist work, visit other schools in the local authority to share experiences.

Students have developed good skills for their future lives as a result of their good academic achievement through exciting initiatives such as 'Inspiring Futures' and their willing response to the school's promotion of teamwork and self-assessment. Students are also appreciative of the opportunities offered by the school to travel to Italy, France and Germany.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	2
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	2
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	2
How well do pupils behave?	2
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	2
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	2
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	2
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is well planned to support learning and engage interest. In almost all lessons teachers involve students in a wide range of activities that lead to clear gains in knowledge and understanding and enable good progress to be made. Carefully planned questioning, with well-structured discussions between teachers and students, encourages students to reach valid conclusions that are often expressed in imaginative and interesting ways. Students observed during the inspection revising

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

for examinations in lessons were inspired by the positive encouragement and practical advice offered. Teachers' enthusiasm makes students ambitious to succeed and gives them confidence in their power to do so. Relatively little of the teaching is outstanding because teachers do not provide enough chances for students to think for themselves. Too often students' progress is only good, because they are engaged, but not outstanding, because they respond to set tasks and questions rather than pose their own. Recent developmental work on the written feedback given to students about the quality of their work, coupled with advice on how to improve it, has had an excellent impact on their understanding of how to develop it further. However, students report that the extent to which they feel well informed about progress in this way is inconsistent.

Personalised programmes for students provide opportunities that match their needs well. There are some vocational courses such as health and social care, horticulture and construction, which complement the creative and academic options. Religious education and citizenship qualifications for all students contribute to the breadth of students' experience. Students enjoy the wide range of extra-curricular activities including clubs, charitable fund-raising and visits. While the curriculum is satisfactory, school leaders recognise that there is a need for a wider range of opportunities than can be provided in one school to broaden students' experiences, and are beginning to plan joint provision with local schools and colleges for the future.

Staff know the students very well and take their well-being and achievement very seriously. The school gives individual guidance to all Year 11 students in their decisions about sixth form courses. Systems for monitoring students' welfare are very clear and are used very well. The care and support for vulnerable students is excellent. The school has established close and very effective links with local services to promote students' well-being very successfully. As a consequence, problems are usually identified early and intervention strategies have successful outcomes. One student movingly said, 'We all appreciate all of the help and support the school offers us, including behaviour and anger management as well as bereavement counselling. This has meant a lot to me, personally.' The school's strategies for improving attendance and reducing persistent absence have been successful in improving them to the national average. Students with physical disabilities, for example those needing walking aids and those from the unit for students with hearing problems, are supported to play a full role in the life of the school.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The current leadership of the school, provided by the two interim headteachers, is clearly focused on achieving good outcomes for students. They communicate this vision clearly and are fully supported by the rest of the senior team and by subject leaders and heads of year to achieve their high expectations of students. The strong ethos established contributes directly to the good levels of achievement and to securing the well-being and good personal development of students. Targets are set for students on the basis of a clear understanding of each learner's potential. They are appropriately challenging and are used systematically, and with vigour and determination, to enable students to achieve high standards. There are clear mechanisms to regularly gauge attainment and identify underachievement, and the school's specialist subjects are leading the way in developing their use across the school. These mechanisms enable the school to support and strengthen good practice and identify and tackle areas of weakness. There is a systematic and wide-ranging set of responses to any individuals or groups of learners who are not on target to achieve their expected grades. These include after school study support and the active involvement of parents. Governors undertake their work with passion and commitment and work productively with the current leadership in the school to secure the best-quality provision and outcomes for students. As a group, they have a good understanding of the school, its students and the wishes of parents about how the school can continue to improve. Governors and senior leaders are now working cooperatively to manage the budget.

The school has a thorough understanding of the importance of safeguarding and takes child protection very seriously. Systems to identify risk are implemented rigorously and reviewed regularly. Staff training for safeguarding children, and recruitment procedures, meet requirements fully.

The leadership of the school has worked successfully to ensure that it is a community in which students of different ethnicities, faiths and backgrounds work happily side by side with each other. Students show respect and understanding of these differences. The school promotes equal opportunities actively and very successfully but systems to monitor and evaluate the strategies used to eliminate discrimination are not fully refined. The school has established good links with its local community and has a good understanding of its needs with regard to securing greater levels of cohesion. It has yet, however, to develop a strategic approach in working to support these needs and to evaluating the impact of its actions.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in communicating ambition and driving improvement	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2

The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Students' achievements and their enjoyment of their learning in the sixth form are outstanding. Relative to their starting points students make exceptionally good progress in both academic and vocational strands. Success rates are very high as nearly all students complete their courses and obtain good passes. Students' learning is strongly supported by their well-developed skills of working effectively with others and their ability to undertake independent research. The large majority of A-level students go on to university. These impressive outcomes are the result of very strong leadership and management of this aspect of the work of the school.

Students have a mature understanding of their responsibility for their health and well-being. They make a strong contribution to the school's community cohesion through their work within the school such as mentoring younger students, helping Year 7 students with their reading and responsibilities such as acting as prefects. A number of fund-raising activities for chosen charities such as the Royal Marsden Hospital are organised and run by sixth formers and they are highly successful. Many sixth form students are participating in a Habitat for Humanity event in Zambia.

Students speak highly of the quality of teaching they receive. Teachers make excellent use of students' prior learning and targets to individualise the learning so that teaching is sharply focused on students' needs and supports their learning strongly. Constructive feedback is of high quality and is regular. One student said, 'Teachers know you really well, and what other subjects you are taking, so that they can help you make use of skills and knowledge from other areas.' The curriculum is well matched to learners' different needs to the extent that academic and vocational strands retain a very high number of their students. A broad range of educational opportunities, including visits to the Old Bailey, theatre visits and a visit to Paris, extend the curriculum.

Students feel they have their concerns dealt with in a sensitive and supportive way. The quality of guidance to help students move onto the next phase in their lives is outstanding. The appointment of a higher education officer to help students decide upon and apply for universities has been a major success and this provision is appreciated by students.

Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1
Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

The number of responses to the questionnaire was influenced by the fact that Year 10 students were on work experience placements at the time of the inspection, but the return was sufficient to gain a rounded view of the feelings of parents and carers. On the whole parents' views of the work of the school were very positive. Many expressed appreciation of how the school had worked with them to help their children succeed and be happy. Inspectors saw evidence of effective communication and working with parents, for example in the contact diaries that are felt to be comprehensive, informative and practical. There were no overall trends or patterns in the relatively few concerns expressed.

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at Overton Grange School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. If a parent has more than one child at the school, we ask them to record an answer against all the questions, for each of their children.

The inspection team received 180 completed questionnaires. In total, there are 2124 parents and carers registered at the school.

	Always	Most of the time	Occasionally	Never
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	103	66	10	1

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, training or development. This may refer to the acquisition of skills, knowledge, understanding or desired attributes. Attributes include qualities or personal competencies which are important to the development of the pupil; for example personal, social, cultural, emotional or health.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.

1 June 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Overton Grange School, Sutton, SM2 6TQ



You will recall that inspectors recently visited your school. This was as part of a pilot scheme to inspect schools in new ways; for your school it involved not letting the school know that we were coming. We were made to feel welcome, however, and your mature and friendly manner, and the way in which you took an active part in the inspection, meant that we learned a lot about Overton Grange very quickly.

You wanted us to know that you think your school is good, and we agree. You achieve well and your behaviour in lessons is a major factor in this. You are obviously ambitious to do well and you enjoy much of your learning. We did notice that you were a little passive in some lessons, and it would be better to ask more questions of your own, and make more contributions from your own reflections on your learning, more often.

Overton Grange is a well-led school. The two interim headteachers, the teaching and support staff and the governors all want the best for you and they know how to achieve it. The care, guidance and support provided are outstanding. We were particularly impressed with the quality of the sixth form. Provision in Years 12 and 13 is excellent and students leave as mature and confident young people who are well equipped to succeed at university and/or in future employment.

There are three things that I have asked your headteachers to do make the school even more successful.

- Provide a wider range of courses for you, particularly at Key Stages 3 and 4, by working with other local schools and colleges.
- Ensure that if you find the work more difficult or more straightforward in some lessons, you are encouraged to use different resources, undertake different kinds of tasks and have different kinds of support and assistance to help you to make even better progress and enjoy the work more.
- Make sure that you have clear written feedback on your work so that you know how to improve it, or if it is already outstanding, how to keep it at that level. This happens in some areas very well already, but it should happen across all subjects consistently.

I know that you will be keen to do what you can to support these developments because you care about your progress, your friends and the school. I wish you and the school every success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Alan Taylor-Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.