

The Oaks Secondary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134662
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	341491
Inspection dates	24–25 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Pauline Hilling-Smith

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	235
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	33
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Clive Hubery
Headteacher	Mrs Andrea English
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Rock Road Spennymoor DL16 7DB
Telephone number	01388 827380
Fax number	01388 827314
Email address	theoaks@durhamlearning.net

Age group	11–19
Inspection dates	24–25 May 2010
Inspection number	341491

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

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.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 08456 404045, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2010

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. Eighteen lessons were observed given by 18 teachers and the lead inspector and headteacher undertook a learning walk together. Meetings were held with groups of students, governors, other professionals and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at the school's view of its work, the current development plan, minutes of meetings of the governing body and documentation to ensure that students are safe. The responses to 39 questionnaires from parents and carers were analysed.

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

- the rate of progress of all groups of students towards their targets
- whether or not students achieve equally well in all subjects
- how effective the leadership and management of the school has been in developing the school since the last inspection.

Information about the school

The Oaks is a large secondary special school which caters for a majority of students with moderate learning difficulties. It caters for a small minority of students with severe learning difficulties, the greater proportion of whom are in the sixth form, a small minority of students with autism and a very small minority with profound and multiple learning difficulties. Additionally, a small minority of the students also have challenging behaviour. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is well above average. All students have a statement of special educational needs. The number on roll has increased since the last inspection.

The school has achieved the Healthy Schools Award, Investors in People status, Investing in Children, Eco-schools silver and the Rights Respecting School Award.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This is an outstanding school that has made accelerated progress since the last inspection. This fast rate of progress is based on first-class evaluation, which involves all staff, of the work of the school. Information gathered is used to compare how well students in the school are achieving in comparison with similar students in other schools.

Plans made by the leadership team to ensure that students in this school are performing at a good or outstanding level have been highly effective, and this capacity is set to continue to promote improvement at the same rate. The quality of education is exceptionally good for all students. It is underpinned by the UNICEF articles in the Rights Respecting School Award. These lie at the heart of everything that the school does. Its entire ethos is underpinned by the belief that it is an organisation in which all staff and students have both rights and responsibilities. These principles inform the excellent care, guidance and support the students receive. Students in the school make excellent progress in their personal development, as a result of an excellent curriculum, extended by high quality partnerships, and the many opportunities to be enterprising and creative. The vast majority of students make good progress in their academic development with a few making outstanding progress.

The leadership team, ambitious for the school, has established very high expectations and it demands very high quality practice. Staff respond to this extremely well and work tirelessly to provide stimulating and challenging experiences for their students. Occasionally, staff do not check frequently enough that all students are being challenged throughout a lesson and when this happens, students' progress is slower. Behaviour is excellent. This is because all staff set consistently high expectations and students work hard to meet them.

A particular strength is the support provided by the school's Behaviour Support Unit, to which students can self-refer if they feel that they are unable to curb their potentially disruptive behaviour. Students say they feel safe in school and are confident in the staff to deal with any issues they may have.

Students display a well developed awareness of and respect for cultural diversity, particularly, as a result of the emphasis given to this in assemblies, the exciting and vibrant cultural centre, and through their experiences on the special days on which different faiths are celebrated. The recently introduced text messaging system is proving popular with parents and carers and reminders sent home in this way are resulting in more attending school events.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all students make as much progress as possible in all lessons, by:
 - – making sure that teachers more often check on students' level of understanding during the lesson
 - – carefully adjusting tasks to match students' understanding as the lesson proceeds.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

It is inappropriate to judge attainment against national averages. This is because all the students enter the school with attainment well below that expected for their age. The nature of the students' special educational needs and/or disabilities means that although they make good or better progress, the attainment of the vast majority remains well below national expectations. Students make good progress in lessons because they behave very well and listen carefully. They follow the teacher's directions diligently, concentrate very hard and always try to do their very best. For example, in a physical educational lesson, students understood the difference between push and throw and learned how to lean back and to balance. The students positioned their bodies very well and held and pushed a shot putt with good success. They stayed behind the line until everyone had had a turn because they understood the necessity to keep safe from being hit by a heavy ball. Students support each other well in lessons to achieve success and often burst into spontaneous applause when a target is achieved. Relationships between students are mature. When students consider moral and social issues, both in classrooms and around school, they think deeply about their own and others' experiences and how this affects behaviour.

At work and at play, they demonstrate high levels of cooperation and collaboration and a willingness to listen to the views and opinions of others. Students willingly accept and enjoy taking on roles of responsibility, especially being a member of the student council, as they know their suggestions are listened to. They can see, for example, how school meals have become healthier following discussion in council. Students' attendance is above average because they enjoy coming to school. Most understand that good attendance is important if they are to be successful adults.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is usually consistently effective in ensuring that students are motivated and engaged and that good progress is made. Some lessons are outstanding and in these lessons specialist teachers' strong subject knowledge means that students are inspired and make exceptional progress. Students enjoy using computers in some lessons and this keeps their interest and ensures their good progress. In most lessons, teachers provide a range of activities at different levels to maintain students' interest. However, occasionally students are engaged on a task which is too easy or too hard for too long, and the pace of their learning slows and with it their interest. All adults are skilled at helping students to understand how well they have done. This means that those with even the most severe needs have a sense of achievement, for example, when they focus on a photograph to make a choice of ingredient to include in a snack.

An impressive feature of the outstanding curriculum is extensive enrichment in the form of clubs, and residential visits both in the United Kingdom and overseas. These provide memorable experiences for the students as well as many exciting opportunities in which to learn new things and to practise social and academic skills. The flexibility of the curriculum and range of accreditations and courses mean that it is highly relevant for all students. The particular emphasis given to courses covering the principles of the Rights Respecting School makes a significant contribution to students' outstanding personal development. What is available in the curriculum for students between 14 and 19 years is informed by their range of attainment and their needs, identified while they are in an earlier age group. It is further extended through partnership with Bishop Auckland College

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Staff take great pride in ensuring classrooms and corridors showcase students' experiences; displays indicate some exceptional artwork, much of which is associated with the Rights Respecting School work. This means that an already well appointed building is very impressive and welcoming for all. Careful attention is given at all times to transition arrangements when students make a change of school or go to college. This ensures that when they move on to the next stage in their life they make the change successfully and with minimum stress. The information and guidance provided for students and their families enables them to make the best choices about the future or about their personal health and safety. The most vulnerable students are particularly well supported through staff's strong commitment to meeting the needs of all individuals.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher is highly effective in empowering leadership at all levels. This means that together with high expectations, ambition is embedded and improvement is driven at a fast pace. Steps taken to improve the quality of teaching have been very effective, including specialist training for teachers and improved tracking of students' progress to inform what teachers plan to do in classrooms. These have had a good impact, but are not used equally effectively by all teachers. Highly committed leaders ensure that all of the school's work places equality and discrimination and the development of community cohesion at the heart of its work.

Detailed, systematic record keeping, which is closely analysed and perceptively evaluated, is used to underpin good safeguarding arrangements. Partnerships are effective in improving learning and well-being and school membership of '4 Communities of learning in Durham', bring both resources and expertise into school.

The make up of the governing body reflects the needs of the school well. Governors listen to presentations given by staff and students and they ask questions and have an influence on what the school does. They show determination in challenging and supporting the school, but are not as fully engaged with parents and carers as they would like to be. However, there are plans in place to try to engage further with them.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	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	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

Good leadership and management have enabled the sixth form to develop and improve since the last inspection. There is very good awareness of what the sixth form is good at and what it needs to do to improve. There are high expectations for what students will achieve. This is reflected in the challenging targets that are set for each individual. As a result, students make good progress and are successful in pursuing and achieving in a good range of suitable examination courses. These include the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) and Entry Level accreditation.

Students benefit from effective teaching which ranges from good to outstanding. Every aspect of learning is matched to the students' individual needs. It is lively and imaginative, as seen in an ASDAN lesson where students were learning how to cope with and solve problems related to travelling on public transport. The teacher's use of tailor made games and well managed role play was very successful in holding students' attention and in extending their skills. Assessment and tracking systems designed to monitor the progress of all students is informative and refined. However, it has not had sufficient time to become fully embedded in practice in order to impact on raising students' attainment. The broad and relevant curriculum ensures that very good attention is given to students' literacy and numeracy skills, as well as their work and understanding of healthy living. Students gain experience in attending college and through work placements, helping them to develop into confident, mature young people. Relationships between adults and students are excellent and this ensures that the students know they are valued. Students benefit from visits out into the local community and these have a good impact on developing their independence. A good transition programme ensures that students are well prepared to move on from school when they

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

leave the Post- 16 department. Good care and guidance ensure that attention to developing students' personal skills and preparation for their future lives is given a very high priority. As a result, when students leave they are very well prepared for further forms of education or training. College and work placements are considered carefully to ensure students are rightly placed. Excellent use is made of local partnerships and other agencies to support students.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Only 15% of parents and carers responded to the questionnaire. The overwhelming majority were positive. A very few expressed some concerns and these were followed up by inspectors. The inspectors could not find any evidence to substantiate them. Inspectors agree with the majority of positive views expressed by the parents and carers.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Oaks Secondary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 39 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 235 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	23	59	12	31	3	8	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	24	62	14	36	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	22	56	14	36	2	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	19	49	19	49	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	20	51	18	46	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	19	49	16	41	3	8	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	22	56	13	33	3	8	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	20	51	15	38	0	0	1	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	22	56	14	36	1	3	1	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	24	62	13	33	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	19	49	17	44	2	5	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	25	64	12	31	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	25	64	11	28	1	3	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

Overall effectiveness of schools

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be. ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



26 May 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of The Oaks Secondary School, Spennymoor, DL16 7DB

Thank you for being so welcoming when we inspected your school a little while ago. We enjoyed talking with you and visiting lessons. Thank you for taking the time to give us your views of the school. It was clear from our chats and the questionnaire replies we received from you and your parents and carers that you feel safe at school and are confident that the staff would help you if needed.

We found that your school is outstanding in the way it cares for you. As well as being really well behaved nearly all the time you work very hard. You do well and make good progress in school work and outstanding progress in your personal development. All this happens because you have good staff.

There is one area that would make it even better. We have asked your teachers to:

- make sure you are always involved in tasks in lessons which are at just the right level of difficulty to keep you interested and to help you to learn as much as possible.

We know you will do all you can to help your teachers and we wish you every success in your future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Pauline Hilling-Smith

Lead 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. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 08456 404045, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.