

The Oswaldtwistle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134127
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	328833
Inspection dates	10–11 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Mel Blackband

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	51
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Acting headteacher Dale Hannah
Date of previous school inspection	21 November 2006
School address	Union Road Oswaldtwistle Accrington Lancashire BB5 3DA
Telephone number	01254 231553
Fax number	01254 879544

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This is a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) for students who have been permanently excluded from their mainstream schools or who are at risk of exclusion. The few students aged 11 to 14 spend some of the week in mainstream schools with the intention of re-integrating them back into mainstream education. Students aged 14 to 16, who make up 90% of the population, remain at the PRU, although several students spend much of the week on work-placements or follow courses taught at a local college. Almost all the students are of White British heritage. There are very few girls. The deputy headteacher has recently been promoted to acting headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The Oswaldtwistle School is satisfactory. There are some good features. Since the previous inspection, there have been substantial improvements in the provision for short stay students in Years 7 to 9 and in the range of academic and vocational courses available for students aged 14 to 16. Many students enter the school with negative attitudes to learning and with a history of disrupted schooling. Once in the unit they quickly gain self-esteem and motivation to succeed after a history of failure at previous schools. This plays a vital part in underpinning their academic achievements. The school is particularly good at supporting and encouraging short stay students to regain their interest in learning. This enables some students to reintegrate successfully into mainstream secondary schools within two terms of their arrival at Oswaldtwistle. Students in Year 11 generally leave with General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) qualifications in English, mathematics and science, as well as a range of vocational qualifications. One of the school's strengths is in the successful way staff encourage these students to improve their attendance and motivation to learn and thus to start catching up ground they lost earlier in their school careers. As a result, the students are starting to achieve qualifications more in line with their potential.

Teaching is satisfactory overall, although there is some outstanding work in the short stay provision and in some of the humanities teaching with older students. The off-site teaching provision is good and makes an effective contribution to the curriculum for the older students. The quality of the assessment of students' work is variable and lacks consistency. For instance, each subject uses different methods to assess students' progress. This results in targets for students which are not well coordinated or focused and slows down the pace of progress. Students are sometimes not clear about their progress or how to improve their work. In contrast, the students' behavioural targets are exceptionally clear and precise and students are fully aware of their progress. This has a significant positive impact on their behaviour and on their personal development.

The curriculum is good and enriched by well planned opportunities to interact with the community and by good programmes in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. There is excellent provision for older students to acquire work related skills and they are motivated by a variety of opportunities to prepare themselves for college or further training when they leave school. The increasing range of vocational courses on offer enables staff to some extent to tailor the curriculum for each student to their individual abilities and interests.

The students quickly learn to value what the school offers them and they develop good relationships with staff. Students generally enjoy coming to school and this is clear from the relaxed and friendly atmosphere found within the school and the improving attendance of many students. The students generally make tremendous strides in their levels of attendance compared with when they were in previous schools, but despite the school's strenuous efforts, overall attendance levels remain just satisfactory and there is a very small minority of students whose poor attendance gives cause for concern.

The students make good progress in their personal development. Very quickly, they experience the solid support which the school delivers and which encourages and motivates them to make good progress in their self-confidence and personal skills. Parents, without exception, are pleased for their children to attend, knowing they will be well looked after and that the school

staff have high expectations of their social and academic success. One parent's comment was typical, 'The support we have received from school has been excellent'.

The acting headteacher, who has been in post for less than two weeks, has quickly established sound priorities for the school's improvement and his strong and confident leadership has already proved very effective. For example, he is well aware of shortcomings in assessment and target setting procedures and that currently senior staff do not have a clear overview of students' progress. He is well supported by the senior team.

The management committee is very supportive to the school and has provided an increasingly effective standard of strategic leadership. The school is now starting to evaluate its own work more effectively and there are better procedures for development planning. Because of this, the school has a satisfactory and developing capacity to improve its work further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency of assessment and use this information to set clear targets for students which help them to understand both their progress and how to improve their work.
- Develop procedures which ensure the effective analysis and tracking of students' achievements.
- Further improve attendance.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Most students are making satisfactory progress. Students often enter the school with low self-esteem and aspirations but almost all of them derive benefit from the school's support and encouragement and leave with GCSE accreditation in English, mathematics and science with grades which are only a little below those expected of mainstream students. Almost all students make satisfactory progress in learning basic skills and their achievement in vocational courses has improved since the previous inspection. The students in the short stay provision make significant gains in their self-esteem, motivation and attitudes to learning. As a result, they almost all quickly return, without incident, to mainstream education. All the students make good progress in meeting focused and challenging behaviour targets. This has a strong impact on their academic success.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The students' progress in all aspects of their personal development, including their spiritual, moral and social development, is good and reflects the school's emphasis on moral and social values. The students' understanding of cultural issues is good because they develop a strong sense of their local community through work and college placements. They learn about other nations, customs and beliefs in well planned curriculum activities. As a result, they have a good awareness of diversity amongst races and cultures and they develop understanding of the cohesiveness of the local and wider community. The students generally behave well. They value the school's clear and consistent procedures to manage their behaviour. Students respond well to the praise and support they are given for their efforts and especially to the well organised

reward system. As a result, they work harder, behave better, and therefore improve the rates of their progress. Their achievement however, is affected in some cases by low levels of attendance.

Students acknowledge that there is very occasional bullying but they have confidence that teachers will 'sort it out'. Parents confirm that their children usually enjoy their learning. They develop an understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles through the emphasis on healthy eating and in the many opportunities to take part in physical activity. They make good gains in their social skills through their involvement in the school council and the well supervised leisure opportunities during breaks and lunchtime. The students develop good literacy and numeracy skills and this, combined with the wide range of opportunities which the oldest students have to learn about the world of work, prepares them well for when they leave school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory. On one occasion seen, however, it was outstanding. In this lesson, the students had been very well prepared to learn new things. They felt confident in the knowledge they had already gained about the subject and approached their new learning with enthusiasm and interest. As a result, they made excellent progress. In less successful lessons, teachers either had expectations which were too low or else overestimated the students' understanding and prior knowledge of the topic. This was usually because of inconsistent assessment and target setting which sometimes resulted in learning activities not being effectively matched to students' needs and abilities. There are good relationships between staff and students and staff teams work well together. Teachers generally manage behaviour very well and students respond to clear rules and structures. On some occasions, students are unclear about what they have to do and are less cooperative.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school has good provision for teaching the basic skills. Because of the quality of assessment, however, teachers are not always able to match activities closely to the specific learning needs of each student and this sometimes slows down the pace of their learning. Good programmes which ensure that students understand the value of living healthily and about how to keep themselves, and others, safe underpin the school's curriculum. There are varied trips and visits so that pupils learn new things in different situations. Activities in Years 7 to 9, for short stay students, are based to a large extent around programmes to extend the social and emotional development of the learners. This curriculum contributes well to the successful return of almost all students to mainstream education. There are well organised programmes to teach the oldest students about the world of work and which encourage them to gain a range of vocationally based experience and qualifications. Students in Years 10 and 11 are fully involved in choosing from the range of high quality courses which are carefully tailored to their interests and career ambitions. Some students take advantage of the good partnerships with local colleges and spend up to two or three days each week at college following suitable courses. These experiences help to encourage virtually every student to take up further education, employment or job related training when they leave school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides a high standard of care for all of its students. Safeguarding procedures exceed national expectations. Students are very well supported. The student support officer maintains excellent liaison with students, parents and other agencies. This staff member and other staff make regular home visits. Parents report a high degree of satisfaction with their level of involvement in their children's education. Students may also make appointments to speak to a counsellor. Students receive good advice and support as they are about to leave school. The school takes determined and effective steps to improve the students' attendance, although this remains much lower than normally expected. Good procedures for managing the students' behaviour have reduced exclusions over the last year and bullying has become a rarity. The students have a very clear understanding of their behaviour targets and how to improve their conduct. This has a significant positive effect on their self control and behaviour. However, teachers do not generally write the students' learning targets with sufficient precision to enable them to understand clearly how to improve their academic work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The acting headteacher has quickly and confidently taken charge and is providing very good leadership. He has established clear and appropriate priorities for school development based on his extensive experience and knowledge of the school. Due to his extremely short tenure of the post, however, his improvements have yet to take effect. He is well supported by his leadership team. Together they are sharpening and re-shaping aspects of the school's self evaluation. For instance, the leaders are aware of the shortcomings in assessment and target setting and of the lack of informative monitoring and tracking information about the students' progress. The team has clearly identified the school's strengths and weaknesses. Effective planning is ensuring that students have a good grasp of community cohesion. The senior team receive increasingly high quality support and challenge from the management committee and from the local authority. Members of the committee and local authority officers know the school well and provide clear guidance and advice. The excellent communication and a strong team spirit within the school enable staff to feel fully consulted, involved and valued. The quality of professional training is good and clearly linked to the high quality of performance management of teachers and other staff.

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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
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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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which 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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
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	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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**

Dear Students

Inspection of The Oswaldtwistle School, Lancashire, BB5 3DA

Not long ago I came to your school to see how you were getting on and whether I could suggest anything to make the school better. You made me very welcome and I enjoyed meeting some of you in the classroom and in the dining room.

I was only with you for two days. That was, however, long enough for me to see that you enjoy school and that your behaviour continues to improve. That means you have developed much more confidence in your own abilities and understand the importance of doing well at school and preparing yourselves as well as you can for your adult life. The school gives you a satisfactory education. There are some real strengths and a few areas to improve. These are the main strengths of the school.

- You are nearly all working hard and making better progress in your learning, your behaviour and your personal development.
- You have a good range of activities, including a wide range of well planned programmes to prepare you for when you go on to further education or training after you leave school.
- All the adults at the school have a real interest in your welfare and look after you well.
- Those of you in Years 7 to 9 make good enough progress to return to mainstream schools.

I think the school could improve further in the following ways.

- Your teachers should write down all the small improvements you make in your work in the same way. This information should be used more effectively to give you a better idea of what you need to do to improve your work.
- There should be better records of your progress so teachers can make sure you are all doing as well as you can.
- The school should try even harder to encourage those of you with poor attendance to come to school more often.

You can help yourselves too, by making sure your behaviour is always good, continuing to try hard in lessons and attending every day.

Yours faithfully

Mel Blackband

Lead inspector